

ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHANGE AMONG TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERS IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Introduction of Objectives: Attitude towards change is one of the fundamental characteristics of an educational leader's personality, and we seek to analyse it from the perspective of transformative leadership.

Methodology/sampling techniques: The research sample consisted of 133 primary school class teachers with an average age of 41 years working in the Banska Bystrica, Zilina and Presov regions. Attitudes to change were measured with the Attitudes to Change questionnaire (Dunham, Grube, Gardner, Cummings & Pierce, 2011), personality structure with the NEO-FFI questionnaire (Ruisel & Hlama, 2007), and individual types of transformational leader behaviour with the questionnaire Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) questionnaire (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). SPSS software was used to process the research data. The study has a quantitative comparative and correlational design.

Findings: the results show that the most open attitude towards change was among female teachers over 40 years of age who scored higher on the Model the way and Encourage the heart types of behaviours, which were also significantly positively associated with attitude towards change.

Conclusion: The present paper could contribute to developing the field of human resource management.

Implication of the study: Occupational psychologists and managers in educational settings could be assisted in developing strategies for change and, in fact, in implementing any change brought about by the transformation of the Slovak education system.

Keywords: *Leaders, teacher leader, followers, Big Five factors.*

1. Introduction

The need for transforming Slovak education along the lines of foreign models is highly topical. Many organisations, not least schools, are striving to improve the quality of their target processes by seeking and developing strong leaders to guide them most effectively through a difficult period of dynamic change. This search is one of the reasons why, in today's world of globalisation, rapid change and competition, schools need to identify and develop leaders who can lead them successfully through any change and under any circumstances. Organisations face increasing competition from new services or products coming onto the market. Similarly, schools need to deal adequately with all the contexts of a pandemic situation, in addition to the speed of technical development, changes in information technology, and the like. This process requires innovation and change, the perception of which must be based on acceptance not as a threat but as a normal part of the organisation's life. The issue of leadership is not a new one in professional circles. This, however, is its establishment in schools and school settings, the necessity of which is reflected in the fact that if teachers adopt certain dispositions, knowledge and skills for leadership, the whole culture of the school will improve and systemic changes in educational institutions will be kick-started. Leaders, who are the engineers of pushing for new strategies and new goals, are excellent at sensing the need for change in an organisation early on. They have a genuine, natural vision and the ability to get the right people behind the necessary changes. They can be leaders at crucial moments and transcend the school's boundaries. Change means something new, surprising, and irregular, but it is also a step into the unknown. Being successful means changing faster than the environment changes. The secret to managing change is how leaders and the organisation can respond to what is happening outside. In a competition, the first to implement the demands of a rapidly changing social and educational environment more efficiently and qualitatively wins. The demands of society are changing rapidly, and the time needed to adequately prepare young people for life in society is shortening. Organisations, and not forgetting schools, rely on so-called 'change leaders' to manage

change. A 'change leader' is a person who sees change as an opportunity, actively seeks it out and can apply it to the organisation at the right time and place. Every true and effective leader is essentially a 'change leader' because a constantly changing environment is a natural part of any organisation. The task of leading change may arise because the leader has identified the need for it, or it may have arisen by a decision of a superior authority. However, the fact remains that change management requires a wide range of managerial and leadership skills, abilities and, not least, personal dispositions.

Oreg and Berson (2011), who discuss employee attitudes towards change, state that leaders who openly value novelty, reward innovation, and stimulate creative thinking among their followers are more likely to encourage organisational change and thus lead employees to embrace change. Whereas leaders who attach importance and priority to rigorous procedures, stable and less risky actions of employees create an environment in which employees develop negative attitudes towards organisational change. Tabaka and Barr (1999) addressed a similar theme, suggesting that change managers' self-confidence, ability to accomplish the task and tolerance for risk may influence their intention to adapt to potential new technologies. These results highlight the significant impact of personality differences on strategic decision-making processes and outcomes. Several authors emphasise that the attitudes of organisational members can play an important role in whether workers support or resist change (Tuckman, 1965). In terms of individual well-being, general resistance to change may be important because it may indicate that a person feels threatened by change. Therefore, it seems desirable to be able to assess the extent to which employees respond favourably or unfavourably to job changes.

Organisation development specialists often recommend an organisational diagnosis prior to a change. A behavioural checklist has been developed that focuses on past behaviour in coping with organisational change. Past behaviour is often a good predictor of future behaviour. Such a tool can be helpful in change management. However, Ajzen (1987) notes that attitudes are often a better predictor of future behaviour than past behaviour. Therefore, an instrument that assesses attitudes towards change is handy. Such an instrument could be an important part of periodic attitude surveys and would be used as part of the diagnostic process conducted prior to implementing organisational change. In addition, some instruments have been developed that assess attitudes towards change in general or a particular area, such as work-related activities.

2. Design

The change agent in the team should be the leader, whose attitude often determines how they communicate the change to their followers and how they will perceive it. Kouzes and Posner (2002) found that employees put up less resistance to change if they are provided with reliable information that allows them to make their own judgments about the need for change. Anxiety and a slight level of resistance are considered typical reactions of employees after learning that an employer is planning a major change to the traditional work environment (Fyock, 1990; Schermerhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 1991; Tuckman, 1965). Therefore, it is essential that the leader has a positive attitude towards change and is a leadership personality.

3. Objectives

Our research aimed to determine how and whether attitudes towards change are related to leaders' personality factors and gender.

VO1: Will a leader's personality factors in education be related to their attitudes towards change and the specific type of transformational leader behaviour?

VO2: Will there be gender differences in the personality factors of a leader in education, their attitude to change and the specific type of behaviour of a transformative leader?

4. Methods

The study has a quantitative comparative and correlational design. The Big Five personality factors were identified using the 60-item version of the NEO-FFI (Ruisel & Hlama, 2007). The five scales (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) comprise 12 items. Cronbach's alpha, for each factor, ranges from .67 for the Agreeableness factor to .86 for the Extraversion factor.

To measure employees' attitudes towards organisational change, we were inspired by the instrument from Dunham, Grube, Gardner, Cummings and Pierce (*Attitudes to Change* - 2011). Their questionnaire was adapted for the research using a dichotomous Likert scale with YES/NO options

instead of a 7-point Likert scale. The questionnaire contains 18 items, the sum of which reflects the overall attitude towards change (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). The research instrument also allows for the calculation of three dimensions of attitude toward change - six items each on the cognitive dimension, the affective dimension, and the behavioural dimension. We did not work with these dimensions in our research.

We measured the different types of transformational leader behaviours using the *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The LPI is an inventory that focuses on analysing five main types of leadership behaviours: 1) Showing the way; 2) Inspiring with a shared vision; 3) Encouraging activity; 4) Enabling others to grow, and 5) Encouraging with the heart. The questionnaire consists of a 30-item self-assessment inventory in leadership skills, with six items for each leadership skill area, in which respondents rate their behaviours on a 10-point Likert scale. The sum of each leadership area is an extra score, which can take values from 6 to 60. The reliability of the questionnaire, as measured by Cronbach's alpha for each component, took values ranging from .69 to .83.

The research population consisted of 133 teacher-leaders at different levels of management with a mean age of 41yrs. (86 females and 47 males). The selection was guided by the criterion of availability and conducted during March 2022 online to educational leaders who agreed to participate in the research. The research data were processed using SPSS Statistics version 19. The normality of the distribution of the variables was assessed by describing the shape of the distribution (*skeweness, kurtosis*). Since the data did not show the characteristics of a normal distribution, we used non-parametric statistical methods in their processing.

5. Results

Gender differences were analysed using the Mann-Whitney U - test, and the relationship between attitude to change and Big Five personality factors were analysed using Spearman's correlation analysis. We found the following correlations between the Big Five factors and attitude toward change: Neuroticism ($r_s=.03$; $p=.81$), Extraversion ($r_s=-.15$; $p=.34$), Openness to Experience ($r_s=-.09$; $p=.14$), Agreeableness ($r_s=-.15$; $p=.27$); and Conscientiousness ($r_s=.09$; $p=.57$). Based on our research findings, we conclude that our research did not support a statistically significant relationship between attitude towards change and the Big Five personality factors. Similarly, we analysed the relationship between the different types of leader behaviours and attitudes to change through Spearman's correlation coefficient. We found the following relationships: Model the way ($r_s=.11$; $p=.32$); Inspire a shared vision ($r_s=.27$; $p=.12$); Challenge the process ($r_s=.24$; $p=.10$); Enable others to act ($r_s=.22$; $p=.31$); **Encourage the heart ($r_s=.32$; $p=.04$)**. Hence, only Encourage the way type behaviours had a weak positive statistically significant correlation with attitude towards change.

Concerning gender differences, the arithmetic mean was higher for females, indicating that females perceive change more positively. However, this difference is not statistically significant ($Z = -.48$; $p = .59$). Thus, we can conclude that our respondents do not show a gender difference in attitudes towards change

In an attempt to answer the second research question, we found the following gender differences in the Big Five personality factors: Neuroticism ($Z=-.04$; $p=.59$), Extraversion ($Z=-1.25$; $p=.21$), **Openness to Experience ($Z=-2.91$; $p=.03$)**, **Agreeableness ($Z=-2.23$; $p=.02$)** and Conscientiousness ($Z=-.35$; $p=.67$). Thus, the statistically significant difference was only in Friendliness and Conscientiousness in favour of women. The gender differences in each type of leadership behaviour were as follows: **Model the way ($Z=-1.99$; $p=.05$)**, Inspire a shared vision ($Z=-1.54$; $p=.12$), Challenge the process ($Z=-.82$; $p=.42$), Enable others to act ($Z=-1.52$; $p=.12$), **Encourage the heart ($Z=-2.38$; $p=.02$)**. The Mann-Whitney U-test showed statistically significant significance in the model and encourage procedures in favour of women. Thus, we conclude that women in leadership positions show more of their values, set an example to employees through their behaviour, celebrate their victories, and value their ideas more.

6. Discussion

The main aim of our research was to investigate the relationships between the Big Five personality factors in leaders and their attitudes towards change. However, statistically significant relationships were not demonstrated in our dataset. We hypothesise that the results may have been influenced by the specificity of the educational reality in Slovakia, where leaders in schools are primarily tasked with communicating commands and changes from senior management but are not themselves change-makers and innovators. The group's diversity may have resulted in this, which is inconsistent with previous studies.

Regarding gender, women only score better statistically significant results in the agreeableness and conscientiousness factors. Our results are consistent with other studies that report that women are more agreeable, extraverted, and conscientious and score higher on the neuroticism factor. Feingold (1994) reports that in no country did men score higher than women on the neuroticism factor. Our research also confirms this, but the difference was not statistically significant. Regarding differences in leadership style, in all five practices described in the LPI questionnaire, women scored higher. However, there were statistically significant differences in only two practices. Model the way, characterised by a leader who follows this practice, clarifies their personal values and leads by example. The other practice was Encourage the heart, and thus a leader who uses this practice values the contributions of others, celebrations, values and victories. Our results are also consistent with the research result of Dunham et al. (1989), which argues that women's leadership style, in contrast to that of men, is more people-based and can be described as a modelling style, i.e. a style in which the leader is the role model. It further states that women set clear expectations and rewards. In their study, Zenger and Folkman (2012) found that when initiative, self-development, honesty and drive for results are taken into account, women are more skilled and competent than the opposite sex.

7. Conclusion

Regarding personality traits, four factors may be relevant to organisational change: openness to experience, which practically defines adaptation to change (Costa & McCrae, 1994). People with high extraversion tend to disclose their views on change and may gain useful influence. Agreeableness and conscientiousness indicate that people are likely to show goodwill in embracing change and will try their best to succeed (Watson & Clark, 1997). Agreeableness describes people as good, kind-hearted, and good-natured, avoiding tensions and disagreements in the workplace (Costa and McCrae, 1992). It is also a variable predicted to be related to positive attitudes towards change. For example, employees with high agreeableness scores are expected to be less resistant and more likely to try to follow new policies and procedures that may be applied to organisational change. The trait of conscientiousness, which describes people with self-discipline, ambition and competence (Costa and McCrae, 1992), is expected to be positively correlated with positive attitudes towards change because employees scoring high in this dimension are conscientious and tend to adhere strictly to the policies and responsibilities established by management. Our results indicate that women score higher in every factor, significantly so in the agreeableness and conscientiousness factors. In conclusion, regarding personality traits, women should perceive change better.

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