

TRANSCENDENTAL LEADERSHIP: THE PATH FOR AUTHENTIC LEADERS

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the development of transcendental leadership theory and validation measurement of scale. The focus of this research is to study the constructs of leadership identity, followership, leader/follower relationship, leadership educational process, and organizational context in relation to transcendental leadership. The study will be implemented in a sample of Mexican industries in the private sector, located in the state of Nuevo Leon, Mexico. The survey uses two questionnaires for transcendental leadership in the workplace. In addition, we validate the dimensions of the constructs of the research cause-effect model with qualified experts in the field of leadership, using their feedback to adjust the measurement instruments and survey perspective. Content validity was made through content analysis of extant literature review and content expert item analysis. We established preliminary construct validity and reliability based on the confirmatory factor analysis of pre-test data from the pilot group, and offered further construct validity through cross-validation in another sample. The final transcendental leadership scale showed robust preliminary explicit theoretical grounding, suggesting that the initial conceptualization of the cause-effect model was positively related and its measurement was comprehensive. The implications and contributions of the present research on transcendental leadership are discussed in the concluding section.

Key Words: transcendental leadership, leader identity, followership, effective leadership.

1. Introduction

New ways and approaches in leadership are emerging to face the challenges of our actual human communities and organizations. In this paper, we are proposing that leadership should not continue to be studied as a process or style, but approached as a social philosophy of human relationship.

We argue that, in the past, most researchers have paid little attention to the essence of leadership, which is embedded in our human nature of living and developing with dignity, prosperity, and quality of life. As cited by Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber (2009 p. 422): "Leadership is no longer simply described as an individual characteristic or difference, but rather is depicted in various models as dyadic, shared, relational, strategic, global and a complex social dynamic".

The notion of transcendental leadership has been developed recently by Cardona (2000), as a contribution-based exchange relationship. In this relationship, the leader promotes unity by providing fair extrinsic rewards, appealing to intrinsic motivations of the followers, and developing their transcendent motivation. Later, Sanders, Hopkins & Geroy (2003) proposed, that the transcendental theory of leadership comprises three dimensions of spirituality (consciousness, moral character, and faith) that incorporate the managerial facets of transactional theory and the charismatic aspects of transformational theory to enhance

leadership effectiveness. Then, Liu's (2008) research on Transcendental Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior, recalled that existing leadership and motivation theories, based on the assumptions of a stable environment, certainty, and cognitive rationality, are unable to solve the existential vacuum. So, Liu (2008) founded that it is necessary to recognize the significance of spirituality in the workplace as a new approach to motivate employees effectively and helping organizations to compete and cooperate successfully in the global economy. As suggested by Mitroff & Denton (1999): spirituality is the ultimate competitive advantage of organizations.

Last, Probert & Turnbull-James (2011), proposed that renewing the organization's leadership concept, which comprises all the assumptions an organization has embedded in its culture about leadership, is the most important role of leadership development initiatives. In addition, Hannah, Sumanth, Lester, & Cavarretta (2014), stated that certain unique skills, knowledge, orientations, identities, attributes, and other individual factors promote or enable a leader to act authentically in a transformational role, and so forth. They also believe that it is critical to identify those factors to inform effective leader development.

2. Transcendental Leadership 5D Model

Based on our extensive research of leadership theories and literature, we found that the original concept of transcendental leadership was proposed by Cardona (2000). While Cardona's approach of transcendental leadership is based on follower's intrinsic motivations development, in which their needs are aligned with the needs of the leader, our viewpoint is on the enhancement of individual and organization development, prosperity, and sustainability. Cardona's idea of transcendental leadership implies viewing the transcendental leader as a "servant leader", so this notion only allows to infer the possible implications of this facet for leadership effectiveness. Although he proposes that transcendental leadership incorporates features of transactional and transformational leadership, it is not clearly established what is the relationship between these theories.

Later, Sanders et al. (2003), proposed a conceptual model of transcendental leadership which integrates and builds on existing leadership theories. Specifically, their model displays transactional, transformational, and transcendental theories of leadership as being linked together along a common continuum of locus of control, effectiveness, and spirituality. However, their perspective is unclear on how to relate the different constructs of the three theories and how dependent or mediator variables are related to independent variables, regardless of focusing only on leader effectiveness. In contrast, we are building our transcendental leadership theory on five constructs that generate a positive effect on transcendental leadership, thus creating a process of individual and organizational development, prosperity, and sustainability.

We propose to study the relationship between the constructs of leadership identity, followership, leader/follower relationship, leadership development, and organizational context, and their effects on transcendental leadership.

2.1. Leader Identity

Muir (2014) mentions that identity research sheds light on several issues, which have tremendous impact on our understanding of the leadership process. As Lord & Hall (2005) stated, an individual's self-conception as a leader is an essential part of an outstanding leadership development. They also set three statements for the key nature of this identity creation: a) it gives a structure to integrate the new knowledge of leadership and skills development; b) it becomes a source for a leader to access new developmental opportunities; and c) also becomes a source of personal strength to motivate others.

Per literature, there are two types of self-identity: independent and interdependent. Banaji & Prentice (1994), mention that independent type of self-identity is based on an individual sense of uniqueness, self-sufficiency, or independence from others, and the interdependent self-identity is grounded on the extent an individual defined oneself in relation to others or by becoming part or a member of a social group. Additionally, Luhrmann & Eberl (2007) explored the dynamics of identity construction, and suggested four relevant aspects related to leader identity: motivations, conformity and authenticity, power, and relationships.

By contrast, Wilber (1979) define a very simple process to establish an identity. When someone tries to answer the question: Who am I? A very simple event happens. One set a mental limit that cross all the field of experience, thus what is inside that limit is perceived as myself, and what remains outside is excluded from oneself. By this way, the identity totally depends on the place we establish the limit. Besides, when an individual identifies him or herself, choose mainly one facet of his or her totality which considers more representative of his or her authentic reality. That is call different names: mind, personality, psyche, or ego. This view is connected to Mitroff & Denton (1999b) perspective, in the sense that spirituality is the basic feeling of being integrated by one's complete self, others, and the entire universe.

In conclusion, even there are many different definitions of leader identity, it was found three more relevant dimensions for leader identity development: leader self-concept, authenticity, and spirituality.

2.2. Followership

The concept of followership has been recently an important field of research in leadership literature. Kellerman (2008) mentions that it has been produced an enormous quantity of studies on how to be a good leader, but there are only a minimum literature on how to be a good follower. Organizational members in followership positions may exhibit proactive behavior that do not conform to conventionally docile notions of followership (E Cunha, Rego, Clegg, & Neves, 2013). As said by E Cunha et al. (2013), transcendent followers are those who contribute within and across each of the levels of self, others, and the organization. These kind of followers, who display high competence at all levels will contribute to the enhancement of company sustainability in dynamic environments, as well as generating high level of firm performance.

In line with this notion, Crossman & Crossman (2011) define followership as a leadership complement, proposing that followership is a relational role in which followers

can influence leaders and contribute to organizational goals. In other words, followership is the way in which the traits, attributes, and behaviours of followers have influence on leadership effectiveness, and consequently, high impact on results and organizational performance.

In addition, Singh & Pethe (2003) found that subordinate development could be another dimension of leadership, which needs to be explored in the context of influence effect on leaders, empowerment, counselling, mentoring and inspiring behaviours. This means, that followers development refers to increase subordinate's competence, enhancing their self-worth, and encouraging them to perform beyond expectations. Higher competence not only improves the performance but also amplify the self-image of an individual. In the same way, follower development takes place when the superior is willing to develop subordinates. Moreover, Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich (1985) proposed a social constructionist theory to illustrate the relationship between followership and leadership, arguing that leadership is affected significantly by the way followers build their understanding of the leader in terms of leader's personality, behaviours, and effectiveness.

As a final point, Shamir (2007) suggested that leadership effectiveness is both a product of good followers and good leaders. So, more work needs to be done studying how follower's needs, identities, expectations, values, and attitudes determine leader behaviour; how follower's support and acceptance of the leader affects leader's behaviour, self-efficacy, and self-confidence; and how followership is construct across different fields and cultures.

In summary, we have found that research of followership construct is in its infancy, and it is necessary to examine the dimensions of follower competencies and personal growth patterns, values, and performance motivations.

2.3. Leader/Follower Relationship

As it is illustrated by Gerstner & Day (1997), the central idea of the Leader-Member Exchange theory is that the quality of the relationship between leader and followers alters the impact on the relevant outcomes. Thus, leadership occurs when leaders and followers are capable to develop effective relationships, resulting in mutual and incremental influence (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

In a recent study on the role of spiritual leaders, Rego, E Cunha, & Oliveira (2008) suggest that leaders who promote followers personal development and self-determination, respect their personal inner lives, foster positive interpersonal relationships, and are courageous, open minded, kind, compassionate, loyal and respectful of their followers, stimulate several positive effects. Collaborators become happier, more committed to work, and develop better social exchanges with leaders and increase their sense of self-worth. Findings also indicate that leaders who abuse their power, disrespect personal and inner life of collaborators, instigate bad interpersonal relationships among team members, and are dishonest, cruel, unkind, lazy and discriminative of followers, produce a number of negative consequences among followers and teams. For example: low performance, higher turnover, bad team climate, passivity, retaliation, disobedience, and psychological damage of employees, are negative effects of this kind of leaders.

Leader behaviour is one of the main influences in leadership, even though follower traits are important too. In line with this idea, the personal characteristics of followers can influence the way they experience leader behavior. When followers viewed fair treatment by leaders as more positive, they developed organizational citizenship behaviors (Asgari, Silong, Ahmad, & Samah, 2008). Similarly, Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten (2014) mention that the basic assumption of a leadership process approach is that leadership only occurs through combined acts of leading and following. Therefore, the constructionist approach, studies how individuals engage in following behaviours in order to construct leadership. Additionally, making a break-through between the traditional conception of leadership -based on the leader and its traits- and a new conceptualization of more open leadership, it is suggested that another constructs like followership, organizational context, and leadership educational process, should be integrated.

In Avolio, Bass & Jung's (1999) concept of transformational leadership effectiveness, the leader should: purport to raise the employees level of consciousness about making valuable contributions in their work; promote that followers engage in collective benefit instead of self-interest; inspire and motivate followers to strive beyond their prescribed duties; stimulate employees to look at new ways of solving problems and consider rational solutions; and provide individualized consideration by showing respect, acting as a mentor, and treating employees with dignity.

In conclusion, as we analyzed different perspectives of leadership studies, we found three relevant dimensions concerning the Leader/follower relationship: trust, leader/follower traits, and adopted leadership roles.

2.4. Leadership Educational Process

As suggested by Groves (2007), a formal leadership development program is the systematic effort to plan and improve the competence and quality of leadership in organizations. Leadership development programs have become a priority of the leading companies in the industry. In fact, the speed of changes in the business world, in technology, and in political and social environments, have increased the need for effective leadership development programs (Cacioppe, 1998).

In a meta-analysis conducted by Collins (2001), it was found that in 54 studies from 1984 to 2000, research showed a more systemic approach to leadership development, and 16 other studies had focused organizational performance as an expected outcome of leadership development. Furthermore, it has been shown that leadership development programs are more important to global organizations than traditional ones, due to the proliferation of communication channels, matrix organizational structures, cross functional responsibilities, distance, time, and cultural backgrounds (Friedman, 2000).

Recently, Cumberland, Herd, Alagaraja, & Kerrick (2016) suggest that globalization in the XXI century has become a key issue. Therefore, the evaluation and development of global competencies is a relevant topic of the human resources agenda, including personality aspects, knowledge, skills and behaviours. Even in organizations that adopt a wide range of perspectives, we can find four relevant standpoints: self-awareness development, didactic training, experiential assignments, and total immersion experiences.

Brungardt & Crawford (1986) consider that the leadership educational process involves every form of development to promote, motivate, and expand the knowledge and required mastery, to increase the leadership potential and performance of individuals in leadership positions.

Finally, we can conclude that the leadership educational process has a great impact on leadership effectiveness due to essential factors which include: self-awareness development, assimilation of positive mental models (including cross cultural insights), and key business and leadership competencies.

2.5. Organizational Context

During the last few decades, organizations have recognized the importance of positive organizational context to promote leadership development. A positive climate provides leaders a safe environment to face challenges without fear about honest pitfalls. Therefore, organizations which promote learning cultures will reinforce the value and meaning of failures as a source for positive acumen of a leader's success (Avolio & Hannah, 2009). Following the same line of thought, Bass (1999) refers that leaders who endorse organizational renovation will encourage the emergence of warm organizational cultures that are oriented towards creativity, problem solving, experimentation and risk taking.

Beugré, Acar, & Braun (2006) mention that transformational leadership will emerge as a dominant form of leadership when existing perception of the external atmosphere is volatile and ambiguous. They argue that transformational leadership is not a consequence of leaders attributes, but a response of leaders and organizations when facing an external environment behaviour. External factors such as globalization, strong business competition, and technological change create objective uncertainties and relevant facts which create the need of adaptation in an organization.

On the other hand, Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May (2004) suggest that relevance of meaningful work has become more and more important for organizations, aiming to keep a healthy climate and quality life at work, and better performance of employees. Also, Giacalone & Jurkiewicz (2003) argue that spirituality contributes to organizational performance and generates individual benefits: physical and mental health of employees, personal growth, resilience, self-worth feelings, developing of potential, and stress reduction.

Additionally, Amagoh (2009) argues that formal mentoring is a fundamental component of leadership development programs and produces great benefits to organizations, such as: improvement of individual and organizational effectiveness, career advancement, and organizational development. However, the main focus of mentory has been improving management and little attention has being placed on mentoring for leadership development (Muir, 2014).

In summary, we have found that there is a strong tendency in organizations to generate conditions and positive environments for leadership development, as well as to cultivate leader competencies to establish a work atmosphere where people can improve their performance and quality of work life. The main dimensions which may produce and

contribute to positive organizational context are: mentoring, encouraging organizational values, and creating positive work environment.

3. Transcendental leadership constructs and propositions

In an extensive review on leadership literature, we have found some relevant studies related to our research on transcendental leadership. We concluded from the few empirical studies on the topic that spirituality is a mediator variable in the work place, where according to Liu (2008), spirituality has a positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior, which is positively related to organizational effectiveness.

3.1. Leader Identity

We found two relevant studies about leader identity. The first one investigated the role of leader identity and the motivation to lead, and it showed that emphasis on behavior modeling can be used to develop identity and motivation factors which produce leadership effectiveness (Waldman, Galvin, & Walumbwa, 2012). Findings suggest that behavior modeling is a technique to develop transformational leadership behavior. The second research observed how the power dimension is involved in identity construction and identity deconstruction. Nicholson & Carroll (2013) found evidence to demonstrate how power is displayed among members of a group as well as between members of the group and authority figures. Hence, power use has the potential to influence options, interactions, situations, and meaningful personal discoveries. Therefore, considering the relationship between leader identity and the motivation to lead and leadership effectiveness, we propose that leader identity influences transcendental leadership growth, thus:

Proposition 1: As a leader's identity develops, it increases the possibility to build up transcendental leadership in organizations.

3.2. Followership

In our review of followership research, we found little literature on the topic and mainly qualitative and theoretical studies. This is not surprising due to the novelty of the construct in leadership research. In a recent study, Cunha et al. (2013) proposed that transcendent followership is someone who displays competence in managing relations with self, other constituencies and the organization. They found that followers with a high level of competence in the three domains will contribute to sustain the organization in dynamic environments. Therefore, transcendent followers with high levels of competence in all domains will be associated with high levels of organizational performance compared to followers with any other combination of competences. In another research project, Benson, Hardy, & Eys (2015) used a constructivist approach to investigate how interpretations of followership are observed in different settings where leadership and followership emerge. As a result of their research, they realized that the presence of outsiders, the character of the task, the phase in the decision making process, the appropriateness of the objective, and relational dynamics influenced which follower behaviors were perceived as suitable from the leader's perspective. Therefore:

Proposition 2: When followership emerges, it will support the transcendental leadership effectiveness in organizations.

3.3. Leader/Follower Relationship

Analyzing diverse studies on leader/follower relationship, we found some empirical investigations that shed light on the impact of leader/follower relations in leadership effectiveness. Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa (2009) research established two relevant hypotheses: (a) follower work engagement will be moderated by follower traits, thus the relationship between transformational leadership and follower work engagement will be stronger when followers have more positive qualities; and (b) when leaders observe that follower's positive traits are less than the follower's self-reported characteristics, follower's work engagement will be negative. The results of the experiment concluded that the two hypotheses were confirmed ($\gamma = .31, p < .05$; $\gamma = -.02, p < .01$). Therefore, it is evident that examining follower's traits, followership research, perceived roles, and leader's perception of followers, is relevant in future leadership studies.

In another study, Soane, Butler, & Stanton (2015) theorized that follower personality may influence leadership perceptions and that the effective perceived leadership may affect performance. They used Social Identity Theory, Transformational Leadership, and personality theory to develop their research on leadership effectiveness and performance. Results displayed that transformational leadership was related to leadership effectiveness and performance ($r = .87, p < .001$), and personality influenced perceptions of leadership. The key implication is that leaders should take followers personalities into account, and adapt their leadership style accordingly to create better performance. Consequently:

Proposition 3: As the leader/follower relationship is more valued and recognized, then transcendental leadership in organizations will be further developed.

3.4. Leadership Educational Process

After an extensive review of literature, we were unable to obtain any quantitative investigations, so we selected two qualitative studies to shed light on the positive relation between the leadership educational process and leadership effectiveness. The first study by Hind, Wilson, & Lenssen (2009), explored how organizations can develop leaders who have the necessary competences to ensure sustainability of an organization. Results reveal that, whilst the qualities and skills of responsible leadership can be identified, a further mediating concept to be considered is "reflexive abilities", which is posited to explain their transformation into individual managerial behaviours. In the second one, Baron & Parent (2015) analyzed the process of developing authentic leadership in a training context. The results presented a process starting with an exploration phase, in which participants increased their self-awareness and identified their leadership issues, new behaviors to address those issues, and tried those behaviors to evaluate the outcomes. The results also shown that training practices activated and enabled participants to develop three dimensions of authentic leadership: self-awareness, relational transparency, and balance treatment of information. For that reason:

Proposition 4: When leadership educational process is reinforced in organizations, it will generate practices that improve transcendental leadership effectiveness.

3.5. Organizational Context

After a review of literature in organizational context related to transcendental leadership, we selected two studies that we considered to be more representative of these constructs. The first one was an empirical research by Woolley, Caza, & Levy (2011), which examined how leaders and follower's attributes influence results in follower development and authentic leadership. They investigated how the psychological capital was related to authentic leadership and suggested that positive work environment is a mechanism mediating this relation. They confirmed that positive work environment is a mediator between authentic leadership and psychological capital ($\beta = .83$ & $\rho < .05$). The second study by Hendel & Kagan (2014) analyzed the association between perceived organizational values and organizational commitment in relation to ethnocultural background. They consider that organizational values are the bond between individuals and their organization, and found a significant positive correlation between organizational values and organizational commitment ($r = .25$ & $\rho < .01$). The association between perceived importance of values and organizational commitment, related to demographic profile, modified the effect of organizational values on organizational commitment. For example, in a hospital in Israel, when the individual is male, Muslim, orthodox religion, and lesser academic education, the effect of organizational values on organizational commitment is higher. Hence:

Proposition 5: When the organizational context is positive and supportive, the possibility to build an effective transcendental leadership process will be higher.

3.6. The model Matters

We assume that in leadership improvement and effectiveness, the choice of model concerning the kind of leadership is critical for leadership process development. This is because leadership development needs to be contextualized. There are conditions, knowledge, values, abilities, and individual and organizational traits, which promote effective leadership in specific organizational and cultural contexts, in which followers and leaders engage. In addition, we suggest that depending on the maturity of an organization, certain kinds of leadership approach may be more suitable than the others. We propose a theoretical foundation of leadership based on the existentialist philosophy of Heidegger (1962). Our idea of leadership is based on a context where leaders and followers are in a partnership, and the leader concept is: "a being which helps and let be, that another being may become their full potential of been".

Taking into consideration that the model is based on the phenomenological perspective of the being, we ponder it is a newer way of approaching leadership in organizations. This is because it is not conceptualized as a style, but rather as a philosophy of life and social relations in organizations. This theorization rests on two main ideas of leadership: (a) the leadership philosophy requires focusing on leader identity, followership, and leader/follower relationship; and (b) leadership strategy needs to build on leadership educational process and organizational context. In our proposed model, we hypothesize that the mentioned constructs are positively related to transcendental leadership (Figure 1).

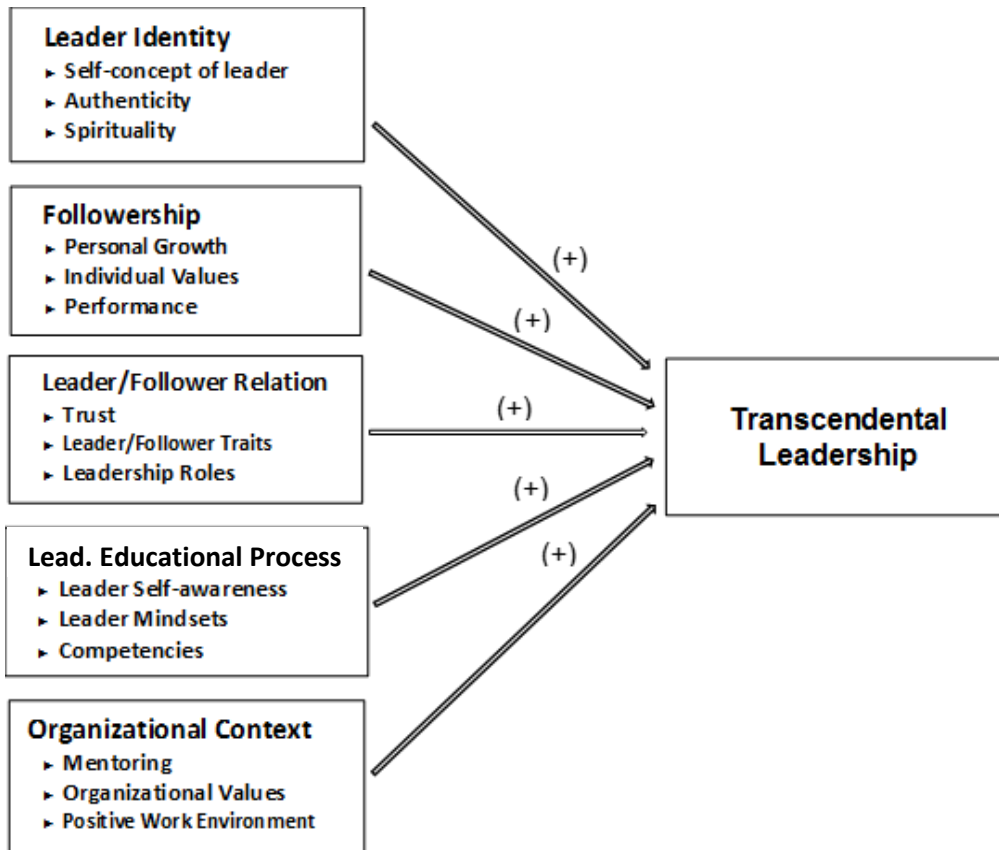


Figure 1. Transcendental Leadership 5D Model

4. The Method

As we mentioned, the focus of this research is to study the constructs of leadership identity, followership, leader/follower relationship, leadership educational process, and organizational context in relation to transcendental leadership.

In this part of the study, we validated the dimensions of the constructs of the research cause-effect model with qualified experts in the field of leadership, using their feedback to adjust the measurement instruments and survey perspective. In addition, we developed two questionnaires for transcendental leadership in the workplace. Then we ran a pilot test to verify preliminary construct validity and reliability based on the confirmatory factor analysis of pre-test data. Results have confirmed a positive validation for the constructs of the transcendental leadership perspective as a philosophy of leadership development to create individual and organizational prosperity, quality of life, and sustainability in the long term.

As this research on transcendental leadership still in progress, we are expecting to make a more robust data analysis in the following phases of the investigation. This will bring new insights on transcendental leadership knowledge and relevant areas for future work.

5. Theoretical Implications

The study has demonstrated that creating a positive work environment in organizations, recognizing employee's potential, and prizing good behaviors and performance, are essential to develop future leaders in all levels.

As mentioned by Boverie & Kroth (2001) in their Model of Occupational Intimacy, when an organization provides a nurturing environment and meaningful work, conditions are set to develop a place where individuals love their job and may feel their work is meaningful. Consequently, this creates opportunities to improve employee's engagement and performance. Additionally, Vardiman, Houghton, & Jinkerson (2006) suggest, that organizational leaders will be better prepared to generate the environment for future leaders to grow when they really understand the contextual factors necessary to develop effective leaders.

Therefore, as transcendental leadership is cultivated in organizations, it is expected that individual and organizational prosperity may increase, as well as improvement of quality life at work and organization sustainability in the long term.

Another major strength of this research is its methodological rigor. Special attention has been placed to different perspectives of leadership and leadership development, so the conceptualization and operational definition of transcendental leadership has explicit theoretical grounding. Also, the items for the scale were developed based on existing literature attributed to dimensions of leadership and validated with experts in the field of leadership.

6. Concluding remarks

After an extensive review of literature on leadership development and effectiveness in organizations, we observe great opportunities of advancement in the topic of effective leadership and transcendental leadership. As pointed out by Sanders et al. (2003): transcendental leadership goes beyond a simple exchange of performance and economics because its purpose is to inspire individuals to develop an internal locus of control and a more focused spiritual orientation.

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