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# Transformational Leadership and Employee Psychological Well-Being: A Review and Directions for Future Research

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This review paper focuses on answering 2 research questions: (a) Does transformational leadership predict employee well-being? (b) If so, how and when does this prediction occur? A systematic computerized search and review of empirical papers published between January 1980 and December 2015 was conducted. Forty papers were found that met the criteria of reporting empirical results, being published in English, and focused on answering the above research questions. Based on these papers it appears that, in general, transformational leadership positively predicts positive measures of well-being, and negatively predicts negative measures of well-being (i.e., ill-being). However, recent findings suggest that this is not always such a simple relationship. In addition, several mediating variables have been established, demonstrating that in many cases there is an indirect effect of transformational leadership on employee well-being. Although some boundary conditions have been examined, more research is needed on moderators. The review demonstrated the importance of moving forward in this area with stronger research designs to determine causality, specifying the outcome variable of interest, investigating the dimensions of transformational leadership separately, and testing more complicated relationships.

*Keywords:* transformational leadership, employee well-being, psychological health, mental health, burnout

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It probably comes as no surprise to most people that positive leader behavior has an important role to play in the health and well-being of employees. However, it was not until 1989 that the first academic work focused on how transformational leaders can play a part in employee well-being was published (Seltzer, Numerof, & Bass, 1989). In the intervening time, studies have been published to answer the following research questions: does transformational leadership *predict* employee well-being?; and if so, *how* and *when* does this prediction occur?

There is a substantial amount of published research detailing the links between various leader behaviors and employee health (for a review, see Kelloway & Barling, 2010). More specifically, this review outlines empirical research findings regarding transformational leadership and employee psychological well-being and shows that, in general, there appears to be a positive relationship between the two. Research in this area has also begun to document how transformational leadership and employee well-being are positively associated, and when this is likely to occur. Yet there is still much to be discovered. Some research questions as yet unanswered include: does transformational leadership predict employee well-being or vice versa? Does transformational leadership predict employee well-being in the future, or just cross-sectionally? Do some dimensions of transformational leadership positively predict, and some negatively predict employee well-being? Which mediators of this relationship are most important? And what are the conditions under which these relationships are stronger? This review outlines studies that investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee psychological well-being, the mechanisms linking these, and the nascent work on the conditions under which this relationship is more likely to occur. Based on this review, I make recommendations for future work in this area.

## Why Transformational Leadership?

There are numerous theoretical perspectives to draw upon when discussing leader behavior, some of which have been the focus of a large amount of published research. During the 1990s transformational leadership was the most studied of all leadership theories (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), and it was also the most widely published theory in the *Leadership Quarterly* journal during the 80s and 90s (Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Cogliser, 2010; Lowe & Gardner, 2000). Setting aside the question of whether or not it should, transformational leadership certainly "dominates the leadership landscape" (Antonakis, 2012, p. 257). In fact, in a review of the literature from 1980 to 2007, Barling, Christie, and Hoption (2011) found that trans-

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formational leadership was the most frequently studied theory in published academic literature during that time. Given the popularity of this leadership theory in both academia and with practitioners (e.g., Desvaux & Devillard-Hoellinger, 2008; Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger, & Baumgarten, 2007), determining the relationship between transformational leadership and employee psychological well-being is important.

Transformational leadership, as defined by Bass, Avolio, and colleagues, is composed of four dimensions (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 1995; Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991; Bass & Avolio, 1993, 1994; Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Hater & Bass, 1988; Yammarino & Bass, 1990). The first of these, idealized influence, refers both to the characteristics that followers attribute to the leader, as well as behavior the leader engages in related to being a role model and doing the right thing. A leader with strong values, who also acts in accordance with these, would score highly on this dimension. The second dimension, inspirational motivation, relates to broadly communicating a positive vision and holding high expectations. Intellectual stimulation, the third dimension, involves being open to new ways of accomplishing tasks and encouraging others to be creative in their thinking. Finally, individual consideration, the fourth dimension, focuses on a leader who treats employees as individuals, spends time coaching and developing their skills, cares, and is compassionate.

## Defining Well-Being

Employee well-being has been defined in many different ways. The concept is quite broad, having been conceptualized as including both physical and psychological health (e.g., Liu, Siu, & Shi, 2010), and "context-free" versus "context-specific" aspects of health (Warr, 1987, p. 40 as cited in Kelloway & Barling, 1991). Context-specific aspects of employee well-being such as job satisfaction have been summarized in other published work (e.g., Bass & Riggio, 2006). This review focuses on research linking transformational leadership to *context-free aspects of psychological well-being*. Specifically, studies conceptualizing employee psychological well-being as employee stress (Smith & Cooper, 1994) and subjective psychological well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002) are included. In occupational health research, employee stress has a long history of examination in relation to various aspects of working conditions (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Sulsky & Smith, 2005). Yet, research associating leadership with employee stress is more recent. Psychological well-being may be conceptualized as subjective well-being (Keyes et al., 2002), and deals with emotions that employeee experience (Warr, 2006), perceived mental health, or reports of psychosomatic symptoms. As this review will demonstrate, it is important to consider the definition and measurement of well-being; findings may differ depending on how well-being is defined and measured. Transformational leadership does not uniformly predict all aspects of employee psychological well-being. One reason for this may be definition and measurement of the outcome. Another plausible reason may be that there are various paths through which leadership may be associated with various forms of employee well-being (Wegge, Shemla, & Haslam, 2014).

## What Do We Know?

In order to answer the two research questions, a systematic literature review was conducted. Four databases were examined: PsycINFO, Business Source Complete, Academic Search Premier, and Health Business Elite. Search terms included: transformational leadership and -employee*; -burnout; -well being; -stress; -health. Citations in various book chapters and other reviews published in journal articles were also considered (Arnold & Connelly, 2013; Barling & Carson, 2010; Barling et al., 2011; Clarke, Arnold, & Connelly, 2015; Kuoppala, Lamminpää, Liira, & Vainio, 2008; Nielsen, 2014; Robertson & Barling, 2014; Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, & Guzman, 2010). This search produced 356 records. Abstracts were examined and those meeting the following criteria were included: (a) published in a peer-reviewed academic journal, (b) the study was published between January 1980 and December 2015, (c) the study reported empirical results focused specifically on the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological employee well-being (as defined above), and (d) the study was published in an English language journal. After applying the above-noted criteria 40 papers outlining 44 studies were identified (Table 1). I draw on these studies to form the basis for the answer to the questions: does transformational *predict* employee well-being?; and if so, *how* and *when* does this occur?

In examining these studies, four trends become apparent. First, while the conceptualization and measurement of well-being differs across studies, the majority of studies focused on burnout/perceived stress/strain (23/44 = 52%), followed by psychological health/well-being (4 General Health Questionnaire [GHQ], 2 World Health Organization [WHO] Index, 2 depression, and 6 psychological well-being; 14/44 = 32%). Affective well-being/emotions forms a smaller subset of these studies (8/44 = 18%; some studies measured multiple outcomes hence the total is more than 44). Those studies investigating burnout as an outcome tend to examine direct relationships, and those investigating psychological health/well-being have generally examined mediated relationships. Second, studies are predominantly cross-sectional survey studies with data from a single source (35/44 = 80%). Third, more studies have investigated mediators (19/44 – 43%) than moderators of this relationship (5/44 = 11%). And finally, the majority of these papers have been published in the last decade (35/40 = 88%).

## Does Transformational Leadership Predict Employee Psychological Well-Being?

Taken as a whole, the published work examined for this review establishes that in many cases transformational leadership positively predicts positive measures and negatively predicts negative measures of employee psychological well-being. The literature also demonstrates that this general conclusion is qualified; it depends on the study design, how well-being is conceptualized and measured, and other variables that are included in the analysis (mediators and moderators)—all issues that I return to later in this paper. Many studies have examined the direct effect that transformational leadership has on employee well-being. These studies are in line with the perspective that the pathway through which leader behavior impacts employees is "by direct actions of the supervisor" (Wegge et al., 2014, p. 12).

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Table 1
*Summary of Published Studies Meeting the Inclusion Criteria Investigating the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Employee Well-Being Between 1989 and 2015*

| No. | Authors, year | Research focus, method, and findings | How employee psychological well-being was measured | Investigated mechanisms or boundary conditions of TFL-employee well-being relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Arnold et al. (2007) | Two cross sectional survey studies (319 health care workers; 146 service workers) of the relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being investigating the degree to which employee find meaning in their work as an explanatory mechanism. Found partial (Study 1) and full mediation (Study 2 – controlling for humanistic work values). | Study 1: Affective well-being Study 2: positively worded items from the GHQ | Yes: meaningful work as mediator |
| 2 | Bono et al. (2007) | Experience sampling study of the relationship between transformational leadership and affective well-being of followers. Momentary positive (composite of happiness, enthusiasm, and optimism) and negative (composite of anxiety, anger and irritation) emotions of 57 health care workers were measured four times a day for two weeks. Transformational leadership of supervisor was measured one month before the experience sampling part of the study. Transformational leadership was positively related to increased positive emotions at work, but not to reports of negative emotions. | Affect: measured by one item assessing each of three positive (happiness, enthusiasm, and optimism) and three negative (anxiety, anger and irritation) emotions | No |
| 3 | Corrigan et al. (2002) | Cross-sectional survey study of 620 mental health employees in 54 teams (team leads answered questions regarding the organization and their leadership style; subordinates rated the leader and organizational culture) demonstrated idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individual consideration in leaders was significantly negatively related to emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout. Intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individual consideration were significantly positively correlated with personal accomplishment. | MBI | No |
| 4 | Densten (2005) | Cross-sectional survey of 480 senior managers in an Australian law enforcement organization investigated whether inspirational motivation (as measured by the MLQ) predicts burnout. SEM showed a negative relationship between concept-based inspirational motivation (behaviors communicating standards and expectations) and emotional exhaustion, and no relationship with image-based inspirational motivation (items focused on creation of vivid ideas and images). | MBI | No |
| 5 | Fernet et al. (2015) | Two cross-sectional survey studies of the relationship between transformational leadership and employee health (other relationships were investigated) in 637 nurses (Study 1) and 210 school principals (Study 2) in Quebec, Canada. Perceived job characteristics (job demands were operationalized in Study 1 as cognitive, emotional, and physical; in Study 2 work overload; job resources were operationalized in Study 1 as cognitive, emotional, and physical; in Study 2 as participation in decision making) and employee motivation were considered. Proposed that perceived job characteristics mediate relationship between transformational leadership and employee motivation and that employee motivation mediates relationship between perceived job characteristics and employee well-being outcomes. In both studies transformational leadership was associated with higher resources and lower demands; demands were positively associated controlled motivation and resources were positively associated with autonomous motivation and a significant indirect relationship of transformational leadership on autonomous motivation through job resources and job resources on well-being through autonomous motivation was found. However, only in Study 1 did job demands have a significant indirect effect on well-being through controlled motivation. | Study 1: Burnout (emotional exhaustion and cynicism scales of MBI-GS) Study 2: Psychological distress measured with Psychiatric Symptom Index | Yes: Job demands and resources and employee motivation (autonomous and controlled) as sequential mediators |
| 6. | Franke and Felfe (2011) | Two cross-sectional survey studies in two different organizations in Germany (sample 1: $N = 201$ manufacturing company; sample 2: $N = 509$ clerical workers in public administration). Hypothesized idealized influence attribute and individual consideration are negatively and inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and idealized influence (behavior) are positively related to strain. Organizational commitment was hypothesized to moderate these relationships; those employees with high commitment would benefit less from transformational leadership than those with low commitment. Found individual consideration and idealized influence (attribute) were significantly negatively related to strain in both samples (after controlling for other dimensions). Only in Sample 2 was idealized influence (behavior) found to be positively associated with strain, and moderation confirmed. | Perceived strain: Irritation scale | Yes: Affective organizational commitment as moderator |

(*table continues*)

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Table 1 (*continued*)

| No. | Authors, year | Research focus, method, and findings | How employee psychological well-being was measured | Investigated mechanisms or boundary conditions of TFL-employee well-being relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Gill et al. (2006) | Cross-sectional survey of 147 hospitality workers in Canada, focused on the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout. Analyses showed that transformational leadership was negatively associated with job stress, and job stress was positively associated with burnout (mediation not tested). | Burnout: 2 items | No |
| 8 | Gill et al. (2010) | Cross-sectional survey of 266 hospitality workers in India, focused on the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout. Analyses showed no significant relationship between transformational leadership and job stress. | Job stress: 5 items | No |
| 9 | Green et al. (2014) | Investigated the relationship between transformational leadership and each of three dimensions of burnout in a cross-sectional survey of 322 clinical and case management mental health service providers in San Diego, CA. HLM analyses demonstrated transformational leadership (in addition to role clarity and cooperation) was significantly positively related to increased personal accomplishment (over and above demographic and work related variables [e.g., caseload size, no. years at the agency etc.]). | Burnout: Organizational Social Context Measure designed for children's mental health service providers (dimensions of Depersonalization, Emotional exhaustion, and Personal Accomplishment) | No |
| 10 | Gregersen et al. (2014) | A longitudinal survey study of 339 healthcare employees. Investigated the relationship between transformational leadership (Time 1) and burnout and perceived strain (Time 2) and whether these relationships depend on levels of occupational self-efficacy. Negative correlations between transformational leadership and emotional exhaustion and perceived strain were significant; correlation with depersonalization was not significant; occupational self-efficacy did not moderate the relationship. | Strain: Irritation scale Burnout: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization assessed using the German version of the MBI (MBI-D) | Yes: Occupational self-efficacy as a moderator |
| 11 | Hetland et al. (2007) | Norwegian information technology employees ($N$ = 289) completed a cross-sectional survey measuring transformational leadership of their supervisors, neuroticism, and burnout. Transformational leadership was not significantly associated with emotional exhaustion, was significantly positively associated with professional efficacy, and was significantly negatively associated with cynicism. | MBI-GS (16 items) | No |
| 12 | Holstad et al. (2014) | Cross-sectional survey study of 199 German employees from financial and service sectors testing a moderated mediation model where the relationship between transformational leadership and follower emotional strain is mediated by social support, and this effect is stronger for highly ambitious employees (controlling for sex, age, weekly working hours, and education). Transformational leadership did not relate significantly negatively to irritation, and overall social support did not mediate this relationship. However, professional ambition was found to moderate the mediated relationship between transformational leadership and irritation for employees who reported medium and high ambition. | Emotional strain measured by the Emotional Irritation Scale (5 items) | Yes: social support as mediator and follower ambition as moderator |
| 13 | Jacobs et al. (2013) | Online cross-section survey study of 318 employees in German information and communication technology organizations. Found transformational leadership has a significant and positive relationship with well-being, controlling for sex, age, type of employment contract (permanent or fixed term), and years of employment with the organization. | World Health Organization's Well-Being Index (5 items) | No |
| 14 | Kanste et al. (2007)[a] | The relationship between transformational leadership and burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) was examined in a sample of Finnish nurses and nurse managers ($N$ = 601). Regression analysis showed transformational leadership was significantly negatively associated with depersonalization. Analysis of variance analysis showed the effect of transformational leadership on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization was stronger for temporary workers than permanent workers. | MBI—Human Services Survey | Yes: employment status as moderator |
| 15 | Kanste (2008)[a] | The relationship between transformational leadership and burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) was examined in a sample of Finnish nurses and nurse managers ($N$ = 627). Transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and contingent reward) positively related to personal accomplishment, and negative related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. | MBI—Human Services Survey | No |

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Table 1 (*continued*)

| No. | Authors, year | Research focus, method, and findings | How employee psychological well-being was measured | Investigated mechanisms or boundary conditions of TFL-employee well-being relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | Kara et al. (2013) | Cross-sectional survey study of 443 employees in five-star hotels in Turkey investigating (among other relationships) the association between transformational leadership and employee well-being mediated by quality of working life. Transformational leadership had a significant and positive relationship with quality of working life, and quality of working life had a negative and significant relationship with burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). | Burnout—22 items: three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and depersonalization | Yes: quality of working life as mediator |
| 17 | Kelloway et al. (2012) | Two cross-sectional survey studies ($N$ = 436 telecommunications fieldworkers investigated both individual and group level transformational leadership; $N$ = 269 from StudyResponse). Study 1 found trust in leader acted as mediator of transformational leadership—psychological well-being relationship at the individual level. Study 2 found trust in leader acted as mediator of transformational leadership—psychological well-being relationship while statistically controlling for liking of the leader, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Extraversion. | Study 1: 12 item GHQ Study 2: Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale | Yes: trust in leader as mediator |
| 18 | Leithwood et al. (1996) | Cross sectional survey of 331 Canadian teachers in community colleges. Results of SEM analysis showed that transformational leadership was negatively related to burnout, and while effect of leadership was stronger than personal factors, it was not as strong as organizational factors. | Burnout: 8 item measure | Yes: organizational and personal factors appear to be tested as mediators |
| 19 | Liu et al. (2010) | Cross-sectional study of 745 employees from various industries in Hong Kong (448) and Beijing (297) of the relationship between transformational leadership and follower well-being (job satisfaction, perceived work stress, and stress symptoms). Investigated trust in leader and self-efficacy as mediators and found that both fully mediated this relationship. | Perceived work stress: negative affective well-being measured with two items | Yes: trust in leader and self-efficacy as mediators |
| 20 | Lyons and Schneider (2009) | Experimental study ($N$ = 214) manipulated transformational leadership style and examined effect on individual performance on a stressful task, perceived social support, self-efficacy beliefs, affect, and stressor appraisals. Among other findings, participants in the transformational condition appraised impending stressor as less threatening, and reported less negative affect (compared with the transactional-management by exception condition). | Stressor appraisal: 6 items (3 measuring primary and 3 measuring secondary); Affect: PANAS | No |
| 21 | McKee et al. (2011) | Cross-sectional survey of 178 employees at a non-profit Canadian organization. Found the relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being was mediated by workplace spirituality (measured with indices of meaningful work, sense of community, and shared values). Sense of community was found to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being. | GHQ—12 items | Yes: workplace spirituality (three dimensions of meaningfulness, sense of community and shared values) as mediator |
| 22 | McMurray et al. (2010) | Cross-sectional survey study of 43 Australian non-profit organization employees showed a positive association between transformational leadership and affective well-being. | PANAS | No |
| 23 | Munir et al. (2010)[b] | Longitudinal study (Time 1 and 2–18 months apart) of 188 Danish eldercare workers found that transformational leadership was associated with reduced depression in followers cross-sectionally and prospectively. | Depressive symptoms—Major Depressive Inventory | No |
| 24 | Munir et al. (2012)[b] | Longitudinal study (Time 1 and 2–18 months apart) of 188 Danish eldercare workers found relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction and psychological well-being was mediated by work-life conflict. | Psychological well-being: degree with which employees reported being in a positive state of mind over the past two weeks | Yes: work-life conflict as mediator |
| 25 | Nielsen and Munir (2009)[b] | Longitudinal study (Time 1 and 2–18 months apart) of 188 Danish eldercare workers found significant relationship between transformational leadership and affective well-being cross-sectionally but not longitudinally. Self-efficacy fully mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and employee affective well-being at Time 2, but not longitudinally (partial support for self-efficacy as mediator). | Well-being: degree of positive state of mind using five item scale from COPSOQ | Yes: self-efficacy as mediator |
| 26 | Nielsen, Randall, et al. (2008)[b] | Longitudinal study (Time 1 and 2–18 months apart) of 188 Danish eldercare workers found that meaningful work, role clarity, and opportunities for development partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and employee affective well-being. | Well-being: degree of positive state of mind using five item scale from COPSOQ | Yes: meaningful work, role clarity and opportunities for development as mediators |

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Table 1 (*continued*)

| No. | Authors, year | Research focus, method, and findings | How employee psychological well-being was measured | Investigated mechanisms or boundary conditions of TFL-employee well-being relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 27 | Nielsen, Yarker, et al. (2008)[b] | Cross sectional study based on 447 Danish eldercare workers (Time1) tested whether involvement, influence and meaning mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and affective well-being. SEM analyses showed meaningfulness partially mediated this relationship. | Well-being: degree of positive state of mind using five item scale from COPSOQ | Yes: involvement, influence and meaning as mediators |
| 28 | Nielsen and Munir (2009)[b] | Cross sectional study based on 274 Danish eldercare workers (Time 2) tested whether self and team efficacy mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee affective well-being. Found both self and team efficacy fully mediated this relationship. | Well-being: degree of positive state of mind using five item scale from COPSOQ | Yes; self- and team-efficacy as mediators |
| 29 | Nielsen and Daniels (2012) | Cross-sectional study of 425 participants from accountancy and eldercare groups investigated the relationship between group level and differentiated level transformational leadership with four mediators (working conditions) on well-being outcomes of intent to leave, job satisfaction, burnout, sleep quality, and vitality. Stronger effects reported for differentiated transformational leadership. Meaningful work, social support, cohesion, and role conflict all mediated some of the relationships between differentiated transformational leadership and well-being. Meaningful work and social support mediated most relationships. | Well-being: burnout (one-dimensional measure), sleep quality (4 items), and vitality (5 items) | Yes: meaningful work, cohesion, social support and role conflict as mediators |
| 30 | Perko et al. (2014) | Part of a larger research project entitled 'Rewarding and Sustainable Health-promoting Leadership (Re-Su-Lead) conducted in three countries, this study reports on a cross-sectional survey study of 557 Finnish municipal employees across many different occupations. Of interest was the relationship between transformational leadership and employee depressive symptoms. SEM analyses of the multiple mediation model showed that occupational self-efficacy, meaningfulness of work, and work-related rumination during off-time mediated this relationship. | Major Depression Inventory (12 items concerning last two weeks) | Yes: occupational self-efficacy, meaningfulness of work, and work-related rumination as mediators |
| 31 | Salem (2015) | Cross-sectional survey study of 327 employees in five-star hotels in Egypt. Correlational analyses showed a significant negative correlation between transformational leadership and both job stress and burnout. | Job stress: 4 items and burnout: 4 items | No |
| 32 | Schmidt et al. (2014) | Study of 285 German employees across various industries investigated the relationship between transformational leadership and psychological strain. Using a cross-sectional survey method and SEM to analyze the data findings showed that the relationship between transformational leadership and strain was mediated by psychosocial resources (i.e. decision latitude, social support, organizational culture, employee satisfaction, work-life balance, generalized self-efficacy, and meaningfulness of the job) with organizational resources having a stronger relationship than personal resources. | Psychological strain: German version of the Symptom Checklist | Yes: decision latitude, social support, organizational culture, employee satisfaction, work-life balance, generalized self-efficacy and meaningfulness of the job as mediators |
| 33 | Seltzer et al. (1989) | Survey study of part-time MBA students theorized a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee stress and burnout. Found that stress symptoms and burnout were significantly and negatively correlated with all four transformational dimensions. However, multiple regression analysis controlling for charisma found part of intellectual stimulation associated with increased stress symptoms. | Stress symptoms: 54 item Personal Stress Symptoms Assessment Burnout: Gillespie-Numer of Burnout Inventory | No |
| 34 | Sosik and Godshalk (2000) | Investigated the relationship between transformational behavior in mentors and job stress in employees. Survey study of 230 adult students with leadership measures completed by mentors and job stress measure competed by protégés. PLS revealed that transformational leadership in mentors was related to increase in mentoring functions and decrease in job stress and moderation was supported. | Job stress: 6 items | Yes: protégé receipt of mentoring functions as moderator |
| 35 | Stenling and Tafvelin (2014) | Study of transformational leadership in coaches asking whether the effect of transformational leadership on athlete well-being is indirect via need satisfaction. Survey of 184 competitive floorball players in Sweden found this relationship was indirect. | Affective well-being: 3 items (cheerful, enthusiastic, and optimistic) | Yes: Need satisfaction as mediator |
| 36 | Stordeur et al. (2001) | Cross-sectional survey study of 625 nurses in a Belgium hospital found no relationship between transformational leadership and emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout while controlling for work stressors (34 items specific to the nursing related to the physical, psychological and social environment). | MBI | No |

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Table 1 (*continued*)

| No. | Authors, year | Research focus, method, and findings | How employee psychological well-being was measured | Investigated mechanisms or boundary conditions of TFL-employee well-being relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 37 | Tafvelin et al. (2011) | Two-wave (12 months apart) longitudinal panel study with a stratified random sample of 136 Swedish social service employees showed transformational leadership had no direct effect on employee well-being over time, but instead an indirect effect was observed through positive climate for innovation. A two-step mechanism was found whereby transformational leadership at Time 1 was associated with climate for innovation at Time 1; climate for innovation at Time 1 was associated with climate for innovation at Time 2, which, in turn, was associated with increased employee well-being at Time 2. Transformational leadership was directly and positively associated with well-being cross-sectionally. | Context-free affective well-being: 8 positively worded items from the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) | Yes: climate for innovation as mediator |
| 38 | Walsh et al. (2014) | Cross-sectional survey study of procedural justice and psychological empowerment as mediators of the transformational leadership—employee well-being relationship. 254 employees from various industries (StudyResponse) responded to a questionnaire and PROCESS was used to test mediation. | GHQ (12 items) | Yes: procedural justice and psychological empowerment as mediators |
| 39 | Zineldin and Hytter (2012) | Cross-sectional survey of 12 academics asking about their perceptions of four previous Deans (therefore for most scales there were 48 responses; although the dependence in the data is not addressed). Found transformational leadership overall has a significant positive association with employee well-being. Analyses of dimensions showed a negative relationship with intellectual stimulation and a positive association with individual consideration. | One item measures; content of this item not specified | No |
| 40 | Zwingmann et al. (2014) | Investigation of the effects of transformational leadership (among other styles) on employee well-being across 16 countries (93,576 employees in 11,177 teams of a large international company). Multi-level analyses showed that shared team perceptions of transformational leadership was significantly associated with increased well-being in all 16 countries, although the magnitude of this relationship differed across countries ($r$ = .35 to $r$ = .50). Power distance was found to moderate the relationship with transformational leadership being more strongly related to employee well-being in high power distance nations. | WHO-5 index | Yes: Power distance as a moderator |

*Note.* TFL = transformational leadership; GHQ = General Health Questionnaire; MBI = Maslach Burnout Inventory; MBI-GS = Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey; MLQ = Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire; PANAS = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule; COPSOQ = Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire; SEM = structural equation modeling; HLM = hierarchical linear modeling; PLS = partial least squares.
[a] These studies appear to report on the same sample. [b] These studies appear to report on the same sample, some at Time 1 and Time 2 and others at both points.

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Burnout has been defined as a "psychological response to work stress that is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization [treating people as objects], and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment" (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004, p. 859). When psychological well-being is measured as burnout, studies have found positive relationships, no relationship, or mixed relationships between transformational leadership and burnout. Different results are found depending on the dimension of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). One of the earliest published studies in this area actually hypothesized a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee burnout (Seltzer et al., 1989). The authors theorized that if your supervisor was transformational you might work longer hours, and put increased energy into your work role, and this, in turn, could lead to higher burnout. The uncertainty associated with intellectual stimulation could also pose a threat to well-being, and the importance of the group for transformational leaders could mean that employees put their health needs below the needs of their jobs (see Table 1 for descriptions of the method, samples, measures, and findings of each study). First-order correlations showed that stress symptoms were negative correlated with all four transformational dimensions and more strongly negatively correlated with burnout. However, when a factor analysis of the intellectual stimulation items was conducted, they found two factors, one of which (My supervisor requires that we backup our opinions with good reasoning) demonstrated a positive correlation with burnout when controlling for charisma. The authors concluded that while the behavior of requiring backing up opinions with reason (intellectual stimulation) could be positively associated with employee burnout, overall transformational leadership is likely to reduce reported burnout (Seltzer et al., 1989, p. 184).

In line with the findings (rather than the theorizing) of this first study, further studies hypothesized a negative relationship between transformational leadership and burnout. The argument is that a transformational leader, being highly considerate of employees, reduces the likelihood of experiencing exhaustion, and increases the likelihood of feeling personal accomplishment. Other cross-sectional survey studies have corroborated the negative relationship between transformational leadership and employee burnout (e.g., Gill, Flaschner, & Shachar, 2006; Leithwood, Menzies, Jantzi, & Leithwood, 1996; Salem, 2015). However, mixed findings in a study of employees in a Norwegian information technol-

ogy organization showed transformational leadership was not significantly associated with emotional exhaustion, was significantly positively associated with professional efficacy, and negatively associated with cynicism (Hetland, Sandal, & Johnsen, 2007).

In one study transformational leadership was positively associated with personal accomplishment (Kanste, Kyngäs, & Nikkilä, 2007). In a second published study on a similar sample, transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and contingent reward) positively related to personal accomplishment, and negatively related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Kanste, 2008). Green, Albanese, Shapiro, and Aarons (2014) also found that transformational leadership (in addition to role clarity and cooperation) was significantly positively related to increased personal accomplishment (over and above demographic and work related variables [e.g., caseload size, # years at the agency etc.]). It could be that combining the positive well-being notion of accomplishment, with the negatives of exhaustion and depersonalization may be the reason for some of the mixed findings.

Another study used an experimental methodology and found, among other outcomes, that transformational leadership was associated with lower threat appraisals compared with transactional-contingent reward and transactional-management by exception conditions and a smaller increase in negative affect (marginally significant) compared with the transactional-management by exception condition (Lyons & Schneider, 2009). This largely supports correlation studies demonstrating an overall negative relationship between transformational leadership and employee stress (as measured by burnout).

However, some studies have found no relationship between transformational leadership and burnout (Gill, Flaschner, & Bhutani, 2010; Stordeur, D'Hoore, & Vandenberghe, 2001). Speculation by authors regarding the lack of relationship between transformational leadership and employee burnout include the country of the study (e.g., India; Gill et al., 2010), and having measured and controlled for other workplace stressors (e.g., physical, psychological, and social environment, role ambiguity, and role conflict; Stordeur et al., 2001).

A few studies have investigated the role of each dimension of transformational leadership in predicting burnout and stress. For example, one study in mental health teams showed that idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individual consideration dimensions of transformational leadership were significantly negatively associated with the emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout. Intellectual stimulation was not significantly positively correlated with emotional exhaustion. Further, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individual consideration were all significantly positively correlated with personal accomplishment (Corrigan, Diwan, Campion, & Rashid, 2002). Densten (2005) studied the relationship between inspirational motivation and emotional exhaustion. Concept-based inspirational motivation (behaviors communicating standards and expectations) was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion and no relationship was found between image-based inspirational motivation (items focused on creation of vivid ideas and images) and emotional exhaustion. Image-based inspirational motivation did have a "positive direct effect on personal accomplishment and a negative direct effect on depersonalization" (Densten, 2005, p. 113). Finally, a study in academia found an overall positive relationship between transformational leadership and well-being; however, when examining the dimensions, intellectual stimulation was negatively related, and individual consideration positively related to positive well-being (Zineldin & Hytter, 2012).

While the majority of published studies on the direct relationship between transformational leadership and employee psychological well-being have been interested in burnout or perceived stress as the outcome, three studies measured well-being differently and also found transformational leadership was positively related to better well-being. For example, Bono, Foldes, Vinson, and Muros (2007) used experience sampling methodology to study the association between transformational leadership and employee affect. Transformational leadership (measured 1 month before the experience sampling portion of the study) was associated with reported increased positive emotions, but not with decreased negative emotions. One of the strengths of this study, in comparison to the majority of studies surveyed for the current review, is the methodology, which is particularly appropriate when investigating emotion which can be variable over the course of any given day.

Jacobs et al. (2013) found that transformational leadership had a significant and positive relationship with well-being (as measured by the WHO Index—while controlling for sex, age, type of employment contract [permanent or fixed term], and years of employment with the organization). McMurray, Pirola-Merlo, Sarros, and Islam (2010) found that transformational leadership was positively related to affective well-being (reported emotions) in a cross-sectional design. In a longitudinal study, Munir, Nielsen, and Carneiro (2010) found that transformational leadership was related to decreased self-reported depression symptoms both cross-sectionally and prospectively.

Overall, transformational leadership appears to positively predict the personal accomplishment dimension of burnout, and negatively predict emotional exhaustion. In addition, transformational leadership has a positive association with positive measures of psychological well-being. Some of the equivocal findings on the relationship between transformational leadership and stress outcomes may be due to the possibility that different conditions affect this relationship. Researchers have begun to examine this possibility, yet there appears to have been greater interest in examining *how* transformational leadership predicts employee psychological well-being.

## How and When Does Transformational Leadership Predict Employee Well-Being?

Studies of *how* transformational leadership might be associated with employee psychological well-being evoke the explanatory notion of resources provided by this form of leadership. With the exception of one study investigating psychological strain (Schmidt et al., 2014), mediation studies tend to examine psychological health/well-being as an outcome. Variables that have been examined and found to mediate (or partially mediate) this relationship include: meaningful work (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Nielsen & Daniels, 2012; Nielsen, Randall, Yarker, & Brenner, 2008; Nielsen, Yarker, Randall, & Munir, 2009; Perko, Kinnunen, & Feldt, 2014), self-efficacy (Liu et al., 2010; Nielsen & Munir, 2009; Nielsen et al., 2009), trust in the leader (Kelloway, Turner, Barling, & Loughlin, 2012; Liu et al., 2010), sense of community (McKee, Driscoll, Kelloway, & Kelley, 2011), quality

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of working life (Kara, Uysal, Sirgy, & Lee, 2013), occupational self-efficacy (Perko et al., 2014), employee motivation (autonomous and controlled; Fernet, Trepanier, Austin, Gagne, & Forest, 2015), team efficacy (Nielsen et al., 2009), work-life conflict (Munir, Nielsen, Garde, Albertsen, & Carneiro, 2012), role clarity and opportunities for development (Nielsen, Randall, et al., 2008), influence and involvement (Nielsen, Yarker, Brenner, Randall, & Borg, 2008), social support (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012), work-related rumination (Perko et al., 2014), need satisfaction (Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014), climate for innovation (Tafvelin, Armelius, & Westerberg, 2011), procedural justice and psychological empowerment (Walsh, Dupre, & Arnold, 2014), and psychosocial resources (Schmidt et al., 2014). The preponderance of evidence to date suggests that transformational leadership has an indirect relationship with employee psychological well-being.

Some of these mediators have garnered more attention and support (e.g., meaningful work, trust in leader, and self-efficacy), and others have yet to be replicated in the published literature. Given the current debate about the state of psychological science and the potential replicability crisis (e.g., Pashler & Wagenmakers, 2012), these findings warrant replication studies. The common denominator in the mediators that have been examined is that they can be conceptualized as increases in resources and/or decreases in job demands according to the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011) and the job demands resources theory (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Through grounding work investigating how transformational leadership is associated with employee psychological well-being in these theoretical frameworks, future studies could begin to examine multiple mediators and determine which mediators are key in explaining this relationship. In fact, taking such an approach is in line with the second of five suggested pathways via which leadership (using a broad definition) may be related to employee "(ill-) health" (Wegge et al., 2014, p. 8). In this pathway the leaders' behavior changes the context of work (e.g., social support, etc.) which affects employees' capabilities to deal with stress. Research to date would suggest that it appears transformational leaders change the conditions of work for employees, and through this process have an influence on employee well-being.

There are comparatively fewer studies investigating conditions under which transformational leadership will be more likely to predict employee well-being. We still know comparatively little about *when* transformational leadership will predict employee well-being. Similar to the mediational studies, the majority of these studies use the overall measure of transformational leadership, instead of examining dimensions separately. Variables found to moderate this relationship include: receipt of mentoring functions (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000), employee status (Kanste et al., 2007), power distance (Zwingmann et al., 2014), and affective commitment (Franke & Felfe, 2011).

Looking at job stress as an outcome, one study investigated the mentor-protégé relationship and found after controlling for age, job tenure, education level, industry, and mentor gender, that transformational leadership in mentors was associated with an increase in received mentoring functions and a decrease in reported stress related to the job (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Protégé receipt of mentoring functions was found to moderate the relationship between transformational leadership in mentors and decreased job stress. One advantage of this study is that the data were from multiple sources which can assist in reducing concerns about common-method variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

One study found that transformational leadership had a stronger negative relationship with reduced emotional exhaustion and depersonalization for temporary workers than for permanent workers (controls included age, employment status, work task and working hours; Kanste et al., 2007). Transformational leadership was potentially a substitute for benefits and security permanent workers had, that temporary workers did not have. Power distance was found to moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being (measured by the WHO Index) across 16 countries (Zwingmann et al., 2014). Transformational leadership was more strongly related to employee well-being in high power distance nations, suggesting that in nations where it is more culturally acceptable to have larger power differentials leader behavior is more likely to predict well-being. Finally, arguing that occupational self-efficacy is stable, and hence not as amenable to leader influence, one longitudinal study tested it as a moderator of the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout (Gregersen, Vincent-Hoper, & Nienhaus, 2014). The test for moderation was not significant, suggesting this variable serves as a mediator of this relationship.

One paper reported two cross-sectional studies investigating whether relationships between different dimensions of transformational leadership and strain were moderated by affective commitment (Franke & Felfe, 2011). The authors anticipated that idealized influence (attribute) and individual consideration would be negatively and inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence (behavior) would be positively related to strain (measured as irritation). Organizational commitment was hypothesized to moderate these relationships such that those employees with high commitment would benefit less from transformational leadership than those with low commitment. Findings regarding moderation were not conclusive in that only in Sample 2 was moderation confirmed. Individual consideration and idealized influence (attribute) were significantly negatively related to strain in both samples (after controlling for other dimensions). And in Sample 2 idealized influence (behavior) was found to be positively associated with strain.

Finally, one study tested a moderated mediation model where the relationship between transformational leadership and follower emotional strain was hypothesized to be mediated by social support, and this effect was stronger for highly ambitious employees (controlling for sex, age, weekly working hours, and education; Holstad, Korek, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2014). Transformational leadership did not relate significantly negatively to irritation, and overall social support did not mediate this relationship. However, professional ambition was found to moderate the mediated relationship between transformational leadership and irritation for employees who reported medium and high ambition. In other words, for ambitious followers, transformational leadership was associated with less irritation, through an indirect effect on social support.

Overall, these studies of moderators of the relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being suggest that there is not necessarily a universal positive or negative relationship between overall transformational leadership and/or each of the dimensions and employee psychological well-being. Future studies of the conditions under which transformational leadership is

more or less likely to predict employee well-being are warranted. In addition, the focus of moderation studies appears to be negative measures of well-being, and we could increase our understanding of boundary conditions of the relationship between transformational leadership and positive well-being by beginning to incorporate tests of moderating variables with these outcomes. In some sense the mediation and moderation research foci could merge to inform our understanding of when and how transformational leadership predicts different forms of employee well-being. In future research it will be important to denote distinctions between variables that act as mediators versus moderators.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

There has been a surge of interest in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being during the past decade. On the basis of this review, I make three suggestions for future work in this area.

### Expand Methods

First, the published work in this area has largely utilized cross-sectional survey methods relying on single source data (80% of all identified studies). Cross-sectional designs are a drawback in that we cannot attribute causal relationships on this basis. Much of the research on this topic has taken a leader-centric approach—the assumption is that the leader engages in the behavior, which then influences the employee's well-being. In fact, an employee's mindset (i.e., well-being) could actually influence ratings of leaders. Taking a follower-centric approach, Perko, Kinnunen, Tolvanen, and Feldt (2016), studied exhaustion and vigor (main indicators of burnout and engagement respectively), as resources which were "available to invest in the relationship with one's leader" (p. 108). In a longitudinal two-wave study of 262 Finnish employees in the public sector they identified patterns of well-being within individuals (a person-centered approach), and correlated these with leadership ratings. For those employees who exhibited an improving or good well-being profile, ratings of transformational leadership also increased over the time span of the study. This finding demonstrates that we must be cognizant of the possibility that well-being may predict ratings of transformational leadership. One longitudinal study suggests that this may be a plausible alternative, as findings showed that there was a reciprocal relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being (Nielsen, Randall, et al., 2008). In addition, a reciprocal relationship ("bi-directional feedback loop") has been suggested as a fifth pathway through which leadership is related to employee well-being (Wegge et al., 2014, p. 12). Finally, two longitudinal studies were unable to confirm that transformational leadership was related to employee well-being over time (Nielsen & Munir, 2009; Tafvelin et al., 2011). Disentangling the direction of this relationship, and the process and timeline over which this relationship holds is essential. Future studies using longitudinal designs and experimental work are warranted.

The use of single-source data may also be problematic, given the issue of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and the plausible hypothesis that leader and employee well-being are intertwined. For example, Kranabetter and Cornelia (2016) studied the moderating impact of leader's health awareness (assessed by managers) on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee exhaustion and cynicism. Findings illustrated that leader health and well-being are integrally related to employee health and well-being and, in fact, may moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being. Future research incorporating both leader and follower well-being perspectives in the same studies are needed.

### Specify Measures

The second issue that this review draws attention to are the different relationships found recently between different dimensions of transformational leadership and dimensions of employee well-being. Studies identified for this review focus on outcomes of burnout, stress, psychological well-being as measured by self-rated mental health (e.g., GHQ, depression, WHO Index), and emotion (affect). These measures tap into different constructs with potentially different predictors. For example, affect may be more fleeting, and therefore more amenable to change due to leader behavior than, for example, symptoms of depression. Even within the burnout construct there is a positive well-being dimension (personal accomplishment), and two negative dimensions (exhaustion and depersonalization). Does it make sense to combine these dimensions in this area? Perhaps not when there are different relationships between different dimensions of burnout and transformational leadership. Transformational leadership may be more likely to consistently be positively related to well-being outcomes that focus on positive states of mind and health, and that are amenable to change by exposure to working conditions. In combination with specifying the dimensions and definitions of well-being, this area of work will potentially be furthered by investigating the different dimensions of transformational leadership separately. While the results of this review suggest that this is an imperative of future work, the challenge comes with high correlations found between the different dimensions (e.g., Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Yet different dimensions have been shown in some studies to have differential effects; therefore, taking this into account in future work will refine our understanding in this area.

### Embrace Complexity

The final issue that this review draws attention to is that as more studies are conducted, the picture of how and when transformational leadership is related to employee psychological well-being gains complexity. While the current review captured research published until 2015, there are at least two studies (and possibly more) currently "in press" that further illustrate this point.

While research to date tends to find a positive relationship between transformational leadership and positive employee psychological well-being, recent studies looking at the separate dimensions may call this into question. For example, in a study of 129 participants linking the full-range model of leadership behaviors to an objective measure of employee stress (cortisol assessed from hair—a biological marker of stress), participants completed a survey about their leaders' behavior and gave a hair sample (Diebig, Bormann, & Rowold, 2016). Using role ambiguity theory as a framework, the findings showed significant positive relationships between identifying and articulating a vision, high performance expectations, and follower stress and significant negative

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relationships between providing appropriate role models, individualized support, fostering acceptance of group goals, and intellectual stimulation and follower stress (Diebig et al., 2016). This study demonstrates the utility of separating the dimensions of transformational leadership. That dimensions of transformational leadership may negatively predict well-being is also highlighted in another recent study focused on sickness absenteeism as an outcome. In a 3-year longitudinal study, Nielsen and Daniels (2016) studied the relationships between group level transformational leadership, presenteeism, and employee sickness absenteeism. They found that presenteeism in Year 1 moderated the relationship between transformational leadership in Year 1 and sickness absenteeism in Year 3. When an employee worked in a group with higher transformational leadership and higher presenteeism, higher reported levels of sickness absenteeism followed. The authors suggest that "transformational leaders who encourage followers to perform above and beyond the call of duty perhaps may do so at the expense of vulnerable followers' health and thereby increase sickness absence levels" (Nielsen & Daniels, 2016, p. 10). These two studies, in addition to the studies covered in this review, demonstrate that the relationship between transformational leadership and employee well-being is more complex than initially anticipated.

## Conclusion

Future research should incorporate designs that can assess causality, investigate the question from the perspective of both the leader and follower, be clear about the outcome measures being used and why these are most appropriate, utilize measures of the dimensions of transformational leadership where possible and attempt to capture the complexity of this relationship. Research is needed to focus on the conditions under which there is a positive or negative association between transformational leadership and psychological employee well-being, in addition to considering appropriate mediators in our models. The importance of transformational leadership to employee health and well-being is a question worthy of our attention, particularly when we consider the individual and organizational consequences of having a healthy workforce, and the fact that leadership training may be a productive occupational health intervention (Kelloway & Barling, 2010). Continued research in this area to more fully understand how and when transformational leadership contributes to the health and well-being of employees is necessary in order that we can make evidence based recommendations in this regard.

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