

# Review and Prospect of the Research on Transformational Leadership, Affective Commitment and Their Relationship

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**Abstract:** With the uncertainty of economic development, continuous globalization and the modern environment of intensified competition, practitioners and scholars pay more and more attention to employee commitment, ensuring employees' feelings and subsequent commitments become the research hotspot. Many studies show that leadership style and behavior style will affect the social exchange relationship of employees in the organization, which makes managers begin to explore and improve leadership style to enhance leadership value. Affective commitment is influenced by transformational leadership to a large extent. This study takes transformational leadership, which has a significant effect on affective commitment, as the logical starting point to conduct an in-depth study and analyze the variables that play an intermediary or regulatory role in the relationship between them. Finally, based on the literature review and comments, this study puts forward some suggestions on how to improve transformational leadership in the process of organizational growth and development, break through the traditional cognition of leadership theory and put forward relevant suggestions.

## 1. Introduction

Since "affective commitment" was put forward in the academic research field in the 1970s, scholars at home and abroad have carried out extensive and in-depth discussion on it. In the outcome variables, affective commitment can effectively predict job satisfaction, innovative behavior and organizational citizenship behavior, and it is significantly related to turnover intention and turnover behavior. On the basis of theory, reciprocity theory, psychological condition theory and other theoretical models are widely used. Among the antecedent variables, they can be divided into the antecedent variables related to organization, work and individual, in terms of organizational environment factors, research shows that leadership style, leadership behavior and leader member exchange relationship are often studied by scholars as the antecedent variables of affective commitment. The transformational leadership motivates the subordinates to pay attention to the organizational interests by stimulating the high-level needs of employees and building a trust atmosphere. However, the linear relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment is not stable, and it is easy to be interfered by other factors, based on this, this study will examine the mechanism of the relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment.

## 2. A Review of the Research on Transformational Leadership

### 2.1 Definition of Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) for the first time gave the connotation definition to transformational leadership, he believed that transformational leadership is a process, involving the improvement of maturity and motivation level between leaders and subordinate employees, achieving the goal of self realization,

being approachable to leaders, and focusing on the communication between both sides, the result of this process is the establishment of the relationship between leaders and employees [1].

After the concept was put forward, it was found that the connotation of the concept has not yet formed a unified understanding, but it still has common characteristics: (1) there is a common character of leadership, that is, influence and leadership charm; (2) the core of the definition is focused on the improvement of motivation level of subordinate employees, the care of work life balance, and the encouragement of better development, with the help of personal charm, leaders construct a harmonious atmosphere and influence the behavior of employees; (3) emphasize the communication with subordinates, employees realize the significance of hard work, and then identify with the organization; (4) on the basis of meeting basic needs, inspire employees' higher-level needs, develop employees' potential, and achieve organizational goals.

## **2.2 Structural Dimension of Transformational Leadership**

The transformational leadership structure model was originally proposed by Bass and Avolio, including four-dimensional structure model of charisma, leadership charm, intelligence stimulation and personalized care. Charisma refers to the good vision described by the leader as the internal incentive of employees. Leadership charm represents the charisma of leadership and guides subordinates to the organizational goals. Intelligence stimulation means to encourage employees' innovative thinking ability. Personalized care means that leaders understand the actual work and life of employees [2]. Meng Hui and Song Jiwen (2013) proposed a second-order four factor structure, including influence, vision incentive, intelligence incentive and personalized care [3]. Without exception, the dimensions of transformational leadership are all focused on relationship oriented leadership (promoting collaborative cooperation, model demonstration, and personalized care) and task oriented leadership (vision expression, high expectations, intelligent stimulation).

## **3. A review of the Research on Affective Commitment**

### **3.1 Definition of Affective Commitment**

Affective commitment occurs when employees sign tangible labor contracts with enterprises, and a "psychological contract" is also born, which makes employees have affective attachment to the organization. Mowday & Porter (1979) expressed affective commitment as the individual's affective dependence, support and identification with the organization's decisions and goals [4]. Wang Shengnan et al. (2017) believed that it was the desire of the individual's heart to love the things themselves, was a kind of recognition and appreciation, and had risen to the level of spiritual culture [5].

Although many scholars have defined the concept of affective commitment in different ways, in the final analysis, the connotation of affective commitment is the same. Affective commitment is the relationship between employees and the organization, which is reflected in the recognition of organizational goals, the acceptance of organizational values and the communication with the organization.

### **3.2 Structural Dimension of Affective Commitment**

Mowday & Porter (1979) are the first to divide affective commitment, which includes three dimensions: value commitment, effort commitment and retention commitment, value commitment refers to the acceptance of organizational values by employees, and effort commitment refers to the degree that employees can even contribute to the organization regardless of remuneration, retention commitment refers to the willingness of employees to maintain the membership of the organization [4].

From the perspective of the design and development of the affective commitment measurement scale by scholars at home and abroad, the dimensions of western cultural background division focus on the spirit of sailing in the same boat, while the domestic scale emphasizes the spirit of selfless dedication, which is a strong sense of belonging of individual employees to the organization.

## **4. Research on the Influence of Transformational Leadership on Affective Commitment**

### **4.1 The Direct Influence of Transformational Leadership on Affective Commitment**

Chen Zhizhong (2010) conducted a large sample survey of 480 employees, which proved that transformational leadership and its dimensions have a significant positive impact on affective commitment [6]. Li Ling (2018) selected 2196 primary and secondary school teachers as the survey object, and found that: the intellectual stimulation and vision stimulation of school transformational leadership have a large contribution rate to teachers' affective commitment, and there are some differences in the relationship between the two variables in the cross school location and stage [7].

To sum up, the research on transformational leadership and its dimensions and affective commitment pays less attention to the direct relationship between them, and mostly studies the effect of mediators or moderators between them.

### **4.2 The Indirect Influence of Transformational Leadership on Affective Commitment**

The indirect influence of transformational leadership on affective commitment is mainly realized by mediating and adjusting variables. It can be divided into individual level variables and organizational context factors according to different types. Among them, the individual level variables include psychological empowerment, internal psychological motivation, leadership organization incarnation, emotional intelligence, etc.; organizational context factors include organizational trust, fairness, work characteristics, justice, atmosphere, organizational learning, etc.

#### **(1) Transformational Leadership Influences Affective Commitment through Individual Level Variables**

Li Lei (2012) found that psychological capital plays an intermediary role between transformational leadership and affective commitment, and the psychological capital that plays a role is resilience and self-efficacy [8]. Based on the agency hypothesis, Chen zhixia (2015) proved the moderating effect of leadership organization incarnation in leadership behavior and affective commitment, the root cause of leadership organization incarnation in employees' cognition is that the different treatment of leaders is directly regarded as the concern of organizations for their own contribution and well-being, which determines the social exchange between employees and organizations [9].

#### **(2) Transformational Leadership Influences Affective Commitment through Organizational Context**

Luliang (2013) studies the relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment by using organizational trust and leadership trust as a dual intermediary mechanism [10]. Gillet & Vandenberghe (2014) introduced intermediary variables - work characteristics, including task diversity, work return and decision-making autonomy, with transformational leadership as the antecedent variable and organizational commitment as the outcome variable [11].

### **4.3 Summary**

In general, through literature review, transformational leadership and its dimensions can not only directly affect affective commitment, but also indirectly affect affective commitment through individual level variables (psychological empowerment, internal psychological motivation, leadership organization incarnation, emotional intelligence, etc.) and organizational situational factors (organizational trust, fairness, work characteristics, justice, atmosphere, organizational learning, etc.).

## **5. Research Conclusion and Future Research Direction**

### **5.1 Research Conclusion and Management Enlightenment**

The research on the definition and structure of transformational leadership and affective commitment at home and abroad is quite mature, which enlightens us that we should pay attention to excellent transformational leadership in the initial recruitment and follow-up training, and even develop a relatively complete assessment and evaluation system of transformational leadership.

Secondly, we should pay attention to the application of intermediary and price adjustment variables in the actual operation, and create the corresponding situation in the organization.

## 5.2 Future Research Prospects

More in-depth and systematic research can be considered at the individual, even organizational and team levels, the mediating and regulating variables that play a role between them are put into the same theoretical framework; The relationship between the two is raised to a dynamic perspective to study the specific changes of affective commitment in different dimensions of transformational leadership in the process of employees' transition from an external identity to an internal identity; We can also explore the role of the interaction between intermediary variables in the relationship between them.

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