Transformational Leadership Impact on Employee Motivation and Performance in the Public Sector

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and Leadership

By

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Abstract

Transformational Leadership Impact on Employee Motivation and Performance in the Public Sector

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Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and Leadership

Over the years, leadership in the public sector has been discussed as a significant component of effective management. The public sector faces challenges regarding increasing motivation and performance because an effective leadership style has not yet been identified. Research shows that the leadership style that a manager exhibits is a key to having a positive influence on motivation and performance. The aim of this study is to investigate the importance of leadership on motivation and performance with a focus on transformational leadership in the public education system. Transformational leadership is a leadership model that inspires employees to focus on the greater good. Transformational leaders motivate employees to rise above their self-interests to better the organization and exceed their expected performance. The study will adopt a concurrent triangulation mixed-methodology approach focusing on analyzing superintendents’ and principals’ perceptions of leadership. The survey responses will provide important qualitative and quantitative data on motivation and performance in the public education. Data will be collected from 300 employees working at 20 different K-12 school districts with locations in the East San Gabriel Valley Los Angeles County. The study will provide useful perspectives on school districts’ leaders to enhance and improve performance outcomes and the public’s quality of services.
Introduction

Public organizations exist to provide services to their citizens. They play a vital role in delivering public services. They must effectively respond to the increase in demand to provide quality services to the public. Leaders in the public sector are under pressure to improve service performance with limited budget resources. The prominence of effective leadership is not a recent phenomenon. Research shows that public administration scholars have recognized the importance of leadership to improve public organizations’ performance (Andersen, Heinesen, & Pedersen, 2014; Bellé, 2014; Jensen, Andersen, & Jacobsen, 2019; Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010). Leadership is a critical component to accomplish the organization’s goals. Research shows that the appropriate leadership theory must be applied according to its culture (Van Mart, 2013).

Leadership theories have evolved, and “scholars agree on one thing: They can’t come up with a common definition for leadership” (Northouse, 2019, p. 5). According to Sun and Henderson (2017), effective leadership leads to improved efficiency, better quality goods, and public sector services. Research shows that leadership style and motivation have been found to influence employees’ performance (Andersen, Bjørnholt, Bro, & Holm-Petersen, 2018). However, leaders in the public sector continue to struggle with applying the most effective leadership style and how to motivate public sector employees. Due to its dependency on the type of political system and different management, leadership in the public sector is not clearly defined (Vandenabeele, Wouter, Andersen, LotteBøgh, & Leisink, 2014).

Literature shows that effective leadership promotes a higher level of employee motivation, resulting in performance outcome improvement. According to Bellé (2014), Caillier (2014), and Jensen (2018), leadership is considered an essential factor in public organizations to stimulate motivation to work together to achieve the organization’s mission, vision and goal. It is
crucial to understand how public administration leadership could effectively improve performance and meet its stakeholders’ expectations. However, there are not enough studies to effectively suggest a specific leadership style to improve performance or ensure quality education. To address this gap, twenty K-12 school districts located within the East San Gabriel Valley Los Angeles County will be selected to learn about their leadership styles, motivation, and performance. This study will examine the interaction between superintendents’ leadership in these K-12 school districts and relate it to motivation and performance.
**Background**

The evolution of education reforms in California started in 1996. School districts and the California Department of Education have focused on improving student learning. School districts are a formation of multiple schools operating as a single purpose governmental entity to provide public educational services at the local level (California Department of Education, 2020). The biggest challenge facing school districts today is the state accountability pressure to improve student test performance with limited budget resources and unfunded mandates. School district leaders have to implement complex education policies, resolve chronic student absenteeism, minimize student-declining enrollment, promote stakeholders’ engagement, operate with financial challenges, and deliver high-quality education.

Additionally, education stakeholders are diverse and very opinionated about how their local school district’s education systems should look. School districts have personnel in charge of instructional and operational services such as principals, teachers, secretaries, fiscal manager, warehouse clerks, bus drivers, and janitors within their multiple schools. The wide range of locations and activities at a school district can create disconnect between employees. For example, schools’ and teachers’ practices between each school could be different due to different students' needs. Leadership strategies between each school principal could be different due to their organizational climate. Parents and teachers could also have different opinions on children’s education needs between each school. District leaders must understand stakeholders’ (teachers, students, parents, bus drivers, secretaries, principals) expectations of the students’ educational needs to share a common understanding due to school districts being completely responsible for students’ learning success.
The board of education establishes the district’s vision. It provides leadership, policy direction, monitoring, approval of district finances, and broad goals to the superintendent (Spain, 2016). The superintendent must implement strategies to realize these goals based upon the expectations of the board of education. However, many of the board members are not educators. Consequently, their goals may not coincide with other stakeholders’ goals. Their backgrounds diverge widely, and range from small business owners, retired teachers to a former parent. The superintendent’s leadership role is to lead and guide all stakeholders towards the district’s vision and motivation to achieve common goals and outcomes. The superintendent is expected to be responsible for his performance, demonstrate innovation, develop human capital, and create new teaching/operation resources to meet the district’s stakeholders’ expectations effectively. The leadership role of the superintendent has evolved over the years due to the increased focus on accountability. The superintendent must exercise effective leadership with a clear sense of purpose and goals to motivate employees to manage change.

In terms of finances, the Great Recession of 2008 affected school districts’ demographics and budgets (Strunk & Marianno, 2019). It impacted school districts’ funding, public policy, focus, and culture. Notably, the recession fueled the exacerbation of inequalities in student outcomes and achievement. According to Strunk and Marianno (2019), students from low-income and disadvantaged groups suffered the most. Whereas most teachers sought collective bargaining because they suffered from salary cuts or district could be forced into a dramatic reduction in workforce. For example, the Oakland district leadership approved an immediate cut in the budget by $20 million (Strunk & Marianno, 2019). These cuts helped the district to avoid fiscal insolvency. Budget constraints are not unique to school district leaders. Other leaders in
the public sector operate with limited budget resources aiming to deliver quality services to the public.

Effective leadership is critical to school district leaders to inspire all stakeholders to achieve the district’s goals, foster employees’ commitment, and motivate employees to exceed their expected performance. Education is a necessity and more critical than ever. The public expects their local schools to prepare them with quality education to enter into the local and global workforce. School leaders have to provide adequate guidance and support to employees to accomplish this end.
Review of the Literature

Scope of literatures have explored the model of transformational leadership in the public sector; investigating the viability of the approach, its dimensions, influence on subordinates/employees, effects on performance, and overall impact on motivation (Asencio & Mujkic, 2016; Jacobsen & Andersen, 2015; Bellé, 2014; Sun & Henderson, 2017; Lambright, 2015). For example, Asencio and Mujkic’s (2016) study established that the values and behaviors that characterize transformational leadership are critical in building higher interpersonal trust levels between the leader and the subordinates. On the other hand, Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) assert the value of transformational leadership in stimulating employees and effectual changes in their beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. The transformational leader does so by espousing the organization’s collective outcomes, which would appeal to everyone. Equally, Bellé (2014) adds to the gamut of research on transformational leadership by conducting a field experiment that seeks to determine the model’s effect on performance and public service motivation (PSM). Indeed, a review of these studies offers a wealth of information to guide the bearing of the essay subject, determine the types of methodologies to be used, and help draw key conclusions that would contribute to the research body. However, and more importantly, the literature review identifies the basic tenets of transformational leadership and classifies them into thematic areas within which the assessment is done; that is, leadership in general, dimensions, mission valence, employee perceptions, performance effects, and motivation.
Leadership

The topic of leadership continues attracting scholars in public administration due to its ability to motivate employees’ performance (Andersen et al., 2018; Asencio & Mujkic, 2016; Bellé, 2014; Nielsen, 2014; Van Wart, 2013). Since this study focuses on performance improvement for school districts, Vandenabeele et al. (2014)’s exploration of leadership in the public sector is tremendously insightful. Vandenabeele et al. (2014) identify the public sector as an area of concern for leadership. Significantly, today’s management of the public sector usually falls into the trap of mimicking the private sector. The danger of mimicking the private sector is eventual mire into parochialism and exceptionalism. The private sector is usually profit-driven versus the public sector is less profit-centric, and rather performance-driven (Vandenabeele et al., 2014). According to Vandenabeele et al. (2014), the public sector needs a more contingent approach to leadership. In another research, Van Wart (2013) examines five different leadership theories and their impact on the public sector and public policy; classical management and role theory, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, horizontal or collaborative leadership, and ethical and critical leadership. Van Wart’s (2013) framework of analyzing the five theories is valuable for this research. The framework particularly observes the five theories through the lens of five parameters; getting results, leading followers, leading organizations, leading systems, and leading with values (Van Wart, 2013). Out of the five theories, Van Wart (2013) observes that transformational leadership stands out in the public sector. The concept of transformational leadership was developed by James Burns (1978) and later Bernard M. Bass (1985), “which has since been highly influential particularly in the generic leadership literature” (Andersen et al., 2018, p. 677). Other studies investigate the impact of transformational leadership to the public sector. As such, the Asencio and Mujkic (2016) study is
valuable because the duo found out that transformational leadership behaviors build higher interpersonal behaviors than transactional leadership. The findings showed that employees who agreed to strongly agreed that they trusted their leaders, pointed out to the role that transformational leadership behaviors (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) played in building their trust. On the other hand, those who supported transactional leadership were appealed to the contingent reward system. However, as the study shows, inspiration and motivation could be more impactful than the reward system; thereby alluding to the significance of transformational leadership in the public sector. In fact, Jensen, Andersen and Jacobsen (2019) recommend that leaders need to inspire and motivate their employees beyond their self-interest, which is for the public’s good.

Public managers are recognized as leaders who possess organizational authority. However, public managers are also constrained (Oberfield, 2014). For example, school district leaders need support from not only subordinates but all stakeholders. School district leaders have to influence strong groups such as bargaining unions and the board of education. Oberfield (2014) explains that transformational leadership can influence followers because transformational leaders have the potential to shape their behavior by developing a compelling vision. According to Oberfield (2014), transactional leadership has limited potential to inspire, therefore leaders adopt transformational leadership. Oberfield (2014) explains that “Bass sees these leadership styles as complementary” (p. 412). Literature shows that there are many leadership dimensions, leading public leaders to the uncertainty of selecting one. It appears that leadership style depends on a specific situation. These findings are critical in evaluating the hypothesis of this study. However, these studies still lack one leadership style that is effective in the public sector. The following
subsections would highlight thematic study findings that support the defining characteristics of transformational leadership.

**Dimensions of Transformational Leadership**

The four dimensions of transformational leadership commonly referred to as the 4 I’s, form the core of this leadership model because they establish the relationship between the individual leader and the subordinate. Each dimension has a given influence on the subordinate. For example, in the Idealized Influence (II) dimension, the leader acts as the role model. He lives the leadership style, walks the walk, and serves the subordinates to make them adherents and followers. Through idealized influence, the subordinates would be loyal and entirely trusting the leader. They often realize how the leader values them, putting the subordinates’ needs before their own.

I. Idealized Influence (II)

Transformational leaders serve as role models embodying the qualities they would want their subordinates to adopt. Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) study observes that leadership is in the eye of the beholder. Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) advance the concept of employee perceptions and how it influences organizational performance. Perceptions are established through the processes of influence and idealization. According to Andersen et al. (2018) and Sun and Henderson (2017), employees could perceive leadership practices that they see their leaders embody. In view of Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) findings, most leaders who were using transformational leadership tended to overrate their leadership qualities. More importantly, Jacobsen and Andersen (2015) identified that the more the school principals overrated themselves, the higher the teacher perceptions about their leadership qualities. In another study, Grasse, Heidbrefer and Ihrke (2014) found that there is a continuous effort for public leaders to
assess their leadership credibility. They recommend public managers to utilized feedback from subordinates. A transformational leader with idealized attributes displays a sense of power, confidence, and the importance of credibility (Grasse et al., 2014). Achieving positive perceptions among employees requires a positive influence. The transformational leadership approach usually involves leaders stimulating their subordinates and other employees to change their perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors. According to Andersen et al. (2018), Jacobsen and Andersen (2015), and Sun and Henderson (2017), this makes transformational leadership different from the transactional model. These results support the idea of influencing followers by building positive attitudes, perceptions, and assumptions critical in transformational leadership and the public sector.

II. Inspirational Motivation (IM)

Bellé (2014) and Van Wart (2015) studies conceive transformational leadership as leading to make a difference. According to Bellé (2014), transformational leadership is inspirational and motivational. Van Wart (2015) states that the transformational factor IM results in employees’ collaboration and exceeding self-interests. The model consists of influential factors that motivate public employees’ performance, whereas motivating them to work on a purposeful basis. For instance, Bellé (2014) notes that transformational leaders usually speak inspiring messages to employees and their subordinates, which motivates them to deliver on their mandate. When subjecting employees to the model of transformational leadership, Bellé (2014) noted that participants who were made to understand the impact they were making in other people’s life, performed remarkably in their work. The results implied that transformational leadership inspired greater job performance.
III. Individualized Consideration (IC)

A fundamental example of individualized consideration is found in Walsh, Dupre & Arnold (2014). In this dimension, the transformational leader shows concern for the subordinates’ needs and feelings and endeavors to actualize them. These needs could range from physical, emotional, or psychological ones. In retrospect, Walsh et al. (2014) study explores the processes through which transformational leaders could influence the psychological health of their subordinates. In the current dispensation where mental health has become a major problem in society, people are vulnerable to psychological needs. According to Walsh et al. (2014), when transformational leaders empower the psychological health of their subordinates, they influence their positive perceptions regarding the organization. The psychological influence increases the person’s well-being, thereby addressing a genuine concern, and developing the follower to become more efficient, effective, reliable, and fruitful at work. For Walsh et al. (2014) study, psychological empowerment is central in reinforcing the employees’ positive behavior. It helps the individual develop meaning, self-determination, impact, and competence, cognitions that foster well-being and positive behaviors (Walsh et al., 2014). A transformational leader’s goal is to meet all the needs and concerns of subordinates, from health to personal development.

IV. Intellectual Stimulation (IS)

The IS dimension has not been the subject of extensive research. Lambright and Van Wart (2015) study is critical in evaluating intellectual stimulation among transformational leaders. Although transformational leadership's intellectual stimulation characteristics postulate a scenario in which the leaders adopting this model can stir employees to creativity and innovation, Lambright and Van Wart (2015) study does not give meaningful results. In terms of intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders are believed to drive change, provide a plan,
build internal support, provide relevant resources, encourage innovation, provide support, pursue change, and challenge the status quo (Caillier, 2014; Jensen et al., 2019; Oberfield, 2014). These findings suggest further research on the effect of the four dimensions of transformational leadership in various public sectors with different goals and different countries.

**Transformational Leadership and Mission Valence**

According to Oberfield (2014) and Van Wart (2013), leaders are expected to facilitate change in both the mission and vision. Jensen, Moynihan, and Salomonsen (2018) and Wright, Moynihan and Pandey (2012) explore the relationship between transformational leadership, public service motivation (PSM), and mission valence. Particularly, Wright et al. (2012) identify the role of transformational leadership in developing organizational behavior. The leadership model empowers, motivates, and inspires employees to realize the essence of supporting the values of an organization. In this case, transformational leadership in school districts could empower teachers and the entire board of education to improve the district's quality of learning. In a study of 1,322 senior managers' responses, Wright et al. (2012) established in their finding a significant but indirect effect of transformational leadership on mission valence. Jensen et al. (2018) and Wright et al. (2012) indicate that the mission valence and its appeal to the employees are critical in enhancing the quality of service provision and overall performance. Transformational leaders, therefore, are apt to reinforce the positive mission valence but only through PSM and goal clarity (Wright et al., 2012). Andersen, Heinesen and HolmPedersen (2014) and Paarlberg and Lavigna (2010) assert that employees' public sector motivation depends on the ability to align them with their values, the values of the leader, the values of the organization, and those of the collective. Such alignment usually takes place through the processes of socialization and selection. Furthermore, transformational leaders usually
communicate a strong vision and mission to employees, evoking compelling emotions in them. With this strong vision, mission, and values in mind, the employees are readily aligned with the sector's organizational ideology.

**Influencing Employee Perceptions of Goal Clarity**

A host of literature such as Nielsen (2014) and Jacobsen and Andersen (2016) has explored how transformational leadership influences employee perceptions. Whereas Jacobsen and Andersen (2016) postulated the effect of employee perceptions on performance, Nielsen (2014) explores the implication of perceived managerial authority on goal clarity and performance. Conventionally, and in the public sector, there is a general perception that the degree of managerial authority determined the quality of performance. Of course, the leaders have the fundamental requirements to create this perception among employees. They help the employees to conceive the existence of managerial authority in the leadership docket. The perceptions that the leader has such an authority to lead, make decisions, fire, and recruit, and much more would influence employees to articulate the organization's goals and their own goals so that they could meet the demands of the leader.

However, managerial flexibility is also critical in creating perceptions within which employees could perform or underperform. Caillier (2014) states that “setting goals that are both difficult and specific is consistent with the nature of transformational leaders” (p. 222). Overall, Nielsen (2014) establishes that employees' perceptions are important in guiding the clarity of their goals in an organization. These findings suggest that transformational leadership clarifies an entity's goals, which could be appealing to employees, thereby motivating them to support these goals in public service. These studies show that goal clarity is dependent on leadership. Transformational leadership can motivate employees to attain goals by focusing on collective
interests instead of self-interest. However, there is lack of research on the intersection of transformational leadership and employees' perceptions of goals' attainability.

**Performance Effects of Transformational Leadership in the Public Sector**

Many researchers have studied the impacts and relationships of leadership style with employee performance (Andersen et al., 2014; Bellé, 2014; Caillier, 2014; Jacobsen & Andersen, 2015; Jensen, 2018; Sun & Henderson, 2017). According to Jensen (2018), transformational leadership presents one way to promote values through articulation. Public service employees need to experience that their work impacts society's well-being to have positive effects on performance. Jensen (2018) states that motivation increases the organization's performance and transformational leaders influence employees' motivation. Sun and Henderson (2017) aver that leaders are important actors in public performance. However, Sun and Henderson (2017) point out a gap in the literature, a clear indication of the leadership processes and models that could make a difference in public sector performance. The study depicted the four dimensions of transformational leadership and established that the use of transformational leadership in schools, especially by the principals, positively affected the students' grades. Through transformational leadership, the principals affect purposeful performance in which they inspire, motivate, stimulate, and empower students to perform well (Sun & Henderson, 2017). These studies demonstrate how transformational leadership has a positive effect on job performance. However, there is still not enough experimental evidence on the cause and effect.

**Public Sector Motivation (PSM)**

According to Caillier (2014), PSM has been linked to employee retention and performance due to its positive impact on motivation. Caillier’s study (2014) collected 778 surveys from local, state, and federal government employees. The study found a positive
correlation between PSM and performance. However, the findings suggest that PSM did not moderate the relationship between transformational leadership and performance due to employees with high PSM already having the motivation to serve the public. Caillier (2014) suggests more research to understand how to increase performance for employees with high PSM. Transformational leadership motivates employees to improve performance by establishing clear goals. However, the goal may not motivate employees with high PSM because it is not aligned with their passion, reducing their individual performance (Caillier, 2014). Caillier (2014) and Bellé (2014) seem to agree that there is still not enough experimental research on the cause and effect between PSM and job performance. Bellé (2014) conducted an experimental study with 138 nurses at a public hospital in Italy. Nurses were exposed to PSM and job performance with two conditions: beneficiary contact or self-persuasion interventions. The findings show a positive effect on employee job performance, including nurses with high PSM. After making contact and seeing the effect they have made on their beneficiaries, nurses increased their persistence, productivity, and focus (Bellé, 2014).

Paarlberg and Lavigna (2010) investigate transformational leadership's effect on public sector motivation on driving individual and organizational performance. This study's critical concept is to establish how public service motivation enhances performance, and not really, what motivates public servants. The study draws on the concepts of transformational leadership as an essential condition for the effective harnessing of public organizations' performance of managers to influence their employees (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010). One of the key elements of transformational leaders is the aptitude to pursue their employees' interests, thus transcending the leaders' own interests. Prioritizing the employees' interests makes them realize their value within the public sector. This prioritizing, in turn, highly motivates them. However, Paarlberg and
Lavigna (2010) indicate the need for modeling the public service motivation. Transformational leadership helps model public service motivation because it makes its moral values and ideals attractive to employees. These studies demonstrate a better understanding between PSM and performance. However, Andersen et al. (2014) found that a gap remains concerning performance. Literature shows that public sector employees will not be motivated if the organizational goals are not linked to their values. More research on PSM needs to be completed to better understand the mechanisms that make PSM work. It is crucial to understand what motivates employees when working within the public sector since their work can positively or negatively influence someone else's life.

**Literature Research Gap**

Based on the literature, it is assumed that the leadership style that works for one public organization may fail in another. The diversity among employees within the K-12 school districts is continually changing and increasing. A more extensive sampling of K-12 school districts is needed to understand the dynamics between leadership’s styles and their employees’ motivation. Paarlberg and Lavigna (2010), recommend researchers conduct more observations of transformational leadership effects on individual employees and public organizations’ motivations and practices. Andersen et al. (2018) state that transformational leadership may not have the same effect in different public organizations. Besides, literature shows little to no data identifying the effective leadership style for a school district leader in the East San Gabriel Valley Los Angeles County.
Literature Review Summary

From the literature, public administrators can determine that leadership in the public sector is a complex concept. Public leaders are required to use a leadership style that will afford the accountability results of performance. Literature shows that transformational leadership is positively associated with organization performance (Bellé, 2014; Caillier, 2014; Oberfield, 2014; Sun & Henderson, 2017; Wright et al., 2012). Transformational leaders have an advantage in improving employees’ PSM due to their ability to increase employees’ perception of attractiveness to the organization’s purpose (Bellé, 2014; Jensen et al., 2018; Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010). The findings show that transformational leadership does contribute to motivation and performance in different public organizations. However, studies are complex with contradicting findings. Andersen et al. (2018) recommend reformulating the concept of transformational leadership to understand better the idea of transforming. According to Van Wart (2013) when a leader’s passionate efforts become egotistical, transformational leadership can be dangerous. Andersen et al. (2014) support that PSM is relevant for performance, but future research should firmly establish their association. Oberfield’s (2014) study discusses the implications of transformational and transactional leadership strategies and found that transactional leadership has limited potential to inspire, therefore leaders adopt transformational leadership. Literature suggests that transformational leadership positively influences public organizations' performance, yet there is still insufficient experimental evidence on the cause and effect. Besides, the studies’ results demonstrate low generalizability to apply to a school district. Literature shows little to no data identifying the effective leadership style for a school district leader in the East San Gabriel Valley Los Angeles County. Further research is needed to understand the relationship between superintendents’ and principals’ transformational leadership

**Research Question and Aim**

What leadership style is the most effective in the East San Gabriel Valley school districts to improve employees’ motivation? The aim of the study is to first, understand the superintendents’ practices and how effective these practices are from their own perspective. From a qualitative standpoint, superintendents will be able to express their experiences and perceptions of leadership. The second goal is to compare the motivation of employees who perceive their superintendent to be using techniques associated with the transformational leadership style and examine if there are significant differences in their self-perceived motivation levels.
Research Design

This study will adopt a mixed research methodology following a concurrent triangulation approach in which quantitative and qualitative forms of collecting data will be employed. The study’s two-section data collection instruments will be a qualitative interview utilizing open-ended questions (See Appendix A) and a quantitative survey (See Appendix B and C). The qualitative analysis will provide the study with additional insights and perspectives of K-12 school district leaders. Superintendents will be able to express their experiences and perceptions of leadership. The quantitative analysis will measure the perceived value of motivation and leadership by implementing a five-point Likert-Scale survey. Both instruments will be essential to gain different kinds of knowledge. However, a concurrent triangulation mixed-method approach will best examine both sets of data collections to gain insights and compare results to a more general picture.

The study will be classified into two levels; the district superintendent level and the school principal level. The researcher will visit the district after establishing superintendents’ leadership style. In terms of qualitative methodology, an interview will be used to collect relevant information from the district superintendent's leadership style. About five superintendents who use transformational leadership will be selected to participate, whereas three who use other leadership forms will be used as control variables.

In terms of quantitative methodology, a survey questionnaire will be used to collect data from the superintendents and principals from the 20 selected K-12 school districts. The survey will include questions on leadership such as “My supervisor is clear about the organization goals and what they expect out of assignments given to me” and motivation such as “In my organization, leaders generate high level of motivation and commitment in the workforce” as
well as standard demographic questions. This study will use a quantitative non-experimental and quantitative correlation to show the relationship between the independent variable: leadership style, and the dependent variable: motivation. Descriptive statistics are going to be run and statistical tests will be used to confirm the statistical significance of the results observed.

**Approach**

*Interview/Survey Structure and Delivery*

The population for this study will consist of 300 employees representing 20 superintendents and 280 principals from 20 K-12 school districts. The total number of sample participants per school district will be 15 participants consisting of 1 superintendent and 14 principals. The survey will be a Likert-type 5-point scale questionnaire with 24 questions separated into 3 parts to measure employee motivation and performance with the transformational leader's presence. Section A collects motivation information about the participant; section B consists of leadership style about management; and section C consists of demographic information about the participant. The interview will consist of 9 open-ended questions where the participant can provide details of his or her experience in his or her own words. A request will be made to each school district’s Human Resources (HR) department for permission to conduct this study. Due to HR restrictions, HR and researcher will use a convenience sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling method. With their approval, the researcher will create two emails: first email to be sent to principals describing the survey and its purpose along with contact information for the researcher; the second email to be sent to superintendents describing the interview and survey and its purpose along with contact information for the researcher.
Data Collection

This study will be executed by conducting an open face-to-face interview and a structured survey (See Appendix A, B, C). Superintendents will be the only participants to be interviewed. In order to strengthen validity, the interview will be combined with systematic observations. The interview will allow the researcher to observe behaviors relating to developing, and sustaining visions for the school district, while observing the superintendents’ reflection about these visions. The interview is estimated to be completed in 45 minutes.

The survey will be distributed using SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool, via electronic links delivered directly to participants’ email address to complete the survey. The survey will be open for three weeks to allow the participant ample time to complete the survey. All questions in the survey will be required. The advantage of using an online survey tool is that it is convenient for participants to complete and for the researcher to collect the data. The survey is estimated to be completed in 15 minutes.

This study’s data will be collected over a period of 60 days with occasional email reminders to participants to complete the survey and to confirm interviews.

Data Interpretation

The interviews will be transcribed and coded based on a code list with exact descriptions. The researcher will take field notes to capture the observations. With authorization from the participant, the interviews will be recorded using a voice recorder. During the intake of the interview, a deductive approach will be applied on any common themes referring to the research question: “What leadership style is the most effective in the East San Gabriel Valley school districts to improve employees’ motivation?” The researcher will read through the interviews more than once to gain a general sense of the data. As the researcher reads little sections, he or
she will highlight it if it expresses some ideas, thoughts, or concepts relating to the phenomena and will code it accordingly. The researcher will collapse codes into themes such as collaboration, motivation, adaptability, creativity, inspiration, role model, and goals. In addition, a constant comparative method will be used to examine any theme that emerged from the data. The researcher will use a computer-aided qualitative analysis to increase the efficiency of the coding. The results of the interview will confirm or challenge the findings from the literature.

The survey will be organized using a five-point Likert-Scale that will measure the perceived value of motivation and leadership. The survey responses will test the hypothesis that principals who perceive their superintendent to be using transformational leadership style will exhibit higher levels of motivation. Depending on the data distribution, two or three groups will be created. For example, high scoring on transformational leadership, low scoring on transformational leadership, or non-perception on management’s transformational leadership. Motivation will also be transformed into a low-high ranking category. The two variables will be analyzed using a Chi-square test to determine their correlation.

The researcher will be comparing and contrasting the results from the interview and survey for similarities, differences, and incongruences to validate the results generated by each method. The triangulation process will add to the depth of the findings such as higher ranking score on motivation when transformational leadership style is perceived by principals. It will be compared with the qualitative insights for further validation of the leadership style’s relationship to contextual elements such as collaboration, motivation, inspiration, performance, goals, and vision. The triangulation method will strengthen the validity of the data outcomes.
Discussion

Methodological Implications

The two data collection instruments will be a qualitative interview utilizing open-ended questions and a quantitative survey. The interview answers will be transcribed, coded based on a code list with exact descriptions, and set into themes. The analysis of qualitative data could be very time-consuming. The open-ended questions answers will allow the researcher to gain maximum feedback. However, the researcher has limited experience to conduct a well-directed interview. The environment may require the researcher to repeat the question to obtain the answer. Another implication could be gender differences between female and male participants. The implication of using predetermined questions could prevent participants to respond thoroughly and completely. Additionally, participants’ responses can vary greatly which causes difficulty when coding responses (Blair, 2016). Due to qualitative data being interpretive, Blair (2016) explains the importance of labeling each category with a code based on meaningful parts. The researcher will need to decide what is essential and irrelevant for the data analysis. The three-part survey will be electronically distributed to all participants. The survey questionnaire findings will be compared to find a correlation between employee motivation and performance with the transformational leader's presence. However, the survey results are dependent upon the honesty of the participants. The work experience and knowledge of leadership concepts could vary among participants due to many factors. The interview and survey responses may not reflect participants’ true feelings. The views of the study could be subjective to the views of the literature reviewed. The sample size will be too small to draw generalizable conclusions. Also, time constraints can pose implications for this study.
Ethical Considerations

The privacy and confidentiality of all participants will be a priority throughout the study process. All documentation containing the participants’ names will be shredded by the researcher. All participants will be assured that answers from the interview and survey are voluntary and will not affect their job. Participants will be reminded of their rights to accept or refuse participation. Only the researcher will have access to the data to be collected. The email invitation will include a descriptive explanation of the study for participants to make informed choices and a consent form to be signed and returned to the researcher prior to the receipt of their survey questionnaire and interview.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the study will use ordinal questions with predetermined responses. One of the limitations of using predetermined responses is that the researcher limits the possibility of responses that a respondent can provide. Participants may not express their true feelings on the survey. Predetermined responses prevents participants from providing a more robust and comprehensive response. Another limitation is the possible low amount of data collected due to voluntary participation of the interview and survey. The entire target population may not be represented by the participants who complete the survey. Additionally, the results of the interview and survey are limited to only K-12 school districts within the East San Gabriel Valley Los Angeles County. Results may be different for school districts employees working outside the East San Gabriel Valley Los Angeles County. It is recommended to measure other variables like organizational culture and trust. More descriptive data is needed relevant to the daily experiences of school district leaders. Also, a larger sample size of participants would provide a greater power to allow for greater generalizability.
Significance of this study

The study will focus on how a school district superintendent’s leadership can guide, motivate, and engage stakeholders in performance improvement. Literature shows a gap identifying the specific leadership style a school district leader could implement to support performance. The results could indicate if transformational leadership influences principals’ and employees’ motivation to contribute to the district’s mission. This study will be important to school districts to enhance and improve performance outcomes.
Conclusion

In the public sector, such as public schools and hospitals, the focus of quality leadership provision is to increase learning or health outcomes, performance, and overall quality service provision for the people. How does a public organization ensure that its leaders accomplish these goals? Does transformational leadership promote employees motivation and performance?

The literature points out that effective leadership promotes positive changes to values, attitudes, behaviors, motivation, and performance. Public administrators have a gruesome challenge in today's complex government and must understand the demands being placed upon their leadership. The public sector needs leadership that challenges the status quo, creates visions of the future, and inspires employees to achieve these visions. Due to the public organizations' being cause-driven, transformational leadership is a compelling theory to apply to the public sector because it focuses on inspiring a vision and mission and motivating followers to rise above their personal goals for the organization's greater good. Though, the study findings indicate that transformational leadership promotes motivation and performance in the public sector, the relationship between transformational leadership and the school district system remains incomplete. Andersen et al. (2018), Bellé (2014), Caillier (2014), Jensen et al. (2019), and Paarlberg and Lavigna (2010) suggest that transformational leadership may have more difficult and intricate effects on motivation and performance than anticipated until now.

Studies of transformational leadership in school districts have been limited. Transformational leadership in school district systems could be vital to promote employees' motivation and performance. The results of this study can provide useful perspectives on school districts’ leaders to enhance and improve performance outcomes and the public’s quality of services.
References

https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852316654747

https://www.jstor.org/stable/24484832

https://www.jstor.org/stable/24772946


Appendix A: Interview

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. This interview is voluntary and will assist this study in discovering the predominant leadership styles of current K-12 school district leaders. Your responses will remain confidential and will be destroyed after it is recorded.

1. Could you describe your typical day-to-day work activities?

2. How would you describe your managerial style?

3. How would you describe and define the job of the superintendent to someone unfamiliar with the position?

4. Has the job of the superintendent changed since you first took a job as a superintendent?

5. What expectations do stakeholders (principals, teachers, school board members, other staff, students, and community) have for this position?

6. What are the values and goals of stakeholders (principals, teachers, school board members, other staff, students, and community)?

7. What type of leadership do you think can get staff to do what you want them to do? Why?

8. What kind of person do you think can be a good superintendent?

9. In your opinion, what are the most important attributes of public sector leaders?
Appendix B: Principal Survey

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. Your participation is voluntary and will assist this study in discovering the predominant leadership styles of current K-12 school district leaders. Your responses will remain confidential and will be destroyed after it is recorded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Survey Questions</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
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</table>

**Section A: Motivation**

1. In my organization, leaders generate high level of motivation and commitment in the workforce.
   1 2 3 4 5

2. In my organization, managers/supervisors communicate the goals and priorities of the organization.
   1 2 3 4 5

3. In general, I am excited to go to work every day.
   1 2 3 4 5

4. In general, I am entirely focused on my job task when I am at work.
   1 2 3 4 5

5. I am very involved in my work.
   1 2 3 4 5

6. I am determined to give my best effort every day when I am at work.
   1 2 3 4 5

7. For me, the mission of my employing organization is exciting.
   1 2 3 4 5

**Section B: Leadership**

8. My supervisor helps me develop my strengths.
   1 2 3 4 5

9. At work, I want to be challenged and have the opportunity to solve problems.
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<td>12. My supervisor is clear about the organization goals and what they expect out of assignments given to me.</td>
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**Section C: Demographics**

19. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other (please specify): ____________________________
20. What category below includes your age?
   - Under 18 years old
   - 18-24 years old
   - 35-44 years old
   - 45-54 years old
   - 55-64 years old
   - 65+ years old

21. What is your ethnicity?
   - Black or African-American
   - White
   - American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - Asian
   - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander
   - From multiple races
   - Other (please specify):

22. What is your marital status?
   - Married
   - Widowed
   - Divorced
   - Separated
   - Never married
   - Other (please specify):

23. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
   - Less than high school degree
   - High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
   - Some college but no degree
   - Associate degree
   - Bachelor degree
   - Graduate degree
   - Doctorate degree

24. How long have you been employed with the organization?
   - Less than a year
   - 1-5 years
   - 6-12 years
   - 13-25 years
   - More than 25
Appendix C: Superintendent Survey

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. Your participation is voluntary and will assist this study in discovering the predominant leadership styles of current K-12 school district leaders. Your responses will remain confidential and will be destroyed after it is recorded.

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