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Analysis of women's career leadership in Taiwan: Exploring transformational leadership behavior

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Abstract

Traditional concepts and culture usually lead to doubts about women's leadership in the workplace. Women are often criticized for their inability to execute, lead, and perform as well as men in leadership and management. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effects of transformational leadership on leadership self-efficacy and organizational performance for women's career leadership in Taiwan. This study employed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) to measure transformational leadership behaviors. The results of this study show that idealized influence directly affects leadership self-efficacy. Inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation directly affect both self-efficacy and organizational performance. Furthermore, individual consideration has a direct impact on organizational performance, while leadership self-efficacy also exerts a direct influence on organizational performance. The findings reveal that career women who employ high levels of transformational variables are more likely to be more potent than those who use lower levels. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2025; 29 [10]: 133-142*).

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Leadership Self-Efficacy; Organizational Performance; Structural Equation Modeling (SEM); Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)

Résumé

Les concepts traditionnels et la culture conduisent généralement à remettre en question le leadership des femmes sur le lieu de travail. Les femmes sont souvent critiquées pour leur incapacité à exécuter, diriger et performer aussi bien que les hommes dans les domaines du leadership et de la gestion. Par conséquent, cette étude vise à explorer les effets du leadership transformationnel sur l'auto-efficacité en matière de leadership et la performance organisationnelle pour le leadership professionnel des femmes à Taïwan. Cette étude a utilisé le questionnaire MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) et l'échelle GSES (General Self-Efficacy Scale) pour mesurer les comportements de leadership transformationnel. Les résultats de cette étude montrent que l'influence idéalisée a un effet direct sur l'auto-efficacité en matière de leadership. La motivation inspirante et la stimulation intellectuelle ont un effet direct à la fois sur l'auto-efficacité et sur la performance organisationnelle. En outre, la considération individuelle a un impact direct sur la performance organisationnelle, tandis que l'auto-efficacité en matière de leadership exerce également une influence directe sur la performance organisationnelle. Les résultats révèlent que les femmes actives qui utilisent des variables transformationnelles à un niveau élevé sont plus susceptibles d'être plus efficaces que celles qui les utilisent à un niveau plus faible. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2024; 29 [10]: 133-142*).

Mots-clés : Leadership transformationnel; Efficacité personnelle en matière de leadership; Performance organisationnelle; Modélisation par équations structurelles (SEM); Questionnaire multifactoriel sur le leadership (MLQ)

Introduction

Traditionally and culturally, women are often seen as weaker or less capable of leadership than men in the workplace. Women are usually perceived as soft and motherly in society. As a result, women are often criticized for their inability to execute, lead, and perform as well as men in leadership and management. The motivation for this study stems from the high value of women's professional

leadership, not only because of ethical demands for gender equality but also because women's leadership qualities and abilities can bring unique advantages and practical benefits to organizations. Therefore, this research explores the effects of transformational leadership on leadership self-efficacy and organizational performance in the workplace for women's career leadership in Taiwan. This study also served as an essential reference for women's career leadership.

Because leadership self-efficacy is an imperative process that drives organizational performance, organizations can stimulate performance through leadership self-efficacy. Bass defines transformational leadership behaviors as influencing employees' thoughts to transform into several routes.¹ Transformational leaders are expected to affect their followers' actions to organizational change. For example, transformational leaders inspire followers by using intellectual stimulation to create innovative solutions to problems in their organization.² However, understanding the effects of transformational leadership can help women leaders improve organizational performance, develop leadership skills, and lead to more competitive organizations.³ As Spreitzer and Pertula (2005) pointed out, under different backgrounds, leaders usually have different individual behaviors that demonstrate different personal judgment and leadership skills.⁴

Leadership development is an imperative process that precedes leadership self-efficacy to stimulate organizational performance.⁵ By recognizing the impact of leadership behaviors, women leaders can develop practical strategies, develop leadership competencies, and effectively supervise employees in their organizations.⁶ This study develops a conceptual model related to these constructs to help women leaders achieve organizational goals. Then, the research formulated and tested several hypotheses with data collected from several national women's groups and women's professional groups in Taiwan

Methods

Research population

This study examined data gathered from leaders of corporations or organizations in Taiwan. A leader is a woman in management with more than 5 years of working experience. The questionnaires used the Likert scale of a five-point assessment, with positive scores; the highest score represents the highest degree.

Participants in the study sample were randomly selected from the following two primary sources: (1) national women's organizations, such as "Association of Women Entrepreneurs", "International Federation of Business and

Professional Women (IFBPW)", and "Taiwan Women's Development Association"; (2) national women's professional organizations, such as "Taiwan Medical Women's Association", "Taiwan Women's Art Association (TWAA)", "The Society of Taiwan Women in Science and Technology (TWIST)", and "Women in Architecture Taiwan (WAT)". The questionnaires and cover letters, which confirmed the anonymity and confidentiality of their participation, were mailed to 825 potential respondents from national and professional women's organizations in Taiwan from November 2024 to February 2025. One and a half months after the email, 285 valid questionnaires were finally collected, representing a response rate of 35.6%. The survey questionnaire includes four parts: The first part asked for participants' demographic background. The second part contains questions about transformational leadership. The third part asked about the questions of leadership self-efficacy. Finally, the last part measured the questions of organizational performance.

Statistical analysis

The research analysis method was used to apply Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) from the SPSS AMOS 30 program. Anderson and Gerbing (1998) proposed that the structural model be applied after confirmed measurements.⁷ In the first step, the model goodness-of-fit (GOF) for the constructs was checked by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). In the second step, the level of significance was tested.

Research hypotheses

The following essential variables were used in the research hypothesis:

Transformational leadership

Downton (1973) developed the hypothesis of transformational leadership in which people will follow an insightful, passionate, and energetic individual who inspires them to pursue greatness.⁸ Conger and Kanungo (1998) provided insights that charismatic leaders possess five behavioral traits: expression and vision; situational sensitivity; member behavioral sensitivity; personal behavioral aggressiveness; and deviant behavior.⁹

The Four "I's" of Transformational Leadership:

Transformational leadership is identified as the following four key factors:¹⁰ (1) idealized influence/ charisma, whereby leaders gain followers' trust and respect by arousing loyalty and emotions from them; (2) inspirational motivation, whereby leaders communicate optimism about vision by encouraging followers believe in their abilities; (3) intellectual stimulation, whereby leaders increase followers' consideration for unexpected situations and encourage them to see problems as opportunities to learn; and (4) individualized consideration, whereby leaders realize the needs of each follower and provide essential assistance. Transformational leadership has four factors (called the 4 "I's"): idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.¹¹

Leadership Self-Efficacy

Leadership self-efficacy refers to a leader's confidence to perform specific missions and complete organizational goals.¹² Self-efficacy has a strong correlation with self-concept in different environments.¹³ Self-efficacy affects all areas of human endeavor. Individuals can influence situational beliefs by recognizing their strengths, which can strongly influence how well an individual performs in the face of real and intense challenges.

Organizational performance

The most ambiguous concept in current research is organizational performance.¹⁴ Organizational performance is defined as the level of achievement in which individuals execute their assigned tasks. Organizational performance is also described as the quantity and quality of assigned tasks executed according to individual skills, methods, and interaction with others.¹⁵ Organizational performance is described as appreciative behaviors and outcomes.¹⁶

The research developed a conceptual model that indicated the impact of transformational leadership on leadership self-efficacy and organizational performance for women leaders in Taiwan (see Figure 1).

Hypothesis 1a: Idealized influence directly affects leadership self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 1b: Idealized influence directly affects organizational performance.

Hypothesis 2a: Inspirational motivation directly affects leadership self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 2b: Inspirational motivation directly affects organizational performance.

Hypothesis 3a: Intellectual stimulation directly affects leadership self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 3b: Intellectual stimulation directly affects organizational performance.

Hypothesis 4: Individualized consideration directly affects organizational performance.

Hypothesis 5: Leadership Self-Efficacy directly affects organizational performance.

Results

The research model is empirically tested by employing survey data from 285 participants of national women's organizations in Taiwan, following an extended literature review and analysis of leadership theory. Table 1 describes measurement items and descriptive statistics in the research constructs. There are four factors (called the 4 "I's") of transformational leadership, including (1) idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration. Each construct includes three items. The selected items are scored as 1 (once in a while), 2 (sometimes), 3 (fairly often), 4 (frequently), and 5 (always), respectively. Self-efficacy includes 10 items; the selected items are scored as 1 to 4, the degree from "not at all true", "hardly true", "moderately true", and "exactly true", respectively. Organizational performance includes eight items, each of "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", and "strongly agree", respectively.

Reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis

The leadership behaviors section was measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 6S, which contains twelve questions.¹⁷ Cronbach's alpha is a measure of reliability that is applied to evaluate the internal consistency of multiple rating scales.

1: Measurement items and descriptive statistics

Constructs	Items	Mean	S.D.	Range
Individualized consideration	I help others develop themselves.	3.24	1.37	1-5
	I let others know how I think they are doing.	3.11	1.36	1-5
	I give personal attention to others who seem to reject.	3.558	1.32	1-5
Inspirational Motivation	I express with a few simple words what we could and should do.	3.06	1.08	1-5
	I provide appealing images about what we can do.	3.76	1.28	1-5
	I help others find meaning in their work.	3.8	1.20	1-5
Charisma and Idealized Influence	I make others feel good to be around me.	3.84	1.17	1-5
	Others have complete faith in me.	3.74	1.25	1-5
	Others are proud to be associated with me.	3.58	1.27	1-5
Intellectual Stimulation	I enable others to think about old problems in new ways.	3.46	1.09	1-5
	I provide others with new ways of looking at puzzling things.	3.20	1.41	1-5
	I get others to rethink ideas that they had never questioned before.	3.38	1.23	1-5
Leadership Self-efficacy	I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.	3.1	0.89	1-4
	If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.	2.5	1.26	1-4
	It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.	2.21	1.11	1-4
	I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.	2.17	1.31	1-4
	Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.	2.38	1.08	1-4
	I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.	3.24	1.08	1-4
	I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.	2.37	1.13	1-4
	When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.	2.35	0.98	1-4
	If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.	2.36	1.21	1-4
	I can usually handle whatever comes my way.	2.85	1.02	1-4

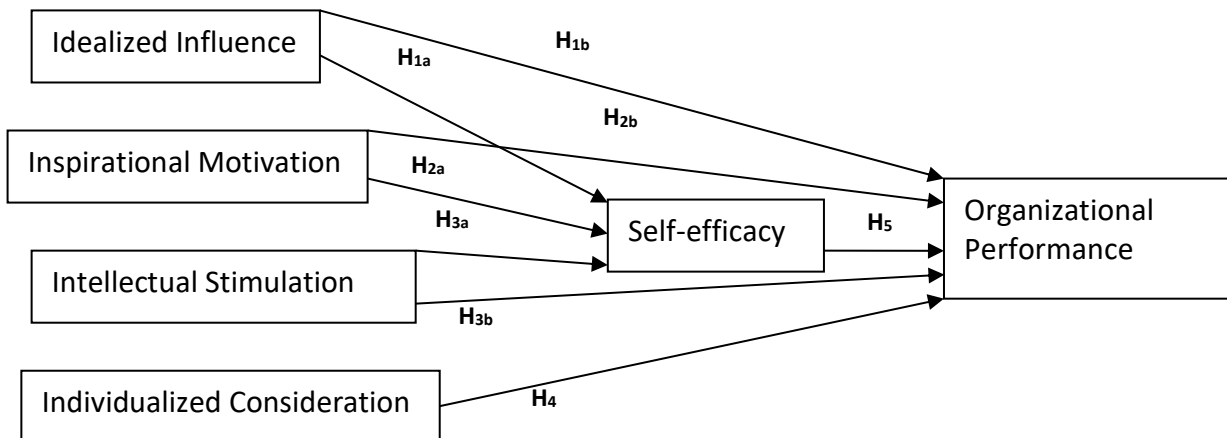


Figure 1: The Conceptual Model of This Research

Rating scales are commonly used in psychology and social sciences to address latent constructs. Values above 0.7 are usually indicated as acceptable reliability. Table 2 shows the Cronbach's alpha of each construct:

The idealized influence construct contains three items, and the Cronbach's alpha is 0.89.

The inspirational motivation construct contains three items, and the Cronbach's alpha is 0.81.

The intellectual stimulation construct contains three items, and the Cronbach's alpha is 0.85.

The individualized consideration construct contains three items, and the Cronbach's alpha is 0.84.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) is usually applied to leadership self-efficacy.¹⁸ The leadership self-efficacy construct included ten items. Cronbach's Alpha value in this section is 0.82. The organizational performance construct used eight items, measuring performance in different dimensions: organizational justice, stress, effectiveness, productivity, teamwork, and job resources.¹⁹ The section measured different aspects of organizational functioning related to how managers evaluate their associates and how they view their organizations. Cronbach's Alpha value in this section was 0.81. All Cronbach's alpha

values above 0.7 indicate that this sample was reliable and has good internal consistency.

In this research, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to measure the reliability and validity. In structural equation modeling (SEM), it is necessary to confirm whether there is good convergent validity and discriminant validity among the latent variables, which are determined mainly by Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). In this study, Composite Reliability (CR) in the measurement model ranged from 0.71 to 0.92, which was above the recommended level of 0.7, and Average Variances Extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.51 to 0.83, which were above the recommended level of 0.5 (see Table 2), indicating good reliability for all constructs.

Moreover, standardized loadings for all items were above 0.7, and Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC) were above 0.5, suggesting recommended convergent validity. In addition, to examine convergent validity, we assessed the model fit on each. All confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) of constructs produced the goodness-of-fit (GOF) indices with the respective recommended levels (see Table 3):

Table 2: Reliability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	Variance Extracted
Idealized Influence	0.89	0.89	0.80
Inspirational Motivation	0.81	0.91	0.83
Intellectual Stimulation	0.85	0.84	0.63
Individualized Consideration	0.84	0.88	0.70
Self-efficacy	0.82	0.92	0.82
Organizational Performance	0.81	0.71	0.51

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of Goodness-of-fit (GOF) indices

Goodness-of-fit Indices	Idealized Influence	Inspirational Motivation	Intellectual Stimulation	Individualized Consideration	Self-efficacy	Organizational Performance
CMIN/DF<3	0.199	0.212	0.87	0.451	1.21	0.81
GFI>0.90	0.999	0.989	0.991	1	0.995	0.981
AGFI>0.90	0.995	0.991	0.981	0.954	0.989	0.995
CFI>0.90	1	0.999	0.978	0.984	0.998	0.994
RMSEA<0.08	0.001	0.021	0.001	0.013	0.04	0.013

Idealized Influence: CMIN/DF=0.199, GFI=0.999, AGFI=0.995, CFI=1, RMSEA=0.001;

Inspirational Motivation: CMIN/DF=0.212, GFI=0.989, AGFI=0.991, CFI=0.999, RMSEA=0.021;

Intellectual Stimulation: CMIN/DF=0.87, GFI=0.991, AGFI=0.981, CFI=0.978, RMSEA=0.001;

Individualized Consideration: CMIN/DF=0.451, GFI=1, AGFI=0.954, CFI=0.984, RMSEA=0.013;

Self-efficacy: CMIN/DF=1.21, GFI=0.995, AGFI=0.989, CFI=0.998, RMSEA=0.04;

Organizational Performance: CMIN/DF=0.81, GFI=0.981, AGFI=0.995, CFI=0.994, RMSEA=0.013.

In summary, the result of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) fulfills the requirements of convergent validity and reliability.²⁰

The result of a conceptual model

The goodness-of-fit (GOF) can be considered an acceptable fit in the original conceptual model. The values of GOF statistics indices are demonstrated as follows: $\chi^2/df = 2.327 < 3.0$; GFI=0.99 > 0.90; AGFI=0.943 > 0.90; CFI=0.999 > 0.90; RMSEA=0.068 < 0.08. Table 4 shows the results for all hypotheses proposed in this study. H_{1a}, H_{2a}, H_{2b}, H_{3a}, H_{3b}, H₄, and H₅ are at the significant level. This means that idealized influence directly affected self-efficacy. Both inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation directly

affected self-efficacy and organizational performance. Individualized consideration directly affected organizational performance. Self-efficacy directly affects organizational performance. However, H_{1b} is not at the significant level (Critical Ratios = 0.247) (see Table 4). Since Hypothesis 1b is non-significant, the path of idealized influence on organizational performance is deleted to produce a modified model (see Figure 2)

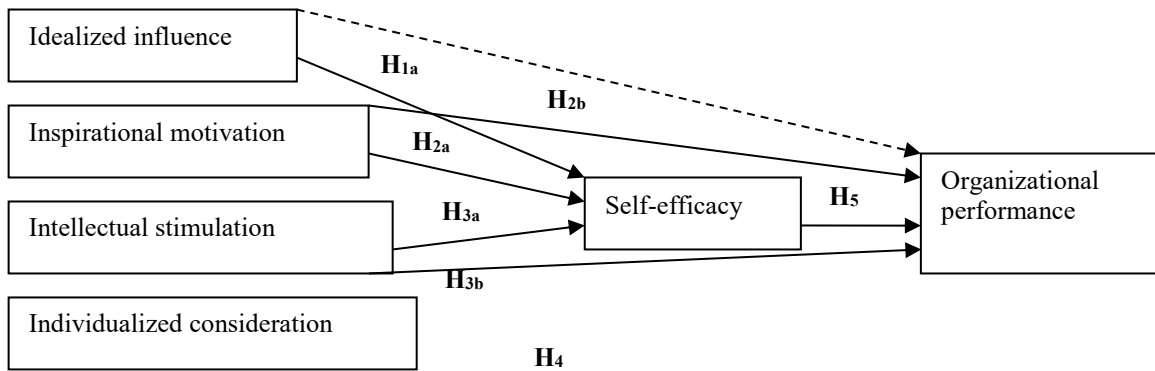
The values of the goodness-of-fit (GOF) indices are described as follows: $\chi^2/df = 1.195 < 3.0$; RMSEA = 0.026 < 0.08; GFI = 0.997 > 0.90; AGFI = 0.971 > 0.90; CFI=1 > 0.90. As shown in Table 5, all of the above GOF statistics indices indicate that the modification model is more compliant than the initial conceptual model. As shown in Table 6, the weights for the direct effect of idealized influence on self-efficacy were 0.412. It represents that the idealized influence has a direct impact on self-efficacy. The weights for the direct effect of inspirational motivation on self-efficacy were 0.279. It represents that inspirational motivation has a direct impact on self-efficacy. The weights for the direct effect of intellectual stimulation on self-efficacy were 0.0139. It means that intellectual stimulation has a direct impact on self-efficacy. However, there is no effect of individualized consideration on self-efficacy.

The weights for the direct effect of inspirational motivation on organizational performance were 0.249.

Table 4: Results of the original conceptual model: Standardized regression weights

H	Path	Original		Modification		Remarks
		Estimate	C.R.	Estimate	C.R.	
H _{1a}	Idealized influence→ Self-efficacy	0.412	7.159*	0.412	7.159*	Supported
H _{1b}	Idealized influence→ Performance	0.029	0.247	deleted	deleted	Unsupported
H _{2a}	Inspirational motivation→ Self-efficacy	0.279	4.704*	0.279	4.704*	Supported
H _{2b}	Inspirational motivation→ Performance	0.261	3.762*	0.249	5.234*	Supported
H _{3a}	Intellectual stimulation→ Self-efficacy	0.139	2.104*	0.139	2.104*	Supported
H _{3b}	Intellectual stimulation→ Performance	0.293	2.644*	0.271	4.013*	Supported
H ₄	Individualized consideration→ Performance	0.210	1.877*	0.266	3.081*	Supported
H ₅	Self-efficacy→ Performance	0.199	4.920*	0.199	4.984*	Supported

Note: Significant at *p<0.05



Note: a. A straight line presents the significance of the path b. The dotted line presents the non-significance of the path

Figure 2: The modification models

Table 5: Comparison of GOF indices of the original conceptual model and the modified model

Goodness-of-fit (GOF)	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI
Recommended Value	≤ 3.0	≤ 0.08	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9	≥ 0.9
Original Conceptual Model	2.327	0.068	0.997	0.943	0.999
Modification Model	1.195	0.026	0.997	0.971	1

Table 6: The effect of variables: Standardized regression weights

		Idealized Influence	Inspirational Motivation	Intellectual Stimulation	Individualized Consideration
Self-efficacy	Direct	0.412	0.279	0.139	N.A.
	Indirect	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
	Total	0.412	0.279	0.139	N.A.
Organizational Performance	Direct	N.A.	0.249	0.271	0.266
	Indirect	0.082	0.055	0.028	N.A.
	Total	0.082	0.304	0.299	0.266

It represents that inspirational motivation has a direct impact on organizational performance. The weights for the direct effect of intellectual stimulation on organizational performance were 0.271. It means that intellectual stimulation has a direct impact on organizational performance. The weights for the direct effect of individualized consideration on organizational performance were 0.266. It represents that individualized consideration has a direct impact on organizational performance. However, there is no effect of idealized influence on organizational performance.

The weights for the indirect effect of idealized influence on organizational performance were 0.082. It represents that the idealized influence has an indirect impact on organizational performance. The weights for the indirect effect of inspirational motivation on organizational performance were 0.055. It means that inspirational motivation has an indirect impact on organizational performance. The weights for the indirect effect of intellectual stimulation on organizational performance were 0.028. It represents that intellectual stimulation has an indirect impact on organizational performance. However, individualized consideration does not affect organizational performance.

The weights for the total effect of idealized influence on organizational performance were 0.082. The weights for the total impact of inspirational motivation on organizational performance were 0.304. The weights for the total effect of intellectual stimulation on organizational performance were 0.299. The weights for the total impact of individualized consideration on organizational performance were 0.266. Self-efficacy served as the mediator between four constructs of transformational leadership and organizational performance

Discussion

This study explores the effects of four transformational leadership factors on leadership self-efficacy and organizational performance for women's career leadership. Based on this research, idealized influence directly affects self-efficacy; inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation directly affect both self-efficacy and organizational

performance; and individualized consideration directly affects organizational performance. In addition, self-efficacy directly affects organizational performance. The results indicate that women leaders who employ the four factors of transformational variables are more inclined to be more potent than those who use lower levels.

These research findings help organization executives consider the effects of transformational leadership behaviors on leadership self-efficacy and organizational performance so that they can develop transformational leadership skills to achieve organizational goals. Leaders can improve self-efficacy with transformational leadership behaviors, which were supported by previous studies.²¹ Leaders offer a vision of future change to inspire subordinates and adopt intellectual stimulation to encourage followers to find new solutions to problems, facilitating subordinates' commitment to high organizational performance.^{22,23}

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that idealized influence directly affects leadership self-efficacy. Both inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation directly affect both self-efficacy and organizational performance. Also, individual consideration has a direct impact on organizational performance, while leadership self-efficacy also exerts a direct influence on organizational performance. The research findings indicate that about 51% of variations in organizational performance are explained by organizational objectives, organizational outcomes, organizational justice, teamwork, job stress, job satisfaction, and job resources. This result indicates that other variables, not included in this research, may influence the organizational performance construct.

Limitations

Because the theory emphasizes the "human" factor in management, the study's subjects include leaders and employees, which will affect the study's "human" factor results. Secondly, the transformational leadership theory will also be different because of the differences in working environment and culture between China and

overseas. Finally, cultural differences in leadership will affect the results of the transformational leadership research, which is likely to have two extreme results. Some companies will still apply the transformational leadership theory, and some will think that the theory cannot be used, and the research results will have variability problems.

Research Implications

The implications of this study have profound theoretical and practical value as follows: The research results reflect that women are highly compatible with the four dimensions of transformational leadership in terms of emotional expression, interpersonal interaction, empathy, and care. Research indicates that women leaders are more effective at enhancing their subordinates' self-efficacy through care and encouragement. The results of this study challenge traditional biases against women's leadership abilities. Companies should strengthen opportunities for the cultivation and promotion of women leaders.

Acknowledgments

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Ethical declarations

The survey questionnaire completion statement explains the purpose of this study and that the data obtained from the questionnaire survey will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. The rules of this study comply with ethical standards.

Authors contribution

The single author, Weng Shih-Kun Liu, conceptualized this study and worked on the literature review, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, and discussion of the findings. Finally, Liu, W. S. K., read and approved the final manuscript.

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