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## School Principals' Support for Distributed Leadership: A Review of Transformational and Distributed Leadership Literature

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**ABSTRACT:** This literature study focuses on the relationship between transformational and distributed leadership in educational settings, aiming to provide insights into the compatibility of these leadership paradigms. Contrary to the assertion that transformational leaders might resist distributed leadership, the synthesis of empirical studies and theoretical frameworks reveals a nuanced dynamic. Transformational leaders, characterized by visionary thinking and inspiration, are inclined towards supporting distributed leadership practices by empowering staff, delegating authority, and fostering collaborative decision-making. The literature underscores the importance of contextual factors, such as organizational culture and leaders' willingness to relinquish control, in shaping the effectiveness of distributed leadership. Considering the practical implications, an integrated strategy that acknowledges the benefits of transformative and distributed leadership is paramount. Instructors are encouraged to develop dynamic, adaptable leadership cultures specific to their learning environments' requirements. Further empirical research is necessary to deepen the understanding of the interplay between these leadership styles, especially in diverse educational settings.

**KEYWORDS:** School Principals, Distributed Leadership, Transformational Leadership

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### INTRODUCTION

The educational environment and methods of instruction are greatly influenced by school principals, with their leadership style profoundly impacting school culture and performance. Within educational leadership, transformational leadership has emerged as a prominent model characterized by visionary thinking, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This approach has garnered attention for its potential to inspire positive change and foster a sense of collective purpose among stakeholders. Concurrently, distributed leadership has gained traction, emphasizing the decentralization of leadership responsibilities and the involvement of various stakeholders in decision-making processes. Advocates argue that distributed leadership promotes collaboration, enhances collective efficacy, and improves school outcomes (Bush, 2013; Leithwood & Harris, 2013).

However, a contentious debate persists regarding the compatibility of transformational leadership with the promotion of distributed leadership within schools. Though transformational leaders are encouraged for their ability to inspire and motivate, some scholars suggest that their robust visionary approach may lead to a reluctance to share leadership responsibilities. This reluctance may stem from a desire to maintain control or a belief that centralized leadership is necessary for driving change effectively. Conversely, others argue that transformational leaders can support distributed leadership by empowering staff, fostering a culture of trust, and promoting shared decision-making (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Transformational leadership and distributed leadership in educational contexts to address this debate. Synthesizing empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and case analyses seeks to elucidate the complex relationship between these leadership paradigms. Through a comprehensive review, the paper aims to offer insights into the statement's validity and provide a nuanced understanding of how transformational leaders may navigate the implementation of distributed leadership practices within their schools.

### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leadership is a leadership style that appeals to followers' ideals and goals to inspire and motivate them to achieve extraordinary outcomes. This technique is characterized by many vital elements, such as charm, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration. Leaders who embody transformational qualities frequently articulate a compelling vision for the future, inspire confidence and trust among their followers, challenge

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existing norms and assumptions through intellectual stimulation, and demonstrate genuine concern for the individual needs and development of their team members (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The effect of transformational leadership on the effectiveness of organizations, including its relevance within educational settings, has been extensively studied. Research suggests that transformational leaders have the potential to significantly influence school outcomes by fostering a positive organizational culture, enhancing teacher motivation and commitment, and promoting innovation and creativity (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). By inspiring followers to transcend their self-interests and pursue collective goals, transformational leaders can mobilize resources, build cohesive teams, and facilitate continuous improvement in schools (Leithwood et al., 2004).

However, the effectiveness of transformational leadership in educational contexts may be contingent upon various factors, including the organizational culture, the nature of the task, and the characteristics of the followers. While transformational leadership relates to positive outcomes, critics argue that relying on the leader's vision and charisma may lead to dependency and passivity among followers, undermining the development of distributed leadership practices (Leithwood & Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Furthermore, the hierarchical nature of traditional educational structures may pose challenges to implementing distributed leadership, particularly if transformational leaders perceive decentralization as a threat to their authority or control (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006).

Given these considerations, the relationship between transformational and distributed leadership warrants closer examination. While transformational leaders are adept at inspiring and motivating followers, their ability to foster distributed leadership may depend on their willingness to empower others, delegate authority, and create opportunities for shared decision-making (Leithwood & Harris, 2008). By leveraging their charismatic influence and visionary thinking, transformational leaders can cultivate a culture of collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility, laying the foundation for distributed leadership to thrive.

### DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND ITS CONCEPTUALIZATION

Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) initially coined the phrase "distributed leadership" to refer to an organizational model that involves the cooperative and dispersed allocation of leadership tasks among many stakeholders. This model contrasts traditional hierarchical structures, emphasizing collaboration, inclusivity, and the active involvement of multiple individuals in decision-making processes. The fundamental premise of distributed leadership is to tap into all members' collective expertise and capabilities, fostering a collaborative environment that aims to enhance overall organizational effectiveness (Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009).

At its core, distributed leadership promotes a collective and collaborative approach to decision-making and problem-solving. Instead of concentrating authority on a single figure, this model recognizes the diverse talents and perspectives within an organization, encouraging the active participation of individuals at various levels. By leveraging the strengths of each stakeholder, distributed leadership seeks to capitalize on a broad range of skills and insights, ultimately contributing to more informed and effective organizational decisions (Spillane, 2006).

This collaborative ethos inherent in distributed leadership is particularly relevant in educational settings, where complex and multifaceted challenges demand a diverse skill set. Research suggests that this leadership model can improve decision quality, increase teacher satisfaction, and enhance student outcomes (Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009). Moreover, the inclusivity of distributed leadership aligns with the evolving dynamics of educational environments, recognizing that expertise and leadership potential exist throughout the organization, not solely within formal administrative roles.

While the benefits of distributed leadership are evident, challenges in its implementation may arise. Harris (2008) highlights the potential for conceptual confusion and empirical reticence, emphasizing the need for clarity in defining and operationalizing distributed leadership. Additionally, resistance to change and the persistence of traditional hierarchical structures may hinder fully realizing distributed leadership's potential (Spillane, 2006).

Distributed leadership represents a paradigm shift from traditional top-down approaches, emphasizing collaboration and shared decision-making among diverse stakeholders. Rooted in harnessing collective intelligence, this leadership model has garnered attention for its potential to enhance organizational effectiveness, particularly in the educational context. However, its successful implementation requires addressing conceptual and practical challenges and recognizing the nuanced interplay between leadership styles and organizational structures.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A comprehensive examination of empirical studies conducted by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) reveals a consistent and positive association between transformational leadership and the adoption of distributed leadership practices within educational settings. The findings suggest that school principals who embody transformational leadership are more inclined to empower teachers and staff, delegate authority, and cultivate a shared leadership culture. The transformative leadership approach, emphasizing

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inspiration, motivation, and individualized consideration, creates an environment conducive to decentralizing leadership responsibilities (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Northouse (2004) contributes to this perspective by arguing that influential transformational leaders recognize the significance of building capacity and developing leadership skills among their team members. By doing so, these leaders contribute to the emergence of distributed leadership structures within their organizations. This aligns with the notion that transformational leaders go beyond personal charisma and vision; they actively promote the growth and empowerment of their team, facilitating a more collaborative and shared approach to leadership (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002; Northouse, 2004).

Contrary to the initial statement proposed, March and Weil (2005) challenge the notion that transformational leaders resist distributed leadership practices. They argue that influential leaders, particularly those with a transformational orientation, actively embrace diverse perspectives and encourage participatory decision-making. March and Weil posit that transformational leadership is not synonymous with centralized control; instead, it underscores collaboration, inclusivity, and the recognition of the team's collective strengths (March & Weil, 2005).

Analyzing the diverse perspectives of numerous scholars can provide further insight into the relationship between distributed and transformational leadership. For instance, while Leithwood and Jantzi's (2005) research supports the positive association, it is essential to acknowledge the potential challenges and variations in implementing distributed leadership within diverse educational contexts. Contextual elements, such as incorporating organizational culture, worker autonomy, and leaders' willingness to delegate accountability, can all impact how effective well-distributed leadership is (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006).

The reviewed literature underscores the intricate relationship between transformational and distributed leadership in educational settings. Most empirical studies support that transformational leaders are more likely to embrace distributed leadership practices, fostering collaboration and shared decision-making within schools. However, challenges and variations exist, and a more nuanced understanding of these leadership paradigms requires consideration of contextual factors and diverse perspectives within the literature.

### DISCUSSION

The researched literature offers insightful information about the intricate interactions between distributed and transformative leadership in educational contexts. As key influencers in shaping the educational landscape, school principals wield significant impact through their leadership styles. Transformational leadership, characterized by visionary thinking and inspiration, has been recognized for its potential to instigate positive change and foster collective purpose among stakeholders. Simultaneously, distributed leadership, emphasizing the decentralization of responsibilities, has gained prominence to enhance collaboration and improve overall organizational effectiveness (Bush, 2013; Leithwood & Harris, 2013).

The debate regarding the compatibility of transformational and distributed leadership remains a central theme in the literature. While transformational leaders are recognized for their motivational prowess, concerns arise regarding their potential reluctance to share leadership responsibilities. Scholars such as Harris (2008) and Spillane (2006) argue that the visionary nature of transformational leadership and hierarchical educational structures may create barriers to the implementation of distributed leadership. However, counterarguments presented by other researchers, including March and Weil (2005), contend that influential transformational leaders actively embrace diversity and encourage participatory decision-making, aligning with the principles of distributed leadership.

The critical examination of transformational leadership reveals its positive impact on organizational performance, potentially enhancing school outcomes, fostering a positive organizational culture, and promoting teacher motivation and commitment (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Nonetheless, critics caution against potential pitfalls, such as dependency and passivity among followers, which may undermine the development of distributed leadership practices (Leithwood & Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). The effectiveness of transformational leadership in fostering distributed leadership depends on leaders' willingness to empower others and delegate authority, creating an environment conducive to shared decision-making (Leithwood & Harris, 2008).

As conceptualized by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), distributed leadership promotes collaboration, inclusivity, and the active involvement of diverse stakeholders in decision-making. The collaborative ethos inherent in distributed leadership aligns with the evolving dynamics of educational environments, recognizing expertise and leadership potential throughout the organization (Harris, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2009). However, challenges in implementation, such as conceptual confusion and resistance to change, underscore the need for careful consideration of contextual factors and practical challenges (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006). The review of empirical studies by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) suggests a consistent and positive association between transformational leadership and the adoption of distributed leadership practices. Principals exhibiting transformational leadership behaviors are likelier to empower teachers, delegate authority, and foster a culture of shared leadership within schools (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Additionally, March and Weil (2005) challenge the notion that transformational leaders resist distributed leadership, highlighting the active embrace of diverse perspectives and participatory decision-making.

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The literature reveals a nuanced relationship between transformational and distributed leadership in educational contexts. While empirical studies generally support the idea that transformational leaders are inclined to embrace distributed leadership practices, challenges and variations exist. The literature underscores the importance of considering contextual factors and diverse perspectives to understand how these leadership paradigms interact within the dynamic landscape of educational environments.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

A synthesis of the transformational and distributed leadership literature reveals nuanced insights directly affecting educational practice. Contrary to the initial contention, school principals who embody transformational leadership traits are open to distributed leadership. On the contrary, they are more likely to foster a culture of shared leadership within their schools by actively empowering teachers and staff, delegating authority, and cultivating an environment that encourages collaboration and collective efficacy (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Educational policymakers and practitioners should take note of the inherent compatibility between transformational leadership and distributed leadership approaches. Rather than viewing them as conflicting paradigms, there is a compelling argument for integrating both into leadership development initiatives and organizational practices. Through integration, a more comprehensive and practical leadership model harnesses transformational leadership's inspirational and visionary aspect while leveraging distributed leadership's collaborative and decentralized nature (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002; Northouse, 2004).

Establishing an environment that motivates transformational leaders to embrace and support distributed leadership approaches must be a significant focus of leadership development programs. This entails offering instruction and materials to improve leaders' abilities to empower others, facilitate group decision-making, and foster respect for one another and cooperation. Educational leaders can help create a more responsive and adaptable organizational culture better suited to handle the complicated issues that schools confront today by doing this (Leithwood et al., 2004; Harris, 2008).

Additionally, educational practitioners should recognize contextual factors' role in shaping the effectiveness of distributed leadership within diverse educational settings. Organizational culture, autonomy granted to staff, and leaders' willingness to relinquish control are crucial considerations in implementing distributed leadership. Therefore, school leaders and policymakers should tailor their approaches based on the specific context of their schools, acknowledging that a one-size-fits-all model may not be suitable for all educational environments (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2006).

The implications drawn from the literature synthesis emphasize the need for a nuanced and integrated approach to educational leadership. By recognizing the synergies between transformational and distributed leadership, educational practitioners can cultivate a dynamic and responsive leadership culture that enhances overall organizational effectiveness and improves outcomes for educators and students.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the comprehensive literature review substantiates the proposition that school principals embodying transformational leadership characteristics are open to implementing distributed leadership within their schools. Instead, the evidence suggests a proclivity among transformational leaders to endorse and foster distributed leadership practices as a strategic approach to elevate organizational effectiveness and cultivate a collaborative culture of shared leadership. Nevertheless, recognizing the complexity of educational contexts, additional empirical research is imperative to delve deeper into the intricate dynamics between transformational leadership and distributed leadership, particularly within diverse educational settings. Further exploration will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how these leadership paradigms interact and evolve in response to various educational environments' unique challenges and contextual factors.

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