

تنمية المهارات الناعمة

من خلال القيادة التحويلية في الأنشطة الطلابية الجامعية

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الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة تأثير سلوكيات القيادة التحويلية على تنمية المهارات الشخصية الأساسية لدى طلاب جامعة محمد الأول بوجدة، المملكة المغربية. وتستكشف الدراسة التفاعل بين القيادة التحويلية، والمهارات الشخصية، وثقافة المؤسسات في التعليم العالي، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على الأنشطة اللامنهجية داخل أندية الطلاب الجامعية. تكشف النتائج أن سلوكيات القيادة التحويلية بما في ذلك التأثير المثالي، والتحفيز الملهم، والاعتبار الفردي، والتغذية الراجعة البناءة، وتعمل على تعزيز التمكين الشخصي، والمرونة، والقدرة على التكيف، والمهارات القيادية لدى الطلاب. وأشار المشاركون إلى أن الثقة، والشفافية، والإرشاد التحفيزي تشكل آليات رئيسية يمكن من خلالها القادة الطلاب من تحقيق النمو الذاتي وتطوير العلاقات بين الأفراد. تؤكد هذه النتائج على الأهمية العملية لإدماج مبادئ القيادة التحويلية في الأنشطة غير الممنهجة والإجراءات التعليمية لتعزيز اكتساب المهارات، وتماسك الفريق، والمشاركة الاجتماعية. ومن خلال إظهار كيف يمكن لأندية الطلاب أن تشكل بيئات تحويلية لتطوير القيادة والمهارات الشخصية، تسد هذه الدراسة فجوة مهمة في الأدبيات المتعلقة بالمجال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القيادة التحويلية، المهارات الشخصية، الإتيقان الشخصي، تنمية الأفراد، التدريب، الأنشطة التكميلية.



Fostering Soft Skills through Transformational Leadership in University Extracurricular Activities

A Qualitative Case Study



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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of Transformational Leadership (TL) behaviours on the acquisition of essential soft skills among students at Mohammed I University. It explores the interplay between TL, soft skills, and the organisational culture of higher education, focusing specifically on university extracurricular activities within student clubs. The findings reveal that TL behaviours, including Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Individualized Consideration, and constructive feedback, promote personal mastery, resilience, adaptability, and leadership capacity among students. Participants highlighted the role of trust, transparency, and motivational guidance as key mechanisms through which leaders facilitate both self-directed growth and interpersonal development. These results underscore the practical importance of integrating TL principles into extracurricular and instructional activities to enhance skill acquisition, team cohesion, and social participation. By demonstrating how student clubs can serve as transformative contexts for leadership and soft skill development, this study addresses a notable gap in the literature.



Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Soft Skills, Personal Mastery, People Development, Coaching, Extracurricular Activities.

Introduction

The way organizations, cultures, and individuals operate has changed as a result of global evolution. The need for people who can lead organizations through these changes has become essential due to the rapid pace of globalization. Leading such organizations requires social awareness, interpersonal skills, and flexibility. Leadership is one of these main skills. In addition to other interpersonal skills such as Personal Effectiveness and People Coaching, they include the necessary qualities for individual and organizational.

Soft skills, including collaboration, leadership ability, and initiative, have become indispensable in the contemporary workplace. Despite their importance, they are often overlooked or treated as secondary in traditional educational curricula. Previous research recognises the importance of these skills. However, research on the impact of TL on soft skills within extracurricular activities could further expand due to the novelty of the soft skill concept. Given the rising importance of extracurricular activities as learning environments, examining this relationship offers new insights into how leadership development occurs outside traditional classroom settings.

To address this gap, the present study explores how transformational leadership influences the development of soft skills among students at Mohammed I University. Specifically, it investigates how TL behaviours such as Inspirational Motivation and Individualized Consideration facilitate interpersonal growth, people coaching, and personal mastery. By applying TL theory to the context of student club activities, this research seeks to demonstrate how extracurricular experiences foster leadership-related competencies that extend beyond academic learning. The study is structured into four chapters: a theoretical background on

transformational leadership and soft skills, a detailed description of the research methodology, an analysis of qualitative findings, and a final discussion and interpretation of results.

1. Literature Review

Transformational leadership has evolved as one of the most influential paradigms for understanding how leaders inspire and mobilize others toward collective goals. Bass (1985) defines the transformational leader as an individual who “motivates us to do more than we originally expected to do” (p. 31), emphasising inspiration that aligns personal and organizational purposes. This view extends Burns’s (2003) original conceptualization, wherein TL represented a moral and emotional exchange separate from the transactional model. Burns (2003) distinguished transactional leadership as a process of exchange based on rewards for compliance, whereas TL generates commitment to collective goals. They are both parts of the contemporary theory of leadership: the Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT), which positions leadership along a continuum from passive to active engagement with followers. (Antonakis & Avolio, 2003).

Yet, these foundational frameworks largely emerged from organizational and political contexts, where leadership was viewed as hierarchical and formal. Bass and Avolio (1994) refined Burns’s ideas to fit corporate environments, emphasizing measurable leadership factors such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Their studies demonstrated TL’s link with innovation, job satisfaction, and organizational sustainability (Bass, 1999; Northouse, 2016). However, applying such frameworks to non-formal settings, such as extracurricular

clubs, remains conceptually underexplored. In these environments, leadership does not rely on authority but on peer influence, collaboration, and communication, elements that closely align with the behavioural competencies described as soft skills.

This gap suggests a need to explore further the theoretical premises of TL. Burns (2003) contends that leadership is fundamentally a human developmental process, promoting moral growth and self-transcendence. Similarly, Bass (1999) viewed TL as a catalyst for empowerment, encouraging followers to realize their potential. Yet, neither fully articulated how such potential is cultivated behaviourally, especially among students who learn leadership through participation rather than position. The context of extracurricular activities offers a unique lens to examine this gap because it embodies the learning-by-doing model of leadership development, where students practice initiative, teamwork, and problem-solving as part of collective action.

The evolution of leadership theory, from Carlyle's Great Man theory to Stogdill's (1950) behavioural perspective, reflects an ongoing attempt to understand how personal attributes and situational factors interact. Although Carlyle's Great Man theory was criticised for its deterministic view, its key contribution is the inherent traits notion, a precursor to the relational focus of TL. In this sense, it may be seen as a developmental bridge between the individual's inner motivation and the group's collective progress. This bridge is often expressed through soft skills such as communication, empathy, and initiative, which mediate how leadership behaviours emerge in practice.

The relevance of soft skills to leadership development has been emphasized by several scholars. Perloff (1997) argues that leadership effectiveness, negotiation, and public speaking depend not only on

technical knowledge and emotional intelligence (EI), which is the ability to perceive, manage and influence emotions. Goleman's model, summarized by Perloff (1997), emphasises five dimensions of EQ: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and people skills, which parallel the interpersonal dimensions of TL. Karimova (2020) further notes that trust, teamwork, and relationship management are crucial for sustaining collaboration, highlighting soft skills as the practical expression of leadership ability. After investigating the necessary skills for the modern workforce, Cimatti (2016) identified eleven of their attributes. They mainly represent communication, ethics, and teamwork, which employers consider vital soft skills. These skills bridge industries and job roles, encouraging collaboration, innovation, and productivity. Defining soft skills as complementary to hard skills, acting as the essential link between technical knowledge and its use, is an accurate description by Cimatti (2016).

Crosbie's (2005) work bridges leadership and soft skills directly, asserting that soft skills form the behavioural foundation through which leadership manifests. From this perspective, TL can be viewed as a framework that explains why people lead, while soft skills describe how they lead. This conceptual integration offers a valuable lens for understanding leadership in extracurricular settings, where students lead through influence, participation, and cooperation rather than traditional authority.

In summary, although Burns and Bass formulated TL as a paradigm of motivational and moral influence, their frameworks have not fully accounted for the informal, developmental processes through which leadership behaviours emerge in educational or extracurricular environments. By combining TL theory with the soft skills framework

by Crosbie (2005), the present study seeks to extend TL theory by exploring how communication, teamwork, initiative operate as pathways for leadership development in non-formal learning contexts.

After having introduced the topic being studied, the next section outlines the technique used to highlight the important aspects of TL's influence on the development of People Development/Coaching and Personal Effectiveness/Mastery, which are regarded as the foundation of soft skills.

2. Methodology

This study uses qualitative data to examine how Transformational Leadership affect the development of soft skills in extracurricular activities at the university. It employs such data gathering method to unravel relations between this leadership style and soft skills.

2.1. Variables

TL has four components: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. Idealised influence refers to leaders serving as exemplars whom followers trust and admire (Avolio & Bass, 2001). Inspirational Motivation is associated with leaders who inspire and motivate followers to exhibit higher performance levels. Intellectual Stimulation is comparable to reflection, which refers to leaders who facilitate innovation and creativity among followers. Individualised Consideration is related to leaders who support, coach and mentor followers to encourage their development.

2.2. Participants and Sampling

The study participants are students enrolled in higher education schools specialising in technology, medicine, engineering, and

commerce. They are all affiliated with Mohammed I University institutions. Data saturation is crucial in qualitative research when determining the optimal number of participants to include. It refers to the point where any new themes or insights emerge from data collection. For Creswell (2012), a sample of 10 to 30 interviews could be sufficient. A larger sample size of 36 subjects was selected to conduct interviews and deepen the understanding of soft skill behaviours.

The Participants for interviews are purposively selected, representing both years of study, clubs, and leadership roles. This strategy aims to collect a wide range of experiences, with a focus on the most relevant to soft skills development. For instance, excluding 5th-year engineering and commerce students is due to their lack of participation in school clubs, as they tend to focus on their graduation projects.

2.3. Instrumentation

Semi-Structured Interviews

Flexible interview questions are designed to elicit participants' experiences in soft skills and leadership roles, focusing on how these skills: collaboration, initiative, and leadership ability. Two main practical skills of Crosbie's (2005) model serve as the framework for the interviews, with TL-related emerging themes, ensuring alignment between TL and soft skills frameworks: People Development/ Coaching, Personal Mastery/Effectiveness. In the interviews, participants share personal narratives of their experiences with soft skills and/or discuss the behaviours exhibited by their team members. Thus, compiling personal narratives and reported experiences offers a perspective on soft skills behaviours through team dynamics and leadership development.

Following the implementation of the qualitative method, the output containing the pertinent and interesting findings and conclusions will be presented to us in the next section.

3. Findings

People Development and Coaching

The point that resonated most was people development and coaching, through expressing gratitude for leaders who invested time in mentoring and provided feedback. This relates to the idea of TL, which requires individualized consideration. One participant supported this claim: “Each time we finish an event, we hold a meeting to discuss what happened...we highlight the good things, and we point out the bad things in order to improve” (Interview 6). The structured debriefing that these students employed addressed flaws and proposed reflection to continue learning and improving.

Celebrating this achievement illustrates how recognising achievements boosts morale and reinforces a winning culture, driving unity and elevating individual energy. Another participant added on the same aspect: “... in the next assessment session we stood around her singing and cheering to her... we gave her a small notebook where all the members of the club signed and gave nice compliments” (Interview 7). Celebrating accomplishments illustrates how it boosts morale and reinforces a winning culture, driving unity and improving individual motivation.

Honesty and transparency were mentioned in excerpts. As a participant cited: “We also value transparency and honesty a lot... we agreed that no matter how anyone may do something wrong, we just need to be honest with each other” (Interview 36). Honesty and transparency stem from open communication and trust, which are two fundamental pillars of effective coaching and personnel development.

Personal Effectiveness/Personal Mastery

Personal effectiveness, or personal mastery, emerged as a prominent

theme as well, with participants discussing their commitment to self-improvement and adaptability. This soft skill displays the importance of self-awareness and continuous growth, which inspires both the leader and team members. This utterance demonstrates self-development: “I actually learned a lot of these things within the club, especially from the vice president of our club” (Interview 5). It reflects the participant’s awareness of self-development process resonating with themes of self-mastery from Crosbie’s model. The following excerpt supports the self-improvement skill as an interviewee stated: “I take it easy and try to improve step by step” (Interview 23). It highlights the gradual improvement necessary for long lasting outcomes. Adapting to new situations is crucial for personal mastery, as transformational leaders adjust their behaviours to fit with the challenges they encounter. It is underlined in the following excerpt: “I have no problem adapting to new situations” (Interview 27).

4. Discussion

This study examined how TL manifests in extracurricular contexts and its influence on the development of soft skills among students. Two main themes emerged from the qualitative data: coaching and Self-Directed Growth. These themes demonstrate the multifaceted ways in which transformational leaders impact followers, both in fostering interpersonal growth and encouraging self-directed development.

People Development and Coaching was a prominent theme, highlighting the role of transformational leaders in facilitating individual growth. Trust, transparency, and reliability were recurrently cited by participants as critical elements in this process. For example, one participant stated, “We also value transparency and honesty a lot...

we agreed that no matter how anyone may do something wrong, we just need to be honest with each other” (Interviewee 36). This finding aligns with Burns’ (1978) conceptualisation of ethical leadership, which posits that trust-building through honesty and transparency fosters psychologically safe environments conducive to learning and development. Moreover, these results resonate with Covey et al. (2022), who emphasise that contemporary leadership requires consistent ethical behaviour to strengthen relational ties.

Structured reflection and feedback were also crucial mechanisms for fostering personal growth. A participant described, “Each time we finish an event, we hold a meeting to discuss what happened... we highlight the good things and we point out the bad things in order to improve” (Interviewee 6), while another added, “...in the next assessment session we stood around her singing and cheering to her... we gave her a small notebook where all the members of the club signed and gave nice compliments” (Interviewee 7). These practices exemplify formative feedback and the recognition of achievement, which support intrinsic motivation and reinforce team cohesion. Burns (2003) asserts that transformational leaders provide accurate assessments focused on improvement, while Covey et al. (2022) highlight that autonomy in learning is fostered when individuals internalise responsibility for their own development. Similarly, Crosbie (2005) stresses that recognising individual potential and encouraging continuous learning are fundamental to leadership effectiveness. Within extracurricular clubs, leaders offered direct guidance, aligning with Bass and Riggio’s (2006) emphasis on stimulating autonomy and innovation through individualized mentorship. The association between leadership ability and People Development in this study further suggests that coaching

peers directly contributes to the cultivation of leadership skills in team members.

Personal Mastery and Personal Effectiveness emerged as another central theme, encompassing self-awareness, adaptability, and resilience. These traits were closely linked to Inspirational Motivation and Idealized Influence. Participants frequently noted the impact of leaders' behaviours on their own development. For instance, one stated, "I actually learned a lot of these things within the club, especially from the vice president of our club" (Interviewee 5), highlighting how role-modelling fosters self-directed growth. Incremental development and resilience were reflected in statements such as, "I take it easy and try to improve step by step" (Interviewee 23), and adaptability in "I have no problem adapting to new situations" (Interviewee 27). Additionally, perseverance was illustrated by, "Even when things don't go as planned, we learn and improve" (Interviewee 11). These findings corroborate Senge's (2006) assertion that personal mastery requires self-reflection and continual learning, and Goldsmith and Reiter's (2007) emphasis on combining self-discipline with adaptability within collaborative contexts. They also align with Knight and Yorke (2003), who highlighted the transferable benefits of skills developed through extracurricular activities for career readiness.

While the study provides insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The findings are derived from a qualitative sample of participants engaged in extracurricular activities within a specific educational context, which may limit generalisability. Additionally, as the data rely on self-reported experiences, there is potential for bias in participants' recollections or perceptions of leadership behaviours. Finally, the study did not include inter-rater reliability in observational measures, which may affect the consistency of reported behaviours. Future

research could expand the sample, incorporate longitudinal designs, and triangulate data sources to further validate the observed relationships between transformational leadership and soft skill development.

Conclusion

Overall, this study demonstrates that TL transformational leaders in extracurricular contexts facilitate both interpersonal growth and self-directed development through trust-building, ethical modelling, motivational communication, and structured feedback. The factors of Individualized Consideration and Inspirational Motivation emerged as particularly significant, embodying the value of an organisational culture where the ability to influence and inspire others is essential for achieving collective goals. They embody the importance of an organizational culture, where the capacity to influence and inspire others is essential for achieving collective goals. The centrality of People coaching and personal effectiveness as foundational skills reinforces how clubs function as a workplace duplicate environment. They also offer opportunities for students to experience professional dynamics, collaboration, and social complexity within a learning setting. From a Readiness-to-learn perspective, these settings foster adaptability, resilience and willingness to embrace challenges. Consequently, the shared goals and the reflective practices lead to such engagement. This ensures that members complete the assigned tasks and simultaneously develop skills applicable beyond their academic journey.

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