

The Dark Side of Transformational Leader Behaviors for Leaders

A long history of research has explored how leaders can help inspire and motivate their employees in organizations. Recent research published in *Academy of Management Journal*, however, examined the influences of transformational leader behaviors on leaders themselves, challenging the general assumption that engaging in more transformational leadership is universally beneficial (e.g., transformational leadership has been found as beneficial for followers such as leading to more positive affect, less emotional exhaustion, and more citizenship behaviors). The authors examined the impact of transformational leadership behaviors on leaders' turnover intentions. They argued that transformational leaders tend to experience more emotional exhaustion, which makes them more willing to leave their organization. The authors further proposed that this detrimental effect on leaders depends on the attributes of their followers.

Key Takeaways:

- Transformational leadership behaviors lead to increases in emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions for the leader.
- Transformational leaders experienced greater emotional exhaustion when their followers are low in conscientiousness or competence.

The authors examined 130 pairs of leaders and followers who were employed in a variety of industries. Tracking these leaders and followers for 12 weeks using six online surveys weekly, the authors found that transformational leadership behaviors were associated with increases in leaders'

emotional exhaustion and their subsequent turnover intentions. The authors further found that transformational leaders experienced greater increases in emotional exhaustion when their followers are low in conscientiousness (i.e., employees who are unreliable, lazy, careless, disorganized, and apathetic) and competence (i.e., employees who are incapable of exploiting their leader's transformational efforts). This study also revealed that transformational leader behaviors of a given leader fluctuated, indicating leaders could behave more transformationally at some times but less at others.

The authors argued that the findings suggest the need to implement some resource-gaining practices (such as periodic breaks, engaging in social activities) in organizations to mitigate the detrimental outcomes for transformational leaders. Further, they argued that organizations and leaders would benefit from deploying transformational leadership behaviors in a more strategic and dynamic manner. That is, leaders can be more or less transformational depending on the extent that their followers are conscientious or competent.

Source: Lin, S. H., Scott, B. A., & Matta, F. K. (2019). The Dark Side of Transformational Leader Behaviors for Leaders Themselves: A Conservation of Resources Perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 62(5), 1556-1582.