

# Transformational and charismatic leadership: Assessing the convergent, divergent and criterion validity of the MLQ and the CKS

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## Abstract

This study aimed at empirically clarifying the similarities and differences between transformational, transactional, and charismatic leadership. More specifically, the convergent, divergent, and criterion validity of two instruments, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) and the Conger and Kanungo Scales (CKS), was explored. It was found that transformational and charismatic leadership showed a high convergent validity. Moreover, these leadership styles were divergent from transactional leadership. With regard to criterion validity, subjective (e.g. satisfaction) as well as objective (profit) performance indicators were assessed. Firstly, results indicated that transformational as well as charismatic leadership augmented the impact of transactional leadership on subjective performance. In addition, transformational and charismatic leadership both contribute unique variance to subjective performance, over and above the respective other leadership style. Secondly, transformational leadership had an impact on profit, over and above transactional leadership. This augmentation effect could not be confirmed for charismatic leadership. Furthermore, transformational leadership augmented the impact of both transactional and charismatic leadership on profit. Implications for leadership theory and practice are discussed.

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Over the last two decades a new genre of leadership theory, alternatively labeled as “charismatic” (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), “visionary” (Sashkin, 1988), or “transformational” (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass, 1985), has emerged. Among these, two fields of research have gained considerable interest. First, within transformational leadership, leaders emphasize higher motive development, and arouse followers’ motivation by means of creating and representing an inspiring vision of the future (Bass, 1997). Second, charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1998) describes why followers identify with their respective leader.

The positive effects of transformational and charismatic leadership on several organizational outcomes underscore their relevance (Bass, 1998; Yammarino, Spangler, & Bass, 1993). While these positive effects have been proven in a wide range of applied settings (Dumdum, Lowe, & Avolio, 2002; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996), the elementary field of research concerning the constructs of transformational and charismatic

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leadership still needs further attention (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002; Hunt & Conger, 1999; Shamir et al., 1993). The urgent call for research in this area is summarized by Yukl (1999):

One of the most important conceptual issues for transformational and charismatic leadership is the extent to which they are similar and compatible. [...] The assumption of equivalence has been challenged by leadership scholars [...] who view transformational and charismatic leadership as distinct but partially overlapping processes. (p. 298 ff.).

The instruments to assess these constructs add to the confusion about the underlying meaning of transformational and charismatic leadership. As an example, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X; Bass & Avolio, 2000), which is used to assess transformational leadership, includes five subscales of transformational leadership. Of these five, three subscales were combined into one factor called charisma in earlier versions of the instrument. In turn, the empirical leadership literature uses the terms transformational and charismatic leadership inconsistently and interchangeably.

Following the arguments made by Yukl (1999) and other leadership researchers (Judge, 2005), the present study aimed at explicating and demonstrating the relationships of the constructs of transformational and charismatic leadership, as well as their effect on individual (subjective) and organizational (objective) outcomes. In the following section, we compare and contrast two widely used instruments for assessing these leadership styles, namely the MLQ-5X and the Conger–Kanungo Scales (CKS). We focus on these instruments as they both represent elaborated theories and have adequate psychometric properties. We are aware, however, that other approaches to transformational and charismatic leadership may result in a more elaborated understanding of the subject as well (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004).

## 1. Comparison of MLQ and CKS

### 1.1. Similarities

Both the MLQ and CKS belong to what has been labeled “neo-charismatic” leadership theories (Antonakis & House, 2002). Fundamental to the theories of Bass (1985) and Conger & Kanungo (1998) is the representation and articulation of a vision by the leader (Sashkin, 2004). As a long-term attempt to change followers’ attitudes, self-concepts (House & Shamir, 1993) and motives, this vision is rooted in commonly-held ethics and values (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The ethical foundation of the vision is fundamental to both Bass’ and Conger and Kanungo’s theories. Thus, they focus on socialized as opposed to personalized charisma (Howell & Avolio, 1992). Socialized charismatic leaders use their abilities to achieve benefits for all followers, and not just for their own benefit.

Both transformational and charismatic leaders are agents of change. In addition to the formulation of a vision, strong emotional ties between the leader and the led are necessary in order to change followers’ belief systems and attitudes. In addition, if the leader is a trustworthy model and represents a code of conduct, transformation occurs more easily. As a consequence of the leader’s charismatic qualities and behaviors, followers identify with the leader. In turn, values and performance standards are more likely to be adapted by followers. Finally, transformational and charismatic leaders foster performance beyond expectations.

These similarities between the theories proposed by Bass (1985) and by Conger & Kanungo (1998) highlight the fact that they share at least one basic assumption (cf. Antonakis & House, 2002). In his original work on transformational leadership, Bass (1985) proposed that charisma is the main component of transformational leadership. However, several important differences between these theories are clearly evident.

### 1.2. Differences

The main difference between the MLQ and CKS is that each is based on its own conceptualization of charismatic/transformational leadership (Antonakis & House, 2002; House & Shamir, 1993). As a consequence, these measures include different sets of leadership scales. We turn to each of these instruments in the following paragraphs.

Central to the theory of Bass (1985) is the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership. Over the last two decades, empirical research resulted in several subscales for the assessment of these two multifaceted constructs. Nine different subscales of transformational and transactional leadership are measured by the MLQ-5X (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass & Avolio, 2000). Whereas in the last decades the factorial validity of

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