

Abstract

Over the years, examining leadership and the traits required to be a good leader has been an important topic for researchers. This paper aims to clarify transformational leadership and listening as a required skill for good transformational leaders. Instead of being treated as a single topic, it discusses leadership as a phenomenon, listening as a trait, and the importance of listening. Given these parallels and the ability to listen to facilitate an awareness of and responsiveness toward individual needs in alignment with the individualized consideration component of transformational leadership, it makes sense to examine whether listening plays a role within transformational leadership. Very little is written about listening in its role within transformational leadership. This paper proposes to bridge that gap by reviewing the literature regarding listening and leadership. Using episodic listening as a theoretical lens, we contend that a basis of effective transformational leadership is active listening skills to enhance follower/leader connections. This review is intended to be generally applicable in other contexts.

Key Words: Transformational leadership, listening, leadership traits.

Introduction

Transformational leadership theory suggests that leaders can inspire commitment toward collective goals by expanding employees' interests and awareness to align with a larger shared vision, all while demonstrating consideration for individual needs. This type of approach is particularly important when trying to generate commitment to organizational change, where resistance and a lack of buy-in often thwart success. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis by Peng et al. (2021) suggests that transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of commitment to, openness to, and readiness for change, and lower levels of cynicism and resistance toward change. Like transformational leadership but situated primarily at the dyadic level, listening is also theorized to facilitate cooperation and openness to change while allowing an individual to relax their defenses (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

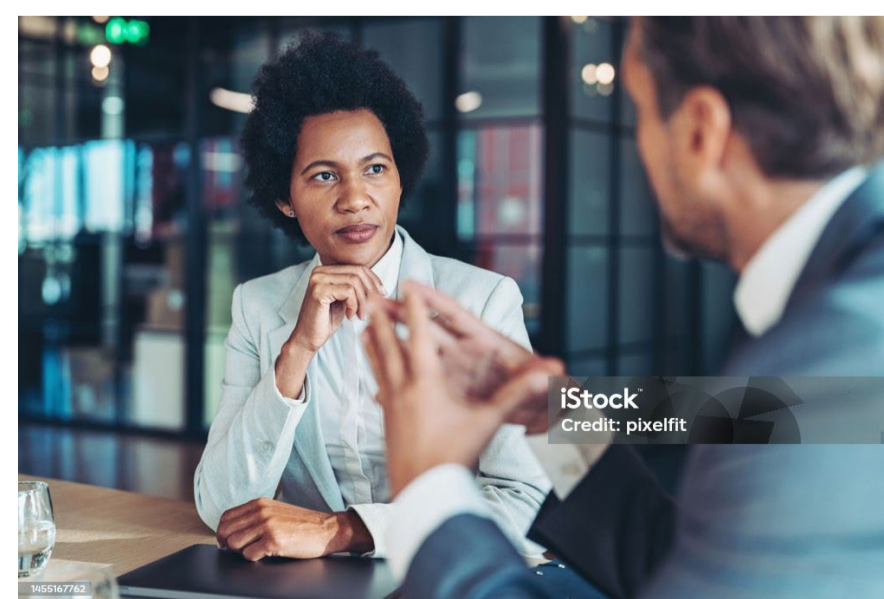
Methods

- Systematic literature review.
- Including date (chronological scope), journal, location (geographic scope), methodology, sample population, sample size, variables, theoretical basis, key findings, and limitations.
- Choosing two databases for academic articles – EBSCOHost (Academic Search Complete) and Web of Science.
- The search terms were 'transformational leadership' and 'listening using peer-reviewed' to limit the search to academic articles. We used 'abstract' to limit the search under the belief that if the terms appeared in the abstract, they were key components of the article.

Key Findings

The importance of listening to employees during organizational change can be thought of from four different viewpoints.

- The first is from an informational perspective: information from all stakeholders is essential to get change right and to get people on board. Employee voice can thus be valuable in organizational change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Gray et al., 2012), yet it also involves risk from an employee perspective, resulting in employees staying silent about important issues (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Listening should increase employees' willingness to speak up because it heightens a sense of psychological safety (Castro et al., 2016).
- The second view is from a motivational perspective. The underlying idea is that employees will be more engaged and autonomously motivated when their basic psychological needs are met, which can be facilitated through leader listening (Van Quaquebeke & Felps 2018). Autonomous motivation has been identified as an essential mediator of transformational leadership's impact on optimal job functioning (Fernet et al., 2015).
- The third view is the cognitive perspective. Employees and leaders may be more open to change when they can explore their thoughts and feelings about it (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).
- Finally, the influence of listening on follower/employee behaviour can also be thought of from a change-related uncertainty perspective. Research by Kriz, Jolly and Shoss (2021) conducted in a context of massive organizational change indicates that an increase in active listening from leaders predicts reduced anxieties relating to the change (namely, job insecurity) via increased perceived control. In this way, listening may foster employee adaptability in dynamic environments where change is widespread.



Conclusions

In Conclusion, findings have discovered that the importance of leadership qualities like listening cannot be underestimated while measuring the success of an organization. Like transformational leadership but situated primarily at the dyadic level, listening is also theorized to facilitate cooperation and openness to change while allowing individuals to relax their defences (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Therefore, in periods of crisis where dramatic change is required, listening encourages clarity of task, purpose, and attachment amongst those involved. From a leadership perspective, transformational leaders strive to create a vision that followers will identify with.

References

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