



## The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Feedback-Seeking Behaviour

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### Abstract

As a new leadership model, transformational leadership style and the impact on employee behaviours have become hot topics in the field of organizational behaviour. Through the questionnaire surveys of 330 employees and their direct leaders, this study explored the relationship between transformational leadership style and feedback-seeking behaviour of employees, as well as examined the mediating role of organizational identity and the moderating effects of power distance. The result shows that: Transformational leadership can enhance the subordinates' organizational identification, thus increase frequency of feedback-seeking behaviour; besides, power-distance controls this process negatively.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership; Feedback-Seeking; Power Distance; Organizational Identification

### 1. Introduction

During the period of Chinese economic transformation, enterprises are facing increasingly fierce competition, which not only need the wisdom and strategy management, but also need more actively involved and active participation of staff. Feedback-seeking behavior of employees is a standard to measure employees' motivation [1]. Employees acquire more information through ask the evaluations of others (colleagues or superior) about their behavior and performance initiatively [2]. This study particularly researched the behaviors which seek feedback from leaders. Feedback-seeking is widespread in all kinds of organizations. It can not only help them to find problems during their work and ameliorate work methods, but also can enhance communication of leaders and employees; it is also helpful to improve employee satisfaction. However, in Chinese management practice, employees often avoid seeking feedback from the superior directly owing to self-protection or impression management motives. As a positive style of leadership, transformational leadership can stimulate employees' high level motivation, intrinsic need and cognitive experience. Whether this leadership style can influence on feedback seeking behavior? How to influence? These are focuses of the research.

From the individual-situation interaction perspective, leadership has different effect due to different individual characteristics of subordinates. The most direct impact is the long form of the value of employee [3]. Therefore, based on the value differences of employees, the study select power-distance as the moderating variable and research the effect in relationship between transformational leadership and feedback-seeking behavior.

### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1 Transformational Leadership and Feedback-Seeking Behavior

Transformational leadership theory was firstly put forward by Bass [4] in 1985, which emphasized on communication and establishment of interactive relationship with employees, in order to promoting their work motivation and ultimately achieving unexpected performance [4]. Through verification, combined with the Chinese

management practice, Li Chaoping [5] put forward four dimensions of Transformational Leadership on the basis of the theory: virtue, vision incentives, charisma and individualized consideration.

The present study showed that, transformational leadership behavior would produce more positive effect on employee. For instance, Schreishem (1999) found that employee satisfaction, procedural justice were influenced directly by transformational leadership behavior, Based on the research of Avolio (2004) [6], transformational leadership could improve staff motivation, and strengthen organizational commitment. Some other studies found that, transformational leadership could improve performance of individuals and organizations, increase employees' voice behavior and inspire the team creativity [7]; besides it had a positive impact on organizational citizenship behaviors [8].

Ashford [9] presented the concept of feedback seeking in 1986. Since the feedback seeking could reduce uncertain information so that made work have definite object in view, but at the same time would bring impression cost and judgment cost. Employees typically weighed the costs and benefits of feedback-seeking and considered the frequency and mode of seeking feedbacks [10]. Researchers showed that two main factors influence the frequency of feedback, including the individual factors (individual characteristics, working cognitive, cultural differences) and situational factors (leadership characteristics, organizational support and etc.) [11].

Specific to the research contents, transformational leadership focused on establishing mutual trust with staff, attended to team interests, therefore employees built a sense of belonging, willing to share information [12]; in addition, in virtue of caring more about personal growth, employees tended to seek feedback initiatively [13]; At the same time, transformational leadership could create a tolerant atmosphere that made subordinates seldom consider the cost of impression during seeking-feedback.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and feedback-seeking behavior.

## 2.2 The Mediating Role of Organizational Identification

As a special form of social identity, organizational identity is defined as a feeling of being attracted by organization due to the consistency of ideas and behaviors therefore produce rational or irrational emotional connection with the organization, to get a sense of belonging and a sense of mission [14]. The social identity theory shows that, the stronger sense of belonging, security and existence they get in organization, the higher level of organizational identity they have [15]. Accordingly, the study supposed that transformational leadership had a significant impact on organizational identity level of employees.

Many studies have found that employees who had strong sense of organizational identification would have lower turnover intention, higher satisfaction and better performance [16]. On the contrary, staff with low organizational identity doubted organization in concept of value, so it was nearly impossible for them to seek feedback from leaders they did not trust. Therefore, this study inferred that transformational leadership could bring higher organizational identification, which would increase the frequency of the feedback-seeking.

Hypothesis 2: organizational identification takes mediator effect between transformational leadership and feedback seeking behavior.

## 2.3 Regulatory Effect of Power Distance

As one of the variables which measures cultural values of organizational members, power-distance reflects the degree of accepting unequal power distribution in the organization [17]. For different power-distance employee, effects of transformational leadership were not identical. Low power-distance employees believed that although superior and subordinate had different position, but they owned equal status, they should be mutual trust, mutual exchange and making decision together [18]. When the leadership style in organization was just transformational leadership which emphasized interaction effect and emotional motivation, employees would increase the psychological identity, also enhanced the intention to maintain positive relationship with leaders [19], and thus increased the feedback seeking behavior. In contrast, the positive impact of transformational leadership on high power-distance employees may be weaker. In that, this kind of employee supposed power difference should exist originally, leader had the right to make any decision independently; employees should obey orders and obedience. In other words, transformational leadership did not make them feel organizational identification, so it would reduce the positive impact on feedback-seeking behavior.

Hypothesis 3: employee power-distance has a moderating effect on the relationship between transformational leadership and feedback-seeking behavior. That is, the lower power-distance, the stronger relationship between transformational leadership and feedback-seeking behavior.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1 The Study Sample

The investigation objects of this study were mainly from of 20 companies in Jiangsu, Shanghai and other places. The sample enterprises included electric power, machinery manufacturing, communication and management consulting industry. In order to avoid the common method bias, this study performed paired survey of investigation object and its direct superior.

Under the assistance of human resources departments, researchers selected some employees and their corresponding direct superiors randomly as investigation object in a certain range. In the survey, employees evaluated transformational leadership of their leader, assessed the degree of organizational identity and power-distance by answering questionnaires, and leaders evaluated feedback-seeking behavior of employees. There were totally 389 questionnaires, including 347 sets of well matched (89.2% recovery rate), by removing invalid questionnaire that employees worked in less than a year, this study finally got 330 groups of the pairing questionnaire (84.83% effective questionnaire recovery rate). In the samples, a total of investigation involved 64 managers with average age 38.26 and the average work life 6.90 years, among them the male managers accounted for 67.04%. Subordinates with average age 27.83 and average work life 4.22 years, college degree or above accounted for 75.16% and 59.62% male among them.

#### 3.2 Variables Measuring Tool

This study used authoritative Li Chaoping & Shi Kan's (2005)[5] scale to measure transformational leadership which is compared authoritative, containing a total of 26 projects, of which 8 projects measuring virtue, 6 items measuring motivation inspiring, 6 items measuring charismatic, and 6 items measuring individualized consideration. The study used 5 point scoring here, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"; employees evaluated their direct leader respectively, and finally the study statistics and analyzed the data of the project. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.89.

The research used the questionnaire with totally 6 projects prepared by Mael [20] (analysis showed good reliability and validity) to measure organizational identification of employees. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.87. The research on employee power-distance measurement used Dorfman and Howell [21] (1988) questionnaires with Cronbach alpha coefficient 0.90, which filled by staff, a total of 6 questions, using the Likert6 scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). As for feedback-seeking behavior, the study adopted Lam [22] (2007) of the 5 item scale to measure, 0.83 is its internal consistency reliability coefficient.

In the previous literature about the feedback-seeking, age, gender, education level, work experience and other demographic variables always appeared in research as control variables. Therefore, the study also examined the effects of these factors on the feedback-seeking behavior. Among them, gender through virtual processing, "1" represented male, "0" on behalf of women; education level was divided into high school and below, junior college, bachelor, master, doctor and above, totally 5 grade; age and working years was marked as the actual number.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis Methods

Our study made statistical analysis using SPSS19.0 and LISREL8.37. In the specific data analysis, the study firstly tested the validity and reliability of these concepts using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability analysis

### 4. The Result of the Study

#### 4.1 Inspection of Concepts' Discriminant Validity

First of all, the study carried on factor analysis about transformational leadership, power-distance; organizational identification and feedback-seeking behavior, meanwhile detected their discrimination validity. Secondly, researcher put each variable as a display item to carry on factor analysis, comparing the single factor model, two factors model, three factors model and four factors model respectively. Results showed that the four factor model data got the best fitting degree from the table 1 ( $\chi^2/df=1.25$ ,  $RMSEA=0.03$ ,  $CFI=0.97$ ,  $GFI=0.95$ ,  $NNFI=0.96$ ), which mean that the 4 variables involved in our study have good discriminant validity.

Model		$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	CFI	NNFI	RMSEA
Virtual Model		2663.25	185					
Single Factor Model	TL+PD+OI+FS	2321.56	165	14.07	0.56	0.69	0.52	0.20

<b>Two Factors Model</b>	TL+PD+OI; FS	1088.63	158	6.89	0.77	0.78	0.80	0.16
<b>Three Factors Model</b>	TL; PD+OI; FS	700.45	156	4.49	0.81	0.82	0.86	0.13
<b>Three Factors Model</b>	TL+PD; OI; FS	570.97	156	3.66	0.84	0.87	0.89	0.10
<b>Three Factors Model</b>	TL+OI; PD; FS	644.28	156	4.13	0.80	0.81	0.84	0.12
<b>Four Factors Model</b>	TL; PD; OI; FS	202.51	150	1.35	0.95	0.97	0.96	0.04

Note: TL stands for transformational leadership; PD stands for employee power-distance; OI stands for organizational identification; FS stands for employee feedback-seeking behavior

#### 4.2 The Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Each mean value, standard deviation, coefficient of correlation and reliability coefficients of variables in the model shown in table 2. You can see from the data in the table that transformational leadership has significant positive correlations with organizational identification and feedback-seeking behavior ( $r=0.48$ ,  $p<0.01$ ;  $r=0.44$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), organizational identification has a significantly positive correlation with feedback-seeking behavior ( $r=0.59$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Power-distance has significantly negative correlations with organizational identification and feedback-seeking behavior ( $r=-0.39$ ,  $p<0.01$ ;  $r=-0.46$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The results support the hypothesis preliminarily.

Table 2: Mean Standard Deviation, Coefficient of Correlation And Reliability Coefficient of Variables										
Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>1. Sex</b>	0.60	0.50								
<b>2. Age</b>	27.83	6.15	-0.04							
<b>3. Education Level</b>	2.94	1.18	0.09	-0.17						
<b>4. Work Experience</b>	4.22	3.86	0.02	0.51**	-0.09					
<b>5. Transformational Leadership</b>	5.79	1.00	-0.10	0.01*	0.10**	0.01*	(0.89)			
<b>6. Organizational Identity</b>	6.75	0.83	-0.03	0.06	0.07**	0.02*	0.48**	(0.87)		
<b>7. Power-Distance</b>	4.19	1.76	-0.07*	0.10	-0.23**	0.19**	-0.27**	-0.39**	(0.90)	
<b>8. Employee Feedback-Seeking</b>	3.28	0.97	-0.05	0.10*	0.13**	0.02*	0.44**	0.59**	-0.46**	(0.83)

Note: \* $p<0.05$ , \*\* $p<0.01$ ,  $n=330$ .

#### 4.3 Hypothesis Testing

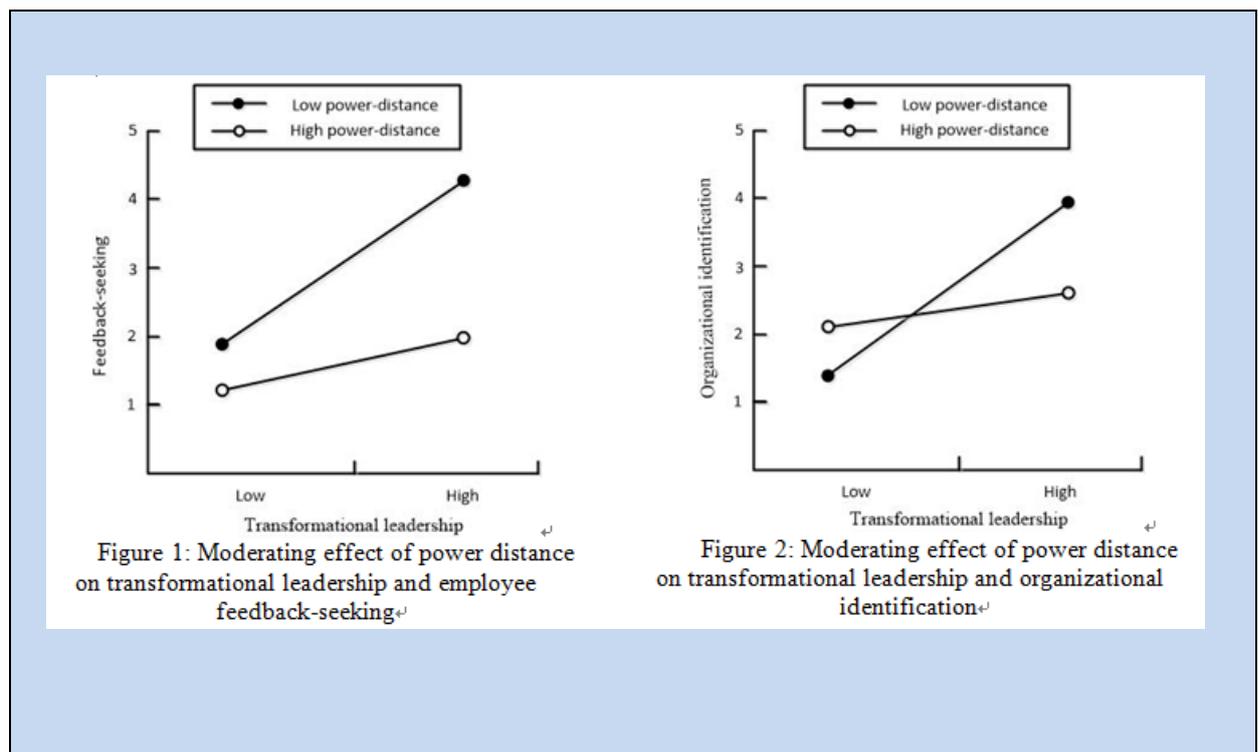
The study used hierarchical regression analysis testing our method, the analysis results of hypothesis 1 and 3 shown in table 3.

Firstly, centering the two variables includes transformational leadership and power-distance, and putting them into the model, then put the interaction effect of both into the final model. The regression results showed that transformational leadership, power-distance both had significant impacts on the feedback-seeking (The regression coefficients were:  $\beta = -0.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\beta = -0.19$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which verified hypothesis 1. In addition, the interactive effect of transformational leadership and power-distance also had significantly effect on employee feedback-seeking. ( $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Ye can see in Figures below that high power-distance curve has been always under low power-distance curve, and low power-distance curve looks steeper. In other words, when employee power-distance was high, transformational leadership would reduce the positive effect on feedback-

seeking. Thus, hypothesis 3 was confirmed, power-distance significantly regulated the relationship between the transformational leadership and feedback-seeking behavior, for the performance of the relationship of two factors became weaker as the power-distance been higher,

Table 3: Results of the Regression Analysis of Transformational Leadership Behavior								
Dependent Variable	Organizational Identity				Feedback-Seeking Behavior			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
<b>Control Variables</b>								
Sex	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02
Age	0.20	0.16	0.16	0.06	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.02
Education Level	0.13*	0.08	0.06	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.04**	0.07*
Work Experience	-0.09						-0.11*	-0.09
<b>Independent Variable</b>								
Transformational Leadership	0.23**	0.29**	0.26**		0.04	0.02		0.06
Power-Distance		0.11 <sup>+</sup>	0.03		0.17*	0.11		0.10
Transformational Leadership × Power-Distance			0.25***			0.14**		0.06
<b>Intermediary Variable</b>								
Organizational Identification							0.26***	0.26** *
$\Delta R^2$		0.07***	0.06***		0.02 <sup>+</sup>	0.02*	0.06***	0.05** *

Note: <sup>+</sup>p<0.1, \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01; the dependent variables of model 1 – 3 are organizational identification; the dependent variables of model 4 – 8 are feedback-seeking behavior.



The study used the method proposed by Baron (1986) to detect the intermediary role of organizational identification of supposing 2 and 4. Result of regression analysis showed that: in model 1, all of transformational leadership, power-distance and the product of transformational leadership and power-distance had the significant influence on organizational identification. In model 2, transformational leadership, power-distance as well as the product of the two factors all had significant impacts on feedback-seeking. In model 3, transformational leadership and power-distance still had significant effects on feedback seeking. On the other hand, organizational identification of employees also had the remarkable effect of feedback seeking. But the effect product of transformational leadership and power-distance on employee feedback seeking was no longer significant. Based on inspection rules of completely intermediary and part intermediary, comparing analysis results of model 2 and model 3, the result showed that organizational identity partially mediated the transformational leadership and power-distance effect on feedback seeking, completely mediated the product of transformational leadership and power-distance effect on feedback seeking. Thus hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 4 have been demonstrated.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Research Summary

Feedback-seeking behavior had important significance for organizations and individuals. However, the effect of transformational leadership on feedback-seeking behavior was still lack of deep research. On the basis of this, the paper studied the effect as well as mechanism of transformational leadership and employee values on feedback seeking.

First of all, this paper proved that transformational leadership had a positive effect on feedback-seeking. On the one hand, transformational leaders made employees to realize the great significance of the work they commitment, and linked the goal of organization and individual together, so that their working power source changed from external pressure to internal demand imperceptibly. Subordinates who became actively enterprising in thought and action would be more concerned about the performance of their work, thus sought the superior leadership "home truths" initiatively in order to improve their work. On the other hand, the encouragement and care to employees could reduce the impression cost and other worries, employees tended to take action actively after they had the feedback-seeking intention rather than conservative stopped the behavior.

The transformational leadership cared for subordinates through social, occupational and personal support. The trust, respect and recognition they showed is helpful to improve relations between leaders and subordinates like family members. As a kind of "feedback" based on social intention, subordinates would improve the cognition and evaluation on the leadership, strengthen the feeling of belonging on organization; with the cognition and emotion dimensions of organizational identification been improved, behavior dimension improved as well. In addition, the organizational identity had the feature of path dependence, other organizations was difficult to imitate, once formed, members would see them and the organization as a whole, thus formed a sense of responsibility and mission, and feedback-seeking frequency would increase naturally. Visibly, revealed the relationship between transformational leadership and feedback-seeking behavior from the perspective of organizational identity was not only more comprehensively, but also opened up a new angle to explain the mechanism of transformational leadership.

As the important factor to measure the individual cultural values, power-distance directly affected the role positioning and communication mode of members. Due to strong self-protection, high power-distance staff would keep more distant with leader deliberately, so that they usually did not contact leaders and sought for feedback initiatively. As a moderating variable, power-distance regulated the relationship between leadership behavior and feedback-seeking through affecting organizational identification. In transformational leadership organizations, owing to the high power-distance employees identify with class consciousness in Chinese traditional culture, they got used to obedience to authority, so they did not get a sense of identity in organization, or change their behaviors, leading to the leadership had less impact on feedback-seeking. For low power-distance employees, transformational leadership behavior was consistent with their position of leadership, virtue and personalized care made subordinates no longer consider self-protection and restraint feedback-seeking, and feedback-seeking process would conversely enhance good impression in leaders, thus formed a virtuous cycle.

### 5.2 Management Implications

This paper analyzed the relationship between transformational leadership and feedback-seeking, provided some implications for organizational leaders to improve the wisdom and effectiveness leadership. Firstly, leaders should accelerate their style transformation; every leader should attach importance to the occupation development of staff, respect for their diverse needs, use guiding and encouraging ways to motivate them as much as possible instead of relying on the punishment mechanism. Another, make efforts to build relationships and trust with employees, listen to the views of them before setting goals then make decisions, let them feel the support, strengthen the organizational identity and sense of participation of them. Additionally, leadership should make themselves an example, pay attention to ethics to improve the moral cultivation, and strive to make good effects of subordinates.

More importantly, in the aspect of communication, the higher should be less bureaucratic, adopt the two-way communication with subordinates, and allow the existence of objection on some different opinions and views. Encourage positive proposals, and give affirmation and praise to employees who actively seek feedbacks to reduce their anxieties. Eventually establish a transformational organizational with weak hierarchy, high rate of participation and barrier free communication.

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