

Leadership in High Performing Congregations: Uncovering the Secrets of Success

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Summary

A wide range of factors has been found to affect organizational performance. Of these factors, the leadership style of those at the top of the organization has been identified as one of the most, if not the most, important. Extant literature (e.g., Waldman & Yammarino, 1999) demonstrates that leadership plays a dual role in the shaping of behaviors and organizational outcomes. First, “close” leadership influences the behaviors of those in immediate contact with the leader. When this is present, the leader can be demanding of others through the communication of high performance expectations and confidence that followers can achieve those expectations. Second, “distant” leadership influences those organizational members not able to form the type of relationships characteristic of close leadership. Hence, distant followers cannot readily evaluate the leader’s circumstances and experience specific day-to-day behaviors. Instead, they must rely more on symbolic behaviors, ideologically based vision, sagas, and storytelling. Through distant leadership, the leader plays an important role in shaping and managing the shared meaning collectively held by organizational members.

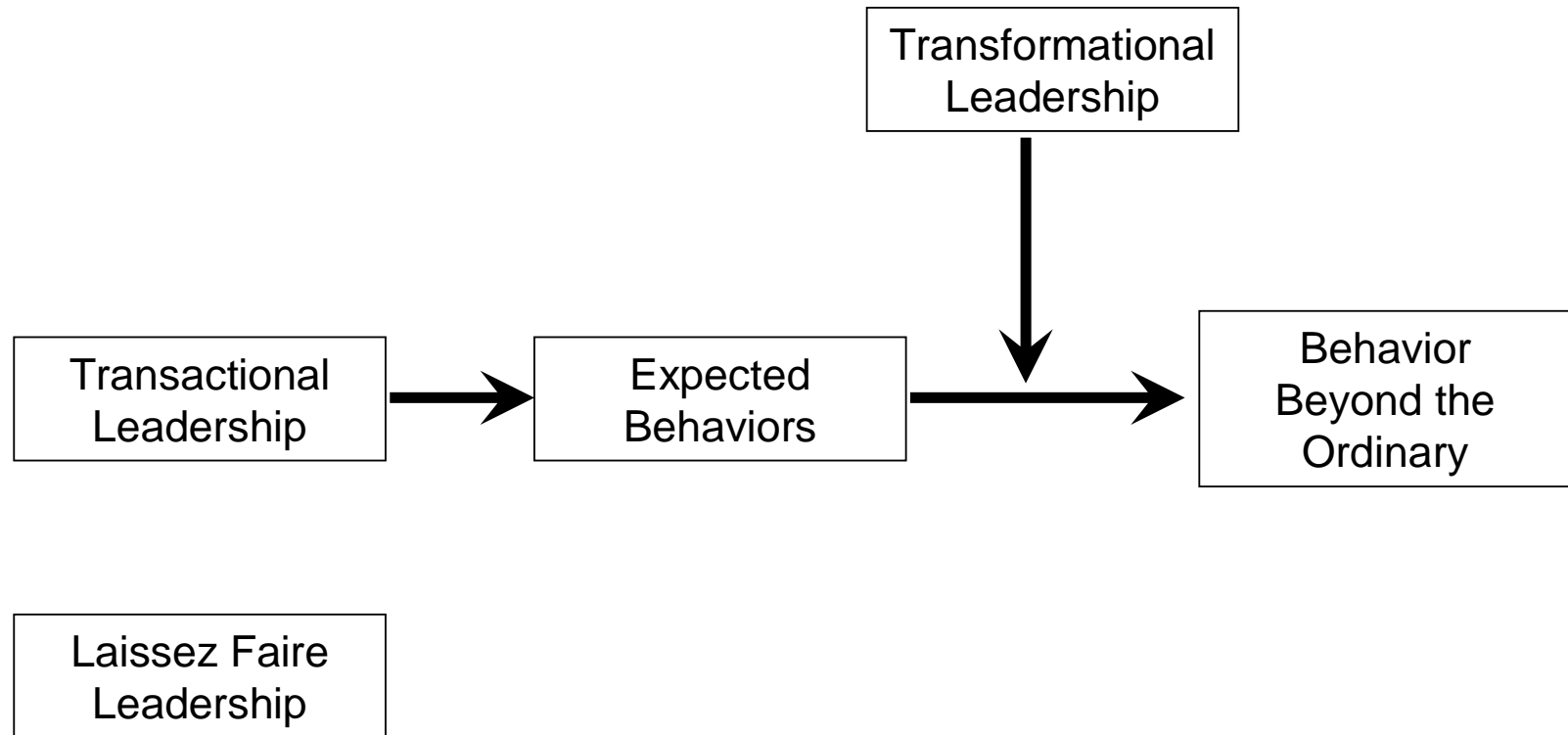
This current study assesses the impact of transformational leadership for organizational vitality, member behaviors, and member perceptions. Transformational leadership is most often studied within corporate settings. On occasion, however, traditional leadership studies leave the for-profit environment and enter the public sector and not-for-profit arena. However, this is one of the first studies that have investigated transformational leadership and its impact within religious congregations. The sample consists of worshipers ($N = 1,131$) within a random sample of religious congregations in the United States ($N = 462$). Congregations with an empowering leadership climate and transformational leaders are more likely to be financially strong, growing, and filled with attenders who are more involved in their religious lives.

The findings from this investigation have wide-ranging implications for the training of future religious leaders. If the practices of exemplary leaders can be taught (cf. Kouzes & Posner, 2003), then seminaries and other institutions of religious education likely should invest in

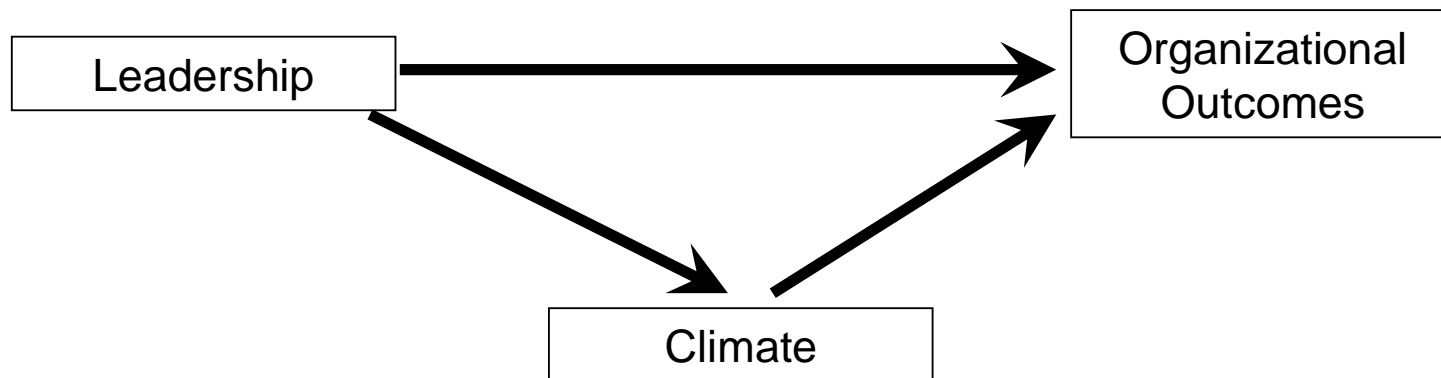
developing such talents and skills in their future leaders. Furthermore, the findings from this study likely would be replicated in voluntary organizations other than congregations. While those in leadership positions in for-profit, public sector, and not-for-profit organizations can fall back on positional power to ensure compliance with their wishes, this is usually not the case in voluntary organizations. Volunteers (like worshipers) are free to come and go as they please. What keeps them around, involved, and committed to the vision of the organization? Perhaps part of the answer can be found in the manner in which they are led (as opposed to being managed).

Finally, it must be remembered that the data this study were based upon represent only a finite point in time. All too often there is an over reliance on such one-wave data collections to describe causal relations. However, while transformational leaders are found among financially strong and growing congregations, we do not know if the leaders brought about the congregations' success, or if successful congregations call forth such leaders. Perhaps with the collection of a second wave of data we will be in a position to answer this important question.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership



Role of Leadership in Shaping and Managing Shared Meaning



Conceptual Model

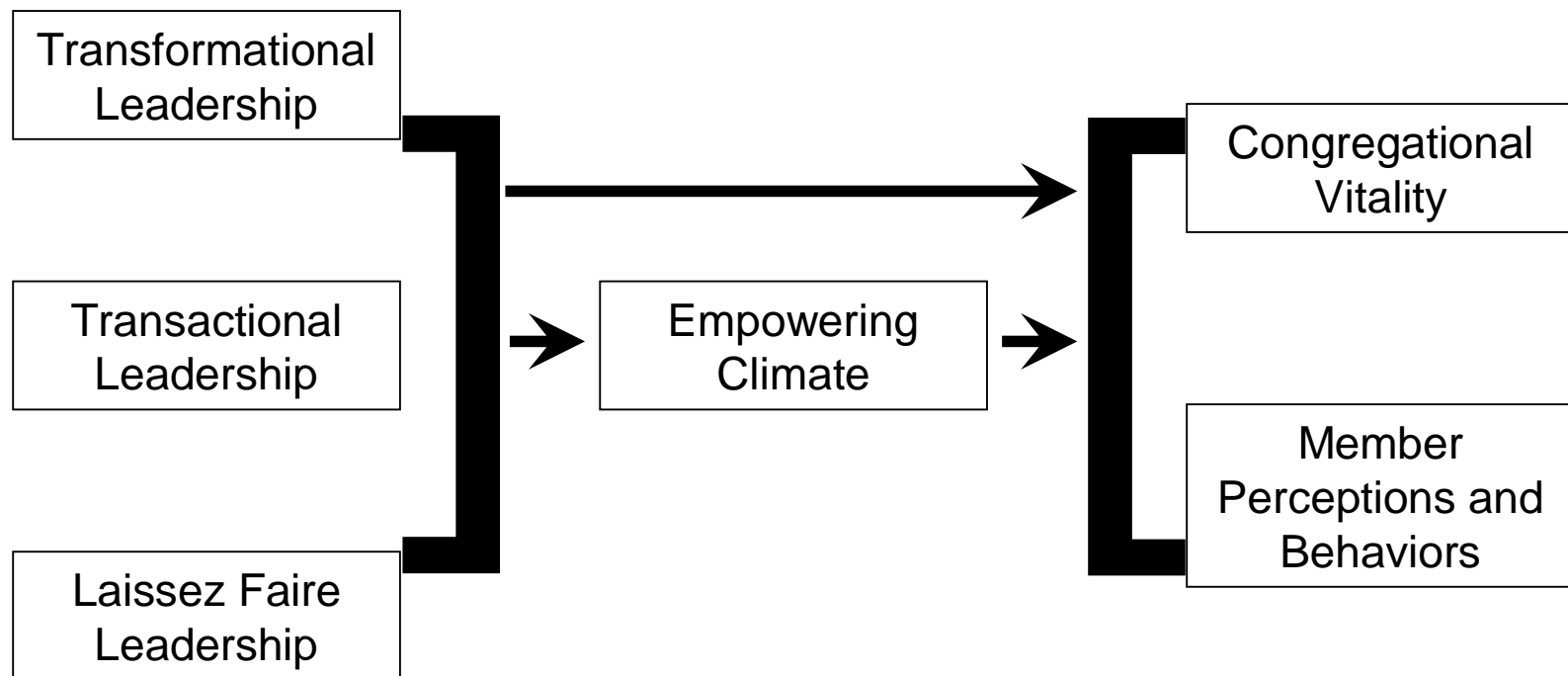


TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Empowering Climate	41.99	12.04										
2. Transformational	3.22	.70	.30**									
3. Transactional	3.06	.70	.18**	.77**								
4. Laissez Faire	2.55	.87	-.01	.40**	.51**							
5. Financial Vitality	3.31	.62	.39**	.13**	.04	-.06						
6. 5-Yr Growth	.07	.15	.31**	.10**	.07*	-.03	.31**					
7. Spiritual Needs Met	4.11	.81	.20**	.52**	.43**	.18**	.12**	.11**				
8. Exciting Place to Be	2.92	.73	.33**	.62**	.48**	.31**	.15**	.16**	.47**			
9. Meaningful Service	3.31	.75	.16**	.40**	.33**	.14**	.11**	.02	.48**	.39**		
10. Devotional Activities	4.84	1.47	.05	.11**	.08*	.02	.04	.02	.14**	.10**	.30**	
11. Amount You Give	3.37	1.17	.21**	.13**	.08*	-.10**	.09**	.05	.24**	.11**	.28**	.26**

* p<.01 ** p<.001

TABLE 2

**ANOVA Results for Leadership Variables by
Denominational Family (Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Conservative Protestant)**

	Catholic (1)	Mainline Protestant (2)	Conservative Protestant (3)	F	Scheffe Post Hoc
Individual-level					
Transformational Leadership	3.12	3.26	3.38	10.85***	3>1
Transactional Leadership	3.00	3.03	3.16	4.07**	3>1
Laissez Faire Leadership	2.63	2.35	2.53	6.91***	1>2
Congregation-level					
Empowering Leadership (Climate)	36.42	47.88	50.75	234.11***	3>2>1

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

TABLE 3

Multiple Regressions for Congregational Vitality Measures

	Congregational Vitality Measures					
	Congregation Growth			Financial Vitality		
Mainline	.032	-.129**	-.128**	.278***	.156***	.147***
Conservative	.182***	-.002	-.001	.342***	.192***	.188***
Empowering Climate		.360***	.341***		.284***	.284***
Transformational			.057			.016
Transactional			.011			-.014
Laissez Faire			-.043			-.047
R ² Change		.090***	.003		.055***	.002
Adj. R ²	.027	.116	.116	.131	.184	.183
F	9.81***	28.74***	14.76***	56.14***	56.32***	28.46***

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Notes: Coefficients are standardized regression coefficients.

TABLE 4

Multiple Regression for Empowering Leadership Climate

	Empowering Climate	
Mainline	.418***	.393***
Conservative	.514***	.474***
Transformational		.308***
Transactional		-.065
Laissez Faire		-.048
R ² Change		.059***
Adj. R ²	.314	.371
F	186.87***	96.73***

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Notes: Coefficients are standardized regression coefficients.

TABLE 5

Multiple Regressions for Member Perceptions

	Spiritual Needs Being Met			Exciting Place to Be			Meaningful Worship Service		
Mainline	.008	-.090*	-.052	.030	-.112**	-.051	.031	-.026	.006
Conservative	.094*	-.025	-.014	.210***	.037	.063	.151***	.082	.093*
Empowering Climate		.234***	.066		.339***	.144***		.135***	.015
Transformational			.456***			.529***			.288***
Transactional			.107*			-.018			.119*
Laissez Faire			-.054			.116***			-.025
R ² Change		.038***	.250***		.079***	.294***		.013**	.131***
Adj. R ²	.006	.043	.291	.039	.117	.409	.019	.030	.159
F	3.43*	12.91***	55.96***	16.73***	35.23***	90.77***	8.50***	9.18***	25.99***

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Notes: Coefficients are standardized regression coefficients.

TABLE 6

Multiple Regressions for Member Behaviors

	Time Spent in Private Devotion Activities			How Much You Give Financially		
Mainline	-.019	-.032	-.031	.139***	.139***	.124**
Conservative	.150***	.134**	.133**	.354***	.355***	.345***
Empowering Climate		.032	.009		-.016	-.021
Transformational			.037			.027
Transactional			.060			.095
Laissez Faire			-.045			-.153***
R ² Change		.001	.006		.000	.019**
Adj. R ²	.022	.022	.024	.115	.114	.129
F	10.21***	6.99***	4.33***	51.90***	34.56***	20.45***

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Notes: Coefficients are standardized regression coefficients.