

Advisor Transformational Leadership and Its Impact on Advisees: A Conceptual Analysis

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Academic advising is an integral part of the higher education domain. Advisors play an important role in collegiate life by establishing a meaningful connection between the students and the college. Despite their important role in student development, limited research exists that has explored advisor identity as leaders. Thus, the primary purpose of this paper is to explore advisor leadership and its impact on students. More specifically, we use transformational leadership in the advising context to develop a conceptual model of advisor leadership and its outcomes on students.

Keywords: transformational leadership, academic advisor, students

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing business environment, many companies are modifying their structures to utilize a nimble and flexible approach instead of highly bureaucratic top-down structures. Leaders play a vital role in making a company more responsive to ever-changing business needs by empowering employees at multiple levels within the company (Özaralli, 2003; Pradhan, Panda, & Jena, 2017). Thus, effective leaders are required at every level in the organization instead of being restricted to the typical "C-suite". The phenomenon of leadership has intrigued researchers and practitioners alike for several decades (Brown, Brown, & Nandedkar, 2019) thereby giving rise to a number of leadership models in the mainstream organizational behavior literature (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Greenleaf, 1979; George, & Sims, 2007; Houghton, & Neck, 2002).

One of the most popular and extensively studied leadership models is transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders are dynamic and goal-oriented; they look for new opportunities and challenge the status quo (Dumdum et al., 2013) to promote innovation in the organization (Paulsen, Callan, Ayoko, & Saunders, 2013). The impact of transformational leadership has not only been investigated on a number of work outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, organizational development, organizational justice, task performance, and organizational

citizenship behaviors (e.g. Asgari, Silong, Ahmad, & Samah, 2008; Masood, Dani, Burns, Backhouse, 2006; Khalili, 2017; Eberly, Bluhm, Guarana, Avolio, & Hannah, 2017; Puni, Mohammed, & Asamoah, 2018; Keskes, Sallan, Simo, & Fernandez, 2018), but also in a variety of contexts: banking, sports, hospitality, military, and higher education (e.g. Bushra, Ahmad, & Naveed, 2011; Wang, Tsai, & Tsai, 2014; Hardy, Arthur, Jones, Shariff, Munnoch, Isaacs, & Allsopp, 2010; Zacher & Johnson, 2015; Fischer, 2016; Smith, Young, Figgins, & Arthur, 2017).

In recent years, there has been a surge of studies exploring transformational leadership in higher education (e.g. Ruiz, 2019; Brown, Brown, & Nandedkar, 2019; Abbasi, & Zamani-Miandashti, 2013; Lidders, & Meijers, 2017; Farid, Davaji, & Barani, 2016; Pongpearchan, 2016 etc). Most studies have focused on transformational leadership of faculty (Treslan, 2006; Pounder, 2008; Harvey, Royal, & Stout, 2003; Bolkon & Goodboy, 2011; Balwant, 2016; Sims, Carter, & Brown, 2019) and administrative positions (Sadeghi & Pihie, 2012; Basham, 2012; Al-husseini & Elbeltagi, 2016; Lo, Ramayah, & De Run, 2010; Mir & Abbasi, 2012; Jones & Rudd, 2008). Whether it is faculty who regularly interact with students or administrators who manage the university operations, the institutional goal today is increasing student retention (Miller, 2017). A planned effort to improve this metric is a collective process that extends beyond the contribution of faculty or administrators and includes other stakeholders such as student advisors (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013). Despite the surge of studies on transformational leadership, little has been explored on advisor transformational leadership and its impact on students (Paul, Smith, & Dochney, 2012; Ohrbalo, 2018). This is particularly important because of the vital role advisors play in the student retention (Drake, 2011).

Advising has been a fixture on the higher education scene since colleges were first established in colonial America (Gordon et al., 2008). Advising can enhance student experiences by helping them set their professional and personal goals, by encouraging them to participate in co-curricular activities, and by making them aware of professional development opportunities. (Young-Jones et al. 2013). Advisors can establish a meaningful connection between the student and the college (Morris & Miller, 2007), and their role is a complex one, which involves coaching, teaching, college policy interpretation, advocacy etc. (McClellan & Moser, 2011). Moreover, advisors play a key role in helping students through many transitions through their college journeys and prepare them for the real-world through sound academic and social advisement while modeling professional ethics. Academic advisors should “work with students to enable them to be confident and assertive in their own abilities to learn, generate, and apply new knowledge and to empower them to embrace their own knowing, learning, thinking, and decision making” (White, 2015, p. 272). Clearly, the advisor’s responsibility includes leading students in the appropriate direction through their college career (McClellan, 2007).

To this end, the main purpose of this manuscript is to conceptualize the transformational leadership of an advisor and its impact on student outcomes. The rest of the manuscript is organized as follows: After presenting related works from the literature, we develop the propositions for the study and present the conceptual framework, which is followed by the discussion. At the end, we discuss implications of the framework and provide conclusion of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Originally introduced by Burns (1978), transformational leadership theory has been associated with bringing radical changes in the work environment by addressing follower needs for development and achievement (Conger, 1999). Transformational leaders have been depicted in the literature as visionary, empowering, social, passionate, and innovative (Hackman & Johnson, 2004). Bass (1985), conceptualized transformational leadership behaviors into separate dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

Bass (1999) emphasized idealized influence as a leader's ability to not only effectively communicate the vision but also to motivate followers to be involved in the vision. These behaviors are attributed with high levels of trust (Bass, 1985), strong emotions and identification with the leader (Yukl, 2006). The

behaviors are also associated with charisma, which in turn is attributed with being enthusiastic about the work, being respected, and emphasizing the importance of mission to followers (Banerji & Krishnan, 2000).

Inspirational motivation is about challenging followers while reinforcing the importance of collective effort towards shared goals (Bass, 1999). It is perceived as a leader's capability to articulate the vision in a way that stimulates followers' interest to exert effort to fulfill the vision (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). It incorporates creative behaviors that can make vision appealing and results in an intensified effort towards vision accomplishment by followers.

Avolio (1999) described intellectual stimulation as supporting followers in challenging the status quo and becoming change agents. It involves encouraging followers to question leaders' assumptions and group processes and to be creative (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Brown and Posner (2001) recognized intellectual stimulation as an integral part of organizational learning and change in that it connects with followers' need for achievement and growth in a way that followers find appealing.

Individualized consideration behaviors are characterized by showing support, encouragement, and coaching to followers (Yukl, 2006). The coaching and mentoring given to each follower is specific to their individual development needs and is used as a platform to transform the follower into a leader over the long term (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Bass, 2000). Barnett, McCormick, & Connors (2001) emphasize that individualized consideration occurs when leaders develop strong interpersonal relationships with followers. The nature of this relationship enables the leader to personalize leadership to followers and set goals that resonate with unique characteristics of the followers.

Transformational Leadership in Higher Education

Transformational leadership and its outcomes have been studied in higher education for more than a decade. A number of studies have explored transformational leadership of instructors and its influence on students. For instance, Harvey, Royal and Stout (2003) investigated the impact of instructor's transformational leadership on university students' outcomes. More specially, they examined the impact of charisma, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration behaviors on student outcomes in a classroom context, and the results indicated that charisma and intellectual stimulation had a strong relationship with respect for the instructor, satisfaction with an instructor, and trust in an instructor. In addition, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation were related to student involvement in class. Also, Bolkan and Goodboy (2009) utilized a sample of 165 college students to examine the impact of transformational leadership on student learning outcomes, student participation, and student perceptions of instructor credibility. The study reported that transformational leadership dimensions (charisma, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation) were strongly related to cognitive learning, affective learning, state motivation, communication satisfaction, and student perceptions of instructor credibility and they were moderately related to student participation.

In a similar vein, Nolan and Richard (2014) surveyed 275 college students to assess the impact of teachers' transformational leadership on student state motivation and learning and found a strong positive relationship between the transformational leadership and outcome variables. In addition, Ojode, Walumbwa, and Kuchinke (1999) found that instructor's transformational leadership had a significant influence on a student's willingness to put extra effort in the course, perceptions of instructor's effectiveness, and their satisfaction with the instructor.

The impact of transformational leadership has also been explored outside the traditional settings and expanded into web-based and international context (Harrison, 2011; Daniels & Goodboy, 2014). For example, Bogler, Caspi, and Roccas, (2013) demonstrated that the transformational leadership style of the instructor was positively related to student satisfaction in a web-based instructional format. The findings related to student satisfaction were echoed in an international setting when Hassan (2013) surveyed 250 full-time college students in Malaysia and found that three dimensions of transformational leadership: inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation were strongly correlated to student satisfaction. In addition, utilizing a sample of British students, Balwant, Birdi, Stephan, & Topakas (2019) reported the positive impact of an instructor's transformational leadership on student

academic performance. The study emphasized that transformational leadership impacted academic performance via student engagement as the mediator.

Apart from the instructors, the transformational leadership style of academic administrators has also been of interest to scholars. For instance, the results of a study that sought to explore the major issues that confront college presidents and their transformational leadership practices, show that a university president's competency in knowledge, leadership skills, and technical expertise is necessary to ensure the successful completion of a transformational effort. In addition, establishing an environment of excellence in the performance of presidential duties was found to inspire trust in leadership as well as energize the complete organization (Basham, 2012). In another study that was conducted by the Institute for Capacity, the UNCF's Exemplary Transformational Leadership Presidential Survey was administered online to 38 presidents of the private HBCUs in the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) network. Respondents were asked to provide their personal definitions of transformational leadership and share their views about what it takes to be a transformational leader among other things. Results showed that a majority of the UNCF presidents surveyed believe that the characteristics needed to effectively lead private HBCUs were embodied in the transformational leadership style. In particular, they agreed that HBCU presidents must be motivational, visionary, risk takers, mission-focused, excellent communicators, courageous and adaptive, and they must have integrity and respect for employees (Myrick-Harris, 2014).

In 2013, the Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream investigated the qualities of presidents who, at the time of leading community colleges, achieved high and improving levels of student success. It was reported that successful presidents had five attributes identified as particularly important among transformational leaders: Deep commitment to student access and success, willingness to undertake significant risks to advance student success, ability to create lasting change within the college, capacity to build strong external partnerships aligned to student success goals, and ability to raise and allocate resources in ways aligned to student success goals (Aspen Institute, 2017).

In addition to presidents, deans play an important leadership role in a university. They are often in the middle leadership positions between the provost and the college faculty and staff. They ensure that faculty in their colleges are working to fulfil the University missions in terms of instruction and research. Deans bring experience and knowledge and many years of academic leadership to their institutions (Gmelch & Miskin, 1995). Many studies have found that university deans always manifest transformational leadership behaviors to inspire, to stimulate intellectually and to motivate faculty, staff and students (Jones & Ruud, 2008; Al-Mansoori & Koç 2019; Hilosky, & Watwood, 1997). As leaders, academic deans have resources that can be used to guide and direct the work of the faculty. Moreover, by utilizing the transformational leadership model, deans can do better by influencing decision-making, shaping a curriculum, and playing a major role in the university system. Deans, as transformational leaders, can also act as change agents to transform the areas of operation from its current state to the ideal one (Huffman-Joley, 1992; Pence, 2013). Academic deans are visionaries who have the ability to contribute to the transformation of their university. As transformational leaders, deans are often responsible for supporting a professional environment that encourages excellence in teaching, research and program development and active collaboration across the university (Land, 2003). In a cross-cultural study that utilized a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to assess leadership style in two engineering colleges (one in a public university in the United States and the other in an International Branch Campus in Qatar) it was shown that deans exhibited different ranges of transformational leadership styles which correlated with followers' satisfaction with the leader and the system (Al-Mansoori & Koc, 2019). In a similar study, Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly and Beyer, (1990) investigated how chairs can improve the functioning of their departments and recommended the use of five leadership strategies which included collective department vision, developing faculty ownership of the vision, initiating changes slowly, allocating resources of time, instruction, and assignments to encourage vision, and monitoring the progress towards vision achievement. In the study, these were said to be closely related to transformational leadership.

Another example of a key contributor to student success is the relationship between coaches' transformational leadership and athletes' outcomes. Transformational leadership theory provides a viable framework for investigating relationships between coaching behaviors and athlete outcomes (Horn, 2008).

To explore the impact of transformational leadership on athletic satisfaction, San-Fu Kao & Chou-Yu Tsai (2016) conducted a study and suggested that coaches' transformational leadership behaviors are not only confined to encouraging athletes' performance effectiveness outcomes but they also promote athletes' perception of their coach's confidence in terms of coaching competency. Similarly, Price and Weiss (2013) utilized 412 adolescent female soccer players to assess coach and teammate transformational leadership behaviors, perceived competence, intrinsic motivation, among other group variables, and found that coaches who engage in transformational leadership behaviors make a positive impact on individual outcomes, such as perceived sport competence, affective reactions, and intrinsic motivation as well as group outcomes, including team cohesion and collective efficacy.

Advisors as Transformational Leaders

Academic advisors play a critical role in promoting student success and contribute greatly towards retention. They are also in a unique position to assist students throughout their entire academic career, from freshman through senior year (Ohrablo, 2017). Despite this important work, there is little research to define the role of academic advisors as leaders. The advisor role not only includes advising students to succeed academically but also encouraging them to embrace opportunities for leadership. In a study on advisors, McConnell (2018) concluded that as empowered leaders, academic advisors have more impact on student outcomes. There are several leadership models and leadership development theories in higher education that have been utilized in developing leadership curricular/co-curricular programs. These include Servant Leadership, Authentic Leadership, the Leadership Challenge, Transformational Leadership, Adaptive Leadership, and the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Emuwa, 2013; Harris, Bruce, & Jones, 2011; Gardner Coglisier, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). These models can also be used in advising programs that promote leadership development and student success.

There are a few studies that specifically look at transformational leadership of academic advisors. For example, Barbuto, Story, Fritz, and Schinstock, (2009) investigated advisor transformational leadership and student outcomes and found a strong relationship between transformational advising and advisor effectiveness, student effort, and the student's satisfaction with the advisor, indicating that the most effective advisors were those who were highly engaged with students and attentive to their individual needs. Also, Drozd (2010) suggested that transformational leadership activities were transferable to activities performed by undergraduate academic advisors and that academic advisors should be introduced to the concept of transformational leadership academic advising.

More recently, Bryant & Hornstein, (2016) advocated for an advising reform that incorporates leadership at the core of the advisor responsibilities. In addition, Spratley (2020), recommended that scholars should explore the leadership identities of academic advising professionals. Taken together, these studies encourage further research on advising professionals as transformational leaders and a strong need exists for examining advisor leadership and student outcomes. Thus, our study is designed to answer the call and build a conceptual model on advisor transformational leadership and student outcomes.

PROPOSITIONS

The main premise of transformational leadership is to motivate followers to accomplish the goals that challenge them to extend their boundaries (Krishnan, 2005). Transformational leaders build relationships with followers and the relationships are characterized by a mutual bond in which both the leader and follower motivate each other to higher levels of goal accomplishment which results in the values congruence between the leader-follower (2005). When the advisor exhibits transformational behaviors, they are likely to establish a bond with their advisees by showing support, establishing open line of communication, sharing past success stories to motivate advisees. Prior research has also shown positive impact of transformational leadership on motivation (Zareen, Razzaq, & Mujtaba, 2015; Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway, 2001). This suggests that:

***P1.** Advisor transformational leadership is positively related to advisee's motivation to persist in college.*

Student satisfaction has been positively related to immediacy, clarity, teacher style, and extra-class communication (Fusani, 1994). Student satisfaction is conceived as the positive feeling that is generated because of the interaction between student and instructor (Myers, 2002). Teachers more often play multiple roles such as advisor, supervisors, and facilitators (Freidus, 2002), and in the context of advising, advisor is a teacher who teaches the student advisee about intricacies of curriculum and provides clarifications on ambiguities. The link between student satisfaction and transformational leadership rests on the premise that interpersonal communication plays a major role in transformational leadership (Pounder, 2003). In the advising process, the communication process between advisee and advisor creates opportunities for the advisor to communicate expectations, provide inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration to the advisees; all of which are hallmarks of transformational leadership. In order for these things to be actualized, the advisee-advisor must engage one another to build an open line of communication that leads to satisfaction (Tsai, 2017). Moreover, there are many studies which report a positive impact of transformational leadership on student satisfaction (Pounder, 2003; Bogler et al., 2013; Hassan & Yu, 2013). Based on the above discussion, we propose:

P2: Transformational leadership of an advisor is positively related to advisees' satisfaction with the advisement process.

While faculty members serve as student advisors at many universities, students at other institutions work with advisors who are not a part of the faculty. Regardless of the advising model used, forming relationships with students is critical for student support and retention (Guiffrida, 2005). This suggests that relationships with people who interact regularly with students on campus can promote student retention and students are less likely to quit when they have a strong support system. Since transformational leaders value empowerment and participatory decision making (Ozaralli, 2003), advisors with transformational style are likely to empower advisees to provide input in the advising process, which increases accountability and satisfaction (Kim, 2002). Prior research has shown a link between transformational leadership and intention to quit. For instance, Jauhar, Ting, Rahim, & Fareen (2017) studied the impact of transformational leadership on intention to quit in the context of Generation Y employees and found that transformational leadership lowered the intention to quit. Sun and Wang (2017) demonstrated that transformational leadership lowered the intentions to quit by forming a collaborative culture. In addition, Reddy and Mehta (2019) found that employees were less likely to quit in the organization led by transformational leaders. To this end, we propose the following:

P3: Advisor's transformational leadership is negatively related to advisees' intention to quit college.

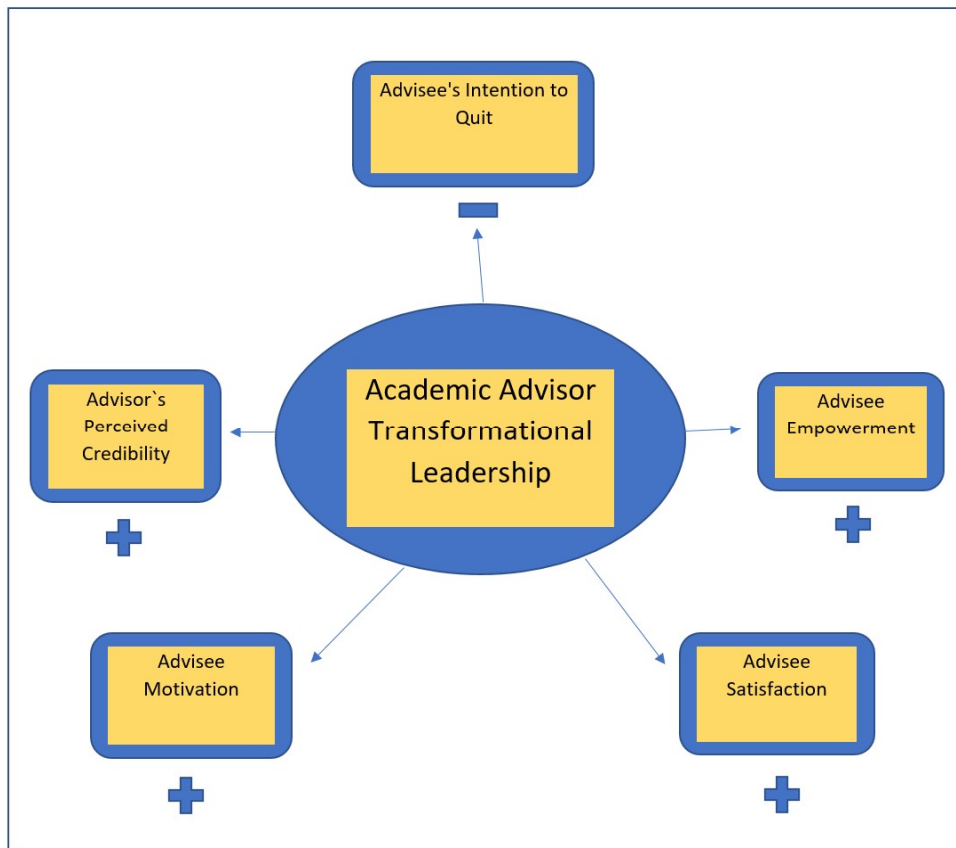
An empowered person is self-motivated and believes in his or her ability to cope and perform successfully (Kark, Shamir & Chen, 2003). One of the key features of transformational leadership is the empowerment of followers through empowering behaviors such as delegation of responsibilities, helping them be more creative, and enhancing their capacity to think on their own. Leaders with transformational behaviors energize and empower their employees by providing an exciting vision for the future, building subordinates' self-confidence with respect to goal attainment, promoting self-efficacy and motivation of subordinates, establishing norms for individual initiative, and achievement-oriented behaviors (Ozaralli, 2003). Empowerment of the follower leads to a strengthened internal locus of control and improved self-esteem, which enhances the follower's self-efficacy, and in turn the personal identity (Balaji & Krishnana, 2014). Many principals, teachers and leaders teach, support and guide their students, but transformational leaders inspire participation and empower others to grow and seek continual improvement (Feltis & Mason, 2018). In student advisor relationships, academic advisors with a focus on developmental advising challenge students, encourage them to get out of their comfort zone, motivate them to engage in intellectual and personal growth and help them build goals. In other words, they empower students to take control of their academic, professional and personal lives rather than prescribing their decisions and actions. Based on the above discussion, we suggest that:

P4. *Advisor transformational leadership is positively related to advisee's empowerment in advising.*

The establishment of positive relationships between students and college faculty and/or staff (and in this case academic advisor) leads to persistence and retention (Nutt, 2003). Positive relationships are grounded on trust, credibility, integrity and good character of the advisor and the advisee (Williams, Raffo & Clark, 2018). Students are looking for someone they can trust on campus. The relational aspect of advising then, begins with the adviser being trustworthy, being credible, trusted and communicating trustworthiness in an authentic way and being able to incorporate trust-building practices into the advising process (Sankar, 2003; Williams, Raffo & Clark, 2018; Paul, Smith, & Dochney 2012; Kelly, 2003). Leaders who are credible can use their knowledge to address challenges in their organization. In the same way, academic advisors as transformational leaders can use their credibility to propel their students to success. In a study that sought to explore credibility as an alternative to charisma and also as an important attribute of transformational and authentic leadership, the authors found that credibility, provides a more accessible and ethical framework to capture the essence of transformational and authentic leadership (Kelly, 2003; Raffo & Williams, 2018). These leadership styles are described as having transparency, openness and trust, virtues that are related to credibility (Leroy, Palanski & Simons, 2012). Therefore, credibility as an important attribute of transformational leadership, may have significant implications for academic advisors. This suggests:

P5. *Advisor transformational leadership is positively related to advisor's credibility as perceived by the advisee.*

FIGURE 1



DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Academic advisors are the first, most significant, and most consistent point of contact between the student and the university. From the time students first set foot on campus until the day they graduate, the academic advisor is there to guide them on their journey. Academic advisors are a key point of contact for students at the university and are uniquely positioned to help them successfully manage college and prepare for life beyond college.

Transformational leaders in all fields are supportive (Yukul, 2006), creative, innovative, empowering (Hackman & Johnson, 2004), motivating, and inspiring (Bass, 1999). They possess the qualities of building a vision and commitment to their followers (London School of Management Education, 2018) and motivate their followers as well as ensure that they are always encouraged to complete assigned tasks. Likewise, advisors employing a transformational leadership approach tend to witness superior student outcome (Barbuto, Story, Fritz, & Schinstock, 2011).

This conceptual paper aims to study the transformational leadership of an advisor and its impact on student outcomes. Academic advisors play an important role in the life of the student throughout the academic journey. Our research argues that an advisor's leadership approach significantly impacts student success and that the transformational approach impacts student outcomes. In this paper, we provide a rationale for the positive relationship between an advisor's transformational leadership and improved student outcomes and formulate propositions in support of that argument.

This study has several implications for practice. First, the major implication of the study is related to the advisor training programs. Due to several positive outcomes reported by transformational leaders in the literature, universities should train advisors in transformational leadership. Second, the practice of transformational leadership at a university by individuals who regularly interact with students as a part of their job will help in student retention. In addition, when students perceive the advisors to be caring and supportive, they will be satisfied throughout their academic career at the institution. Finally, transformational leadership will make the university culture more conducive to diversity and inclusion.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The main purpose of this study was to conceptualize the transformational leadership of an advisor and its impact on student outcomes. The paper recognizes that advisor transformational leadership has great benefits in terms of enhancing the quality of the advising experience for the student. Our research argues that advisors who exhibit transformational behaviors are likely to connect better with advisees and are better positioned to play an important role in student learning and development. The framework provided is a tool to assist advisors improve their practice and help students succeed academically. Our study proposes that the advisor transformational leadership model breeds a partnership between the advisor and the student in which each of them has a responsibility and an important role to play in the relationship. We suggest that future research should focus on designing a quantitative study to examine the specific components of transformational leadership in respect to specific advisor traits. This would allow the educators to identify the extent to which specific transformational leadership behaviors of advisors influence student outcomes. It would also be beneficial to identify specific student traits and identify the extent to which an advisor's transformational leadership behaviors would influence those specific traits. Another possibility is to conduct a comparative study of various institutions and explore whether demographics play a role in affecting the relationship between transformational leadership and student outcomes. We hope that this work will be beneficial to scholars in the advising and leadership domains to design new studies with the objective of improving the student experience in college.

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