

A Study on the Mediating Effect of Learning Orientation on the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Employee Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to confirm the mediating effects of learning orientation on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee lifelong learning. To achieve this, we distributed questionnaires to 800 employees, of which 512 valid questionnaires were received. We then employed hierarchical regression analysis to test our hypotheses. Results confirmed that transformational leadership has a positive influence on employee lifelong learning, and that this relationship is mediated by learning orientation. Based on these results, we conclude by making recommendations for both organizational management practices and future research.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; Learning orientation; Employee lifelong learning.



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1. Introduction

Around the world, an aging population is changing the demographic structure of the workforce. Advances in technology and ever-changing management strategies mean that employees must participate in lifelong learning, to increase their enthusiasm for work, which in turn promotes a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence. and advances in technology and management techniques have made knowledge accumulation and human capital management increasingly important.

Under these trends, research has shown that fostering an atmosphere of continuous learning can provide a competitive advantage for organizations (Chih *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, organizations and their employees should value the benefits of lifelong learning. Previous research has shown that, when organizations change workplace environments and attach importance to education training, employees will learn new skills and thereby maintain their employability (Vigoda-Gadot *et al.*, 2010). The study surveyed employees to better clarify lifelong learning from an employee perspective, lifelong learning can improve employee job satisfaction and improve performance. Therefore, this study studies the relationship between transformational leadership and employee lifelong learning within the framework of social learning theory. We also studied the mediating effects of learning orientation.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Transformational Leadership and Employee Lifelong Learning

Lin (2003) reported that, when employees maintain a sense of enjoyment toward learning and an ongoing motivation to learn, self-adjusting learning strategies can create knowledge for the organization. Yung (2008) found that conversion leadership can motivate organization members to learn, and that employee ingenuity and personal care have significant positive correlations with employee innovation. Therefore, it can be inferred that supervisors who exhibit transformational leadership behavior can positively impact employee lifelong learning. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Transformational leadership positively impacts employee lifelong learning.

2.2. Transformational Leadership and Learning Orientation

Huang and Kao (2014) reported that, when the overall fit between employees and organizations is high, (1) employees exhibit improved performance in the organization and (2) employees' intrinsic learning motivation has the same effect as learning orientation. In other words, motivational behavior within the learning goal orientation contributes to the learning outcome. Accordingly, we propose our second hypothesis as follows:

H2: Transformational leadership positively impacts learning orientation.

2.3. Learning Orientation Mediates the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Employee Lifelong Learning

It seems likely that employee behavior is influenced by transformational leadership behavior. Transformational leaders encourage employees to learn new things and seek to inspire employees through a personalized approach. Indeed, a caring leadership style can promote an attitude of lifelong learning among employees. When employees have a sense of accomplishment and are intentional in their roles, their learning motivation is clear. Furthermore, the goal of conversion-oriented leadership is achieved when employees are oriented towards their learning objectives. It will weaken the lifelong learning of employees, so the motivation provided by learning orientation acts as an intermediary. Accordingly, we propose our third hypothesis as follows:

H 3: Learning orientation mediates the influence of transformational leadership on employee lifelong learning.

3. Research and Sampling Methods

3.1 Data Collection

This study surveyed domestic employees. We distributed 800 questionnaires, and 512 valid questionnaires were received effectivity representing rate of 64%. Participants included 210 males (41.02%) and 302 females (58.98%).

3.2. Reliability and Validity

This study adopted a quantitative approach and used a conversion leadership scale that was based on the multi-factor leadership scale developed by Bass and Avolio (1997). The Cronbach alpha value for this scale was .95. The scale for learning orientation was modified from VandeWalle and Cummings (1997) and had a Cronbach α value of .92. The employee lifelong learning scale was compiled based on the work of Gardiner and Kline (2007) and had a Cronbach α value of .91. The results of reliability analyses were all above the standard of 0.7 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Hierarchical Regression Analysis

4.1.1. Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Employee Lifelong Learning

The regression coefficient for transformational leadership and employee lifelong learning was significant at a value of $\beta = .28$ ($p < .001$) and the R^2 calibration value was also significant for the amount of change ($\beta = .08$, $p < .001$), indicating that conversion leadership has a positive impact on employee lifelong learning. This confirms previous findings, such as those of Cho and Poister (2014), whose research indicated that (1) leaders can promote an increase in organizational performance among teams and (2) leadership behavior is significantly correlated with organizational performance. House *et al.* (1998) also emphasized the importance of leaders' self-confidence and the concept of idealization. Those researchers found that, when leaders use specific language in communicating the organization's vision with employees, the impact on the organization is the same as the results of this study. Hypothesis 1 is therefore supported.

4.1.2. Learning Orientation Mediates the Influence of Transformational Leadership Over Employee Lifelong Learning

In the second mode, the regression coefficient for transformational leadership and employee lifelong learning was significant at a value of $\beta = .28$ ($p < .001$), and the R^2 value was also significant ($\beta = .08$, $p < .001$). However, in mode three, when the variable of learning orientation was included, $\beta = .17$ ($p < .001$) and R^2 changed. The amount of measurements was also significant ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$); however, the regression coefficient for transformational leadership and employee lifelong learning was significantly reduced, which is in line with the third condition of Baron and Kenny (1986). This result suggests that learning orientation has a partial intermediary effect. Our results also reveal that learning orientation can indeed mediate the influence of transformational leadership over employee lifelong learning, and that the intermediate effect is part of the intermediary effect. Therefore, H2;H3 is supported.

5. Conclusion

The results of statistical analysis support all of our research hypotheses. Therefore, the primary finding of this study is that the attitude of the leader can deeply affect his or her employees. A transformational leader cares about the experiences and expectations of his/her employees and also shapes the organization's norms. Appearance, allowing organizations to follow and adhere to organizational goals and visions (Schneider, 1983) further demonstrates the importance of transformative leadership in this study to the organization's future goals (Stone *et al.*, 2004), and conversion. The leader is the object of active learning of the employee. Therefore, the attitude of the leader towards his/her own learning can encourage employees to adopt a positive attitude and actively participate in lifelong learning. Leaders can create a working atmosphere that is oriented towards learning and use learning policy to influence employees.

The study provides empirical evidence to suggest that transformational leadership positively influences employee lifelong learning. Tsai (2008) also investigated the effects of transformational leadership on employee innovation and career development. He found that an active supervisor who meets the employee's ideals will prove performance. Satisfaction with leadership behavior has a similar effect; therefore, a highly satisfying environment

tends to increase organizational commitment. This study validated the intermediary mechanism of learning orientation.

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