



# Development and initial validation of an indirect measure of transformational leadership integrity



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## ABSTRACT

An indirect measure of transformational leadership integrity was developed across three studies. In Study 1, the transformational leadership integrity implicit association test (TLI-IAT) was developed and tested with 65 leaders across heterogeneous organizational contexts. Study 2 involved 51 coaches from 18 sports. Results from Studies 1 and 2 supported the construct validity of the instrument, providing evidence of the instrument's convergent and discriminant validity. Study 3 involved 32 coaches and 133 players from six sports. Findings supported the criterion validity of the measure, providing evidence for the instrument's predictive validity. In sum, evidence is presented that supports the TLI-IATs construct and criterion validity. As such, the present research has made significant advancements to the transformational leadership integrity literature and provides researchers with an indirect measure of automatic transformational leadership integrity self-attitudes.

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## 1. Introduction

As a rule-governed and social activity, sport represents a morally relevant context (Bredemeier & Shields, 1994). As such, the individuals who operate within this context face difficult moral choices on a daily basis. For example, coaches must decide whether to condone or criticize players who verbally abuse opponents (i.e., sledging) or cheat to gain a competitive advantage, instruct players to exploit an opponent's injury, or even whether they should encourage (tacitly or otherwise) the use of illicit performance enhancing substances. Although the majority of coaches are thought to abide by the rules of their respective sport and behave in a morally appropriate manner (Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, & Power, 2005), recent history provides evidence that there are those who do not (Stirling & Kerr, 2008, 2014). By tacitly endorsing appropriate or inappropriate behavior, coaches are in a highly influential position when it comes to developing the moral climate in which their athletes operate (Weiss, Smith, & Stuntz, 2008).

Although considerable research attention has been paid to examining performance related outcomes associated with coach leadership behavior in sport (see Fletcher & Arnold, 2015 for a

review of sport leadership trends), few scholars have investigated the antecedent motives that underpin coaches' morally relevant actions. Further, although researchers have identified several morally relevant outcomes of coaching (see Kavussanu, 2012 for a review), such work is largely based on direct assessments of coach-based variables. As such, there is a need for research that seeks to assess antecedent motives that may contribute to coach-related moral outcomes in sport.

### 1.1. Transformational leadership integrity

Transformational leadership integrity examines the consistency in thought and action to the principles associated with both: (1) True transformational leadership, and (2) Pseudo-transformational leadership. For Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), truly transformational leaders have a commitment to assisting their followers' development, even when this means the leader is required to transcend their own personal, and egoistic desires. They are also proposed to understand themselves, their values, and consider the values of their followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Fairholm (2009) suggests that those with a propensity towards truly transformational leadership use this understanding to create an idealized and ethical vision for the future, based on mutual trust and respect. In turn, Frost and Howell (1989) suggest that this benefits and satisfies their followers, while recognizing them as individuals. Those with a

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propensity towards true transformational leadership (also known as authentic transformational leadership) are thought to be morally virtuous (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), of integrity (Parry & Proctor-Thomson, 2002), and able to liberate and empower those who follow them (Price, 2003). At the other end of the continuum, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) consider those who possess pseudo-transformational leadership characteristics to have an inherent need for power and as such, promote dependency within their followers, and generally lack integrity. Such individuals are thought to manipulate their followers to internalize their own flawed values. They are considered controlling and while it may appear otherwise, they have little interest or empathy for others (Simola, Barling, & Turner, 2010).

Although perceptual approaches to leadership assessment may be effective in identifying true transformational leadership, they have historically been of less use when examining beliefs around immoral or illegal behavior (Rudman, 2004). As such, it is expected that direct, perceptual approaches may be ineffective in assessing self-attitudes towards pseudo-transformational leadership. Further, the effectiveness of perceptual approaches may be hampered by a desire and ability to self-present. According to Price (2003) there are three forms of pseudo-transformational leadership, which are differentiated by impression motivation and impression efficacy: (1) opportunistic, (2) incontinent and (3) base. First, opportunistic pseudo-transformational leadership is used to describe those who present the impression of possessing the qualities associated with true transformational leadership, but only do so as there is a congruence between their needs and those of their followers. Such individuals are impression motivated and efficacious in their attempts to present themselves as possessing true transformational leadership values. Second, incontinent pseudo-transformational leadership describes those who are inefficient in their attempts to construct the perception that they are truly transformational. Third, unlike both incontinent and opportunistic pseudo-transformational forms of leadership, base pseudo-transformational leadership describes those who are not impression motivated and are openly committed to their egoistic values. Such individuals lack integrity and are an example of baseness (i.e., a lack moral principles and a bad character).

It is worth noting at this point that while Price (2003) and Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) use labels such as: true, authentic, pseudo, base, incontinent, and opportunistic, the terminology is used to define attitudes and behaviors associated with the concepts, not act as a way of labelling individuals. While these terms are widely used within the literature, there is currently no discussion or agreement as to the requisite number of behaviors that need be presented or attitudes held to obtain such a label (Hardy et al., 2010). Further, as Mills and Boardley (2017, p. 658) argue 'leaders do not use these behaviors in silos and are rarely all 'dark' or all 'bright''. While those who display the values associated with true transformational leadership are also thought to demonstrate integrity, high moral and ethical principles and, authenticity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio & Luthans, 2003; Parry & Proctor-Thomson, 2002), Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) argue that possessing such values is not in itself a requirement of transformational leadership. As such, transformational leadership behavior (see Arthur & Tomsett, 2015 for a review of the transformational leadership behavior literature within sport) can be displayed without necessarily possessing a foundation of integrity (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). As Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) point out, at a behavioral level, true and pseudo-transformational leadership is two sides of the same coin. For Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002), ultimately it is the attitude towards integrity that defines the motive, which then influences the behavior.

As those with a propensity towards opportunistic pseudo-

transformational leadership are likely to conceal their integrity attitudes and behave in a manner akin to true transformational leadership, relying on direct instruments alone (i.e., self- or follower-report) may be problematic. Although follower perceptions may identify those unsuccessful in their self-presentation (i.e., incontinent) and those who do not attempt to conceal their lack of integrity (i.e., base), Berinsky (2004; Fazio & Olson, 2003) suggests that perceptions alone may be fallible when attempting to identify those successful in presenting a false impression (i.e., opportunistic). Fortunately, instruments have come to the forefront in recent years (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Karpinski & Steinman, 2006; Rothermund, Teige-Mocigemba, Gast, & Wentura, 2009; Teige-Mocigemba, Klauer, & Rothermund, 2008) that negate the problem of manipulation by indirectly assessing implicit social cognition (Berinsky, 2004; Fazio & Olson, 2003). Instead of asking participants to directly report on what they feel or think, indirect instruments assess spontaneously retrieved, automatically formed summaries of mental representations (i.e., the residue of previous observations, thoughts, and experiences) through systematic variations in task performance (Rudman, 2004). Essentially, rather than focusing on the question presented (i.e., direct assessment), participants focus on completing the task with inferences made post assessment; often by comparing reaction times.

## 1.2. Research questions

With the aforementioned in mind, the aim of the research is to develop and provide initial validation for an indirect measure of transformational leadership integrity self-attitudes (i.e., the Transformational Leadership Integrity Implicit Association Test; TLI-IAT). To achieve this, study 1 aims to develop the measure and offer initial evidence supporting its construct validity through examining its relationship with leaders' deliberate (i.e., directly assessed self-report) attitudes towards leader ethical integrity, as well as investigating its long-term reliability. Study 2 then aims to provide further evidence of the instrument's construct validity by testing its relationship with social desirability and directly assessed transformational leadership integrity attitudes, as well as testing its reliability over the short term. Finally, study 3 then aims to further examine its concurrent validity by assessing whether coaches' scores on the new measure are predictive of their players' reported sport commitment.

## 2. Study 1

### 2.1. Overview and aims

Building on the work of Perugini and Leone (2009) and earlier qualitative research of Mills and Boardley (2016), study 1 aims to develop an indirect measure of self-attitudes towards transformational leadership integrity, as described by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999). In addition to assessing self-attitudes towards transformational leadership integrity, Study 1 also examined directly assessed attitudes towards leader ethical integrity (i.e., perceived leader integrity scale; Craig & Gustafson, 1998). Like the indirect instrument developed within the present study, the perceived leader integrity scale (PLIS) adopts a characteristic focused approach. Importantly and again similar to the TLI-IAT, as a measure of ethical integrity, the PLIS was heavily influenced by the way integrity is conceptualized within the transformational leadership literature (Craig & Gustafson, 1998); in particular, the significance Bass (1985) placed on leadership attributes such as trustworthiness, fairness, and believability. That said, while the concepts of ethical and transformational leadership integrity were

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