Dimensions of transformational leadership as revealed from managerial planning prospects in higher education

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Abstract

Transformational Leadership" is a type of management which determines transformation at the level of both the individuals and the social system in which it works. Identification of dimensions of transformational leadership in the dynamic environment of higher education is very important. In this study, strategic plans written by candidates for rector positions are used to determine the dimensions of transformational leadership in higher education as perceived by very experienced professionals. Their goals, mainly long-term ones, are considered as the direction in which they want to take their higher education institutes. Goals and targets stated by candidates and based on the literature of transformational leadership point to nine objective categories being the most relevant objectives for long-running higher education institutes. The methodology is based on content analysis and appropriate software is used to ascertain the most important and relevant categories. The categories are: educational activity management, scientific research management, human resources management, administrative management, financial management, student relationship management, global widening, adjusting to society needs/cooperating with the community, and university image management. The most important objectives are those from the categories of educational activity management, scientific research management, followed by objectives for university image**.**

Keywords: Transformational leadership; managerial planning; managerial objectives; visions.

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1. Conceptual Delimitation

1.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a type of management which determines transformation at the level of both individuals and the social system in which it works. A leader who employs this type of management improves the motivation, moral and performance of others though diverse mechanisms. Such a mechanism connects individual identities to the collective identity and mission of the organization, and encourages others to take on new responsibilities and to understand each other's strengths and weaknesses for the optimization of the accomplishment of tasks and performance.

The common meanings of the words "change" and "transformation" are obvious. McRoy and Gibbs (2009) describe the transformational leader as a dynamic means of change and adds that leaders must answer to the changes in the environment, and identify the optimal conditions for change.

This concept is that of Burns (1978) developed in reference to political leaders; it was, however, also adopted by organizational psychology. Burns believes that this type of leadership assumes that leaders and followers help each other in order to reach a higher ethical and motivational level.

Transformational leadership has four specific elements: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence (Wang et al., 2017).

Individualized consideration refers to the degree of attention a leader gives to the needs of each member of the group. The leader respects Individual preoccupations and needs, is empathetic and offers support, keeps the communication channels open both ways, and challenges the members of the group (Ding et al., 2017). The members have the will and inspiration for their own development, for an ever-increasing level of potential, and are inwardly motivated for the accomplishment of their tasks.

Intellectual stimulation describes the degree to which a leader challenges assumptions, accentuates the essentials, assumes risks and asks members of the group for their ideas, thereby stimulating and encouraging their creativity. Independent learning and thinking are valued and developed, and unexpected situations are seen as learning opportunities. The leader himself creates learning opportunities, and stimulates and encourages problem-solving. Members of the group are encouraged to ask questions, to think of old problems in a new way, and to think of better ways to complete tasks.

Inspirational motivation refers to the ability of a leader to create and share an appealing vision which will inspire the members of the group. The leader motivates the members of the group by establishing high standards, expresses optimism about future objectives and offers a purpose for current tasks. At the same time, changes inside the organization are viewed with enthusiasm according to their significance as indicators of progress. The members must have and must be convinced of the goals in order to be motivated and to act.

Idealized influence offers a model for behavior which implies high morals and ethical standards; it instills admiration. The leader both offers trust and obtains trust. The leader acts in the direction he is aiming for in the transformation model; he is predictable and does not change his mind over night.

1.2. Managerial Planning

In any managerial activities, "project" refers to the anticipation, identification or stabilization of a hypothetical action frame or model which is to be implemented in order to develop an establishment. "Planning" represents the process of elaboration and selection of the finalities which will be followed during a certain period of time, such as the manner in which they can be reached, so that the projected hypothetical model may be accomplished in a practical way at the highest level of efficiency possible. In general, planning is perceived as an exercise which consists of defining specific goals and establishing the necessary means to reach those goals in a certain time frame. Planning implies different responsibilities; some of them refer to strategic content (definition of the objectives, priorities and

actions), while others are related to organizational aspects (organization of available resources and resources which need to be gathered for the accomplishment of the planned activity).

Precise stability of objectives constitutes a first step toward the managerial process and applies to every level of the organization; moreover, the results of planning are reflected in the plans for activities. For this, a "cascade technique" was proposed which begins at the highest management level and reaches down to the smallest organizational structures, and even to the level of individuals who make up this very structure. In an organization where objectives are not always clearly defined, or are defined only at the level of the organization as a whole and not at the level of each and every structural component, the objectives must be explicit with respect to operational manner or be clarified for every structural unit.

1.3. Objectives

The objectives of the analysis are as follows:

1. Identification of the characteristics of transformational leadership in managerial programs.

2. Identification of the manner in which planning is approached by the candidates for the role of rector in managerial programs in Romanian universities.

2. Data

The raw data for this study was taken from 41 managerial planning programs, written by 41 candidates for rector positions at the 18 most important universities in Romania during the February–March 2012 university elections. Of the universities included, four of them offer a purely technical education, seven are mixed and another even are focused on a classical education. The documents written by the candidates included the themes expected from the managerial program as described above.

3. Analysis and Findings

A content analysis framework was used. The first step in this analysis was the selection of key terms that generate topics—in other words, terms that associate and create meaning, a coherent representation of a problem or a position towards it**.** Key terms are frequently and constantly used to indicate significations which are full of meaning. In order to identify key terms which generate conceptual themes, a specialized program, hamlet for windows, was used. Of course, a computerized procedure to choose key terms is based more on the value of the mathematical information than their subjective meaning. It presumes that a word is the indicator of a theme in a text if it has a relatively high frequency rate. For example, in this study, the term "team" had a high frequency rate, and consequently, an independent variable "team" was added to the analysis.

Based on the characteristics of a transformational leader found in the literature dedicated to this concept, a dictionary of categories was defined. Thus, the managerial programs of the candidates for the position of rector were analyzed. The content categories created for this purpose are the following: team, risk, performance, vision, long-term and change.

Table 1. Frequency of the Categories Referring to the Transformational Leader

Category List	Frequency
Team	126
Performance	71
Vision	62
Risk	38
Long-term	32
Change	18

Based on the distance between the categories, the multidimensional scaling generates a three-dimensional pseudograph. One way of interpreting the results involves the study of the configuration's proximities produced by scaling. The closer the categories are to each other, the more repeatedly they are found in this context. A closeness between the words *team* and *performance* and *long-term* can be observed, and close to this, also is *change* (figure 1).
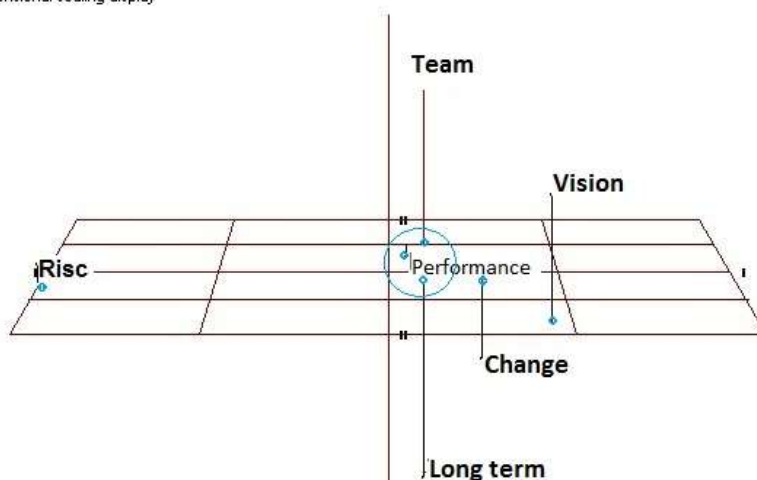

Figure 1. Multidimensional scaling of the categories referring to the transformational leader

In the second phase of the analysis a model was defined to show how considerations and current tendencies in managerial plannings are revealed in the context of today's universities. Taking into account that different types of universities were included in the analysis—different in terms of profile, dimension, history and performance—the results obtained give us an image that we can generalize at the level of universities as a whole and, in particular, for Romanian universities in the case of this research.

Whether the intentions were called strategic objectives, direction of actions or simply objectives, they refer to what the candidates want to realize during their mandate if chosen as rectors. The entire text of each program was included, but the coding was applied to units that refer to objectives. An analytic process through which mentions were decomposed and conceptualized was conducted using Atlas.ti software. Any mention from the unity of the text referring to the objective had a code attached to it. The code was set to be a shortened version of the name of the category. Nine main categories were obtained: educational activity management, scientific research management, human resources management, administrative management, financial management, student relationship management,

global widening, adjusting to society's needs/cooperating with the community, and university image management. These categories are not exhaustive, as not all registered units from the text are represented, as only those that were considered to be relevant are included. Moreover, they are not mutually exclusive; some of the objectives could very well go in more than one category. The nine categories, along with their subcategories, are provided below.

3.1. Educational activity management

- Attracting Romanian and foreign students by means of the quality of the programs and educational activities
- Adaptation of education to the needs of society
- Diversification in the offerings of programs for bachelor's degrees, master's degrees and doctorates
- Education centered on the results of the education, on the students and on their personal development
- Realization of an educational system at a European level
- Growing professionalism in evaluating, and developing a culture of evaluating students, professors, researchers and technical personnel
- Development of continuous educational and professional formation programs

3.2. Scientific research management

- Stimulation and sustainment of research activities
- Excellence in scientific research activities
- Exploitation of research results
- Initiation of new research fields
- Growth of research income
- Financial support for research
- Support young researchers in accessing national and international funds
- Growth of competitions at the institutional level, the department level and the individual level, especially for professors and researchers

3.3. Human resources management

- Ensuring proper professional development conditions for professors and administrative personnel
- Involvement of human resources during decision-making processes related to the life of the organization
- Transparency of actions and decisions for the professors

3.4. Administrative management

- Equipment and infrastructure
- Infrastructure of modern research
- Improvement of electronic technology for the administration and formation of it for personnel to ensure optimal usage
- Maintaining a properly sized infrastructure
- Restructuring teaching, learning and research

- Optimally resizing of the effective practice in agreement with financial sources and with employment prospects
- Real estate assets
- Developing powerful research laboratories
- IT implementation of an integrated professional information system

3.5. Financial management

- Consolidation and growth of budgets
- Attracting new financial resources
- Ensuring sustainable financial management that can satisfy the employees' requirements and those for the establishment's development
- Financial discipline in the establishment

3.6. Student relationship management

- Improvement of living conditions, learning opportunities for students and chances for professional integration for graduates
- More involvement in the students' decision processes
- Social services for students

3.7. Global widening

- Global widening of the institution by developing international relationships, foreign language programs and scientific collaborations, especially in European program;
- International exchange of students and professors
- Participation in European programs for university cooperation

3.8. Adjust to society's needs/cooperating with the community

- Development of partnerships with other social actors (education establishments, research institutions, NGOs, traders)
- Integration of the socioeconomic life of the country
- Services for society
- Stable relationships with the labor market
- Taking an active role in the university for the economic and private environment, both inside and outside the country
- Fair access to education
- Efficient collaboration at a local, regional, national and international level
- Improvement of the quality of public service

3.9. University image management

- Consolidation of the institutional culture based on respect and professionalism, by stimulating performance and loyalty for the university
- Obtaining the state of being an excellent, long-lasting educational establishment that is focused on advanced researched and education
- Public establishment that is transparent, responsible and active in community service

- Promoting achievements and the university's image
- Promoting the quality and growth of university prestige

The model presented synthesizes the objectives found in all the analyzed manifests. The model was developed until theoretical saturation occurred, until the moment when, in the coding of the text, new elements were not appearing anymore. It is without doubt that the differentiation of management plans in this model was large, as some of them covered a big part of this classification, while others only tangentially touched in their construction on the formulation of objectives. The level of generalization of objectives was also different. Some candidates presented in their programs both general and specific objectives, as well as specific activities for their fulfillment.
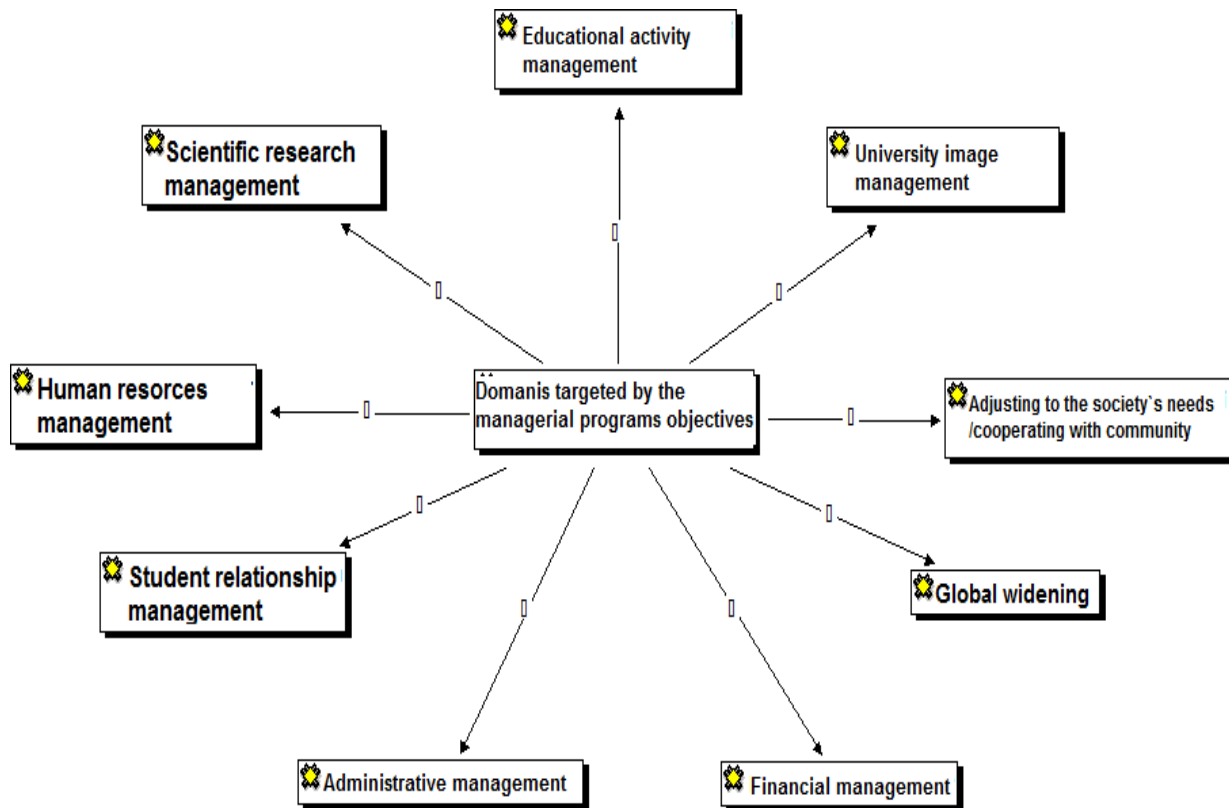

Figure 2. Objective synthetic model.

Based on the categories of this model, we analyzed the texts from the sample from a quantitative point of view. Figure 3 indicates the frequency of intentions referring to objectives in managerial programs.

Feniser, C. & Sadeh, A. (2017). Dimensions of transformational leadership as revealed from managerial planning prospects in higher education. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences.* [Online]. 4(1), pp 123-131. Available from: www.prosoc.eu

Figure 3. Frequency of categories referring to objectives in managerial programs

The objectives mentioned the most frequently are those referring to educational activity and scientific research management, followed by objectives for university image**.**

4. Summary and Conclusions

"Leadership revolves around visions, ideas, directions, and has more to do with inspiring people, giving meaning to their activity direction rather than with day-to-day routine. A leader must be able to leverage more than his own capabilities. He must be capable of inspiring other people to do things without actually sitting on top of them with a checklist" (Bennis, 1989).

The definition of transformational leadership provided by McRoy and Gibbs (2009) was adopted for this study, along with Bennis' (1989) definition of leadership.

A content analysis framework was used and was found to be a useful method to discover and describe interests which focus attention on individuals, groups, institutions or communities. It is clear that the problems addressed by the candidates had multiple facets and were tackled by different point of views. The first step of this analysis was the selection of key terms that generate topics—in other words, terms that associate and create meaning, a coherent representation of a problem or a position towards it**.** Key terms are frequently and constantly used to indicate significations which are full of meaning. In order to identify key terms which generate conceptual themes, we used a specialized program, Hamlet for Windows. Of course, a computerized procedure to choose key terms is based more on the value of the mathematical information than their subjective meaning. It presumes that a word is the indicator of a theme in a text if it has a relatively high frequency rate. For example, in our study, the term "team" had a high frequency rate, something which led us to establish it as an independent variable in the analysis.

One of the objectives of this study was to find out whether certain terms which are characteristic of the transformational leader are present in the text, or in other words, whether they are part of social representation of the aspiring candidates for the role of rector. From the data analysis two suggestive words came out for this concept, namely, team, performance, other terms from this notional sphere (e.g., motivation, success, values, inspiration). Their frequency in the text, however, was not significant enough to create a content category.

The second objective was to identify the main dimensions of planning and of the targets set by them to be realized during their mandate. By overlapping the objectives from all the programs analyzed, we tried to obtain a synthetic model of managerial objectives. From the objectives mentioned by the candidates, we identified nine categories: educational activity management, scientific research management, human resources management, administrative management, financial management, student relationship management, global widening, adjusting to society's needs/cooperating with the community, and university image management.

The objectives mentioned the most frequently by the managers are those from the categories of educational activity management, scientific research management, followed by the objectives for university image.

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