

## THE IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON THE INTERNAL GOVERNANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN GUANGZHOU CITY

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### Abstract

The purposes of this research are to: 1) study the level of major factors affecting transformational leadership of higher education institutions in Guangzhou; 2) study the level of major factors affecting internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou; 3) analyze the factors affecting transformational leadership on internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou; and 4) provide recommendation of the development of internal governance of higher education institutions under transformational leadership. The population of this study was faculty members and staffs of higher education institutions in Guangzhou in China. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including percentage, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression analysis. The statistical significance was set at the 0.05 level.

The research found that 1) the level of transformational leadership in higher education institutions in Guangzhou city is high. 2) the level of internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city is high. 3) transformational leadership have positive correlation with internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city and there is a statistically significant at the 0.01 level. and 4) factors of transformational leadership affecting internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city (Y) including Moral Exemplarity (X1), Leadership Charms (X2), Personalized Care (X4), Sense of Work Meaningfulness (X5), Emotional Control (X6), and Intellectual Stimulation (X7). The resulting of regression between transformational leadership and internal governance in higher education institutions in Guangzhou was:

$$Y=0.206+0.173*X1+0.205*X2+0.119*X4+0.17*X5+0.139*X6+0.165*X7$$

**Keywords** : Internal governance; Transformational leadership; Educational administration; Higher Education Institutions

## Introduction

In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, the governance of higher education institutions has emerged as a key focus for organizational development. This study investigates the impact of transformational leadership on internal governance processes within Guangzhou's higher education institutions. Effective internal governance is essential for operational success and educational quality, as improved governance practices correlate with better future development trends for schools (Liu & Yu, 2023).

In the processes of internal governance, continuous reforms are necessary to adapt to changes and optimize educational administration. It is a global trend, particularly in China, have aimed to strengthen administrative management and enhance governance levels in public universities. Over the past thirty years, significant changes have been made to address social, economic, and demographic challenges, enhancing universities' social responsibility (Wang et al., 2021). The 2020 International Forum on Higher Education emphasized the modernization of governance systems, which is crucial for China's transition from a large to a strong educational country (Shao & Xie, 2023). However, higher education institutions globally, and particularly in China, face governance challenges, including conflicts between political and administrative powers and limited management oversight (Li, 2016). Recent inspections have revealed deficiencies in stakeholder participation and power supervision within university governance. Scholars like Tang Junya (2016) and Fan Huaqiang (2022) highlight issues related to ineffective internal power supervision, which necessitate reforms to improve governance processes and integrate technology effectively.

Transformational leadership, characterized by its ability to inspire and motivate, can significantly enhance governance efficiency and educational quality. This leadership style fosters innovation, improves teaching and research capabilities, and cultivates a positive campus culture (Kotter, 2012). By integrating management and leadership practices, institutions can leverage transformational leadership to boost organizational efficacy, innovation capacity, and teamwork (Zhang & Xu, 2023). Young educators often seek innovative development, and transformational leadership can help stimulate their enthusiasm and drive educational innovation.

Despite theoretical backing, the implementation of transformational leadership faces practical challenges, including resistance to change and resource limitations. Effective leaders need emotional intelligence and strong communication skills (Tsai et al., 2012). Building a

human-oriented culture and providing individualized support for teachers are crucial for promoting innovation (Bao, 2023).

Guangzhou's higher education institutions, known for their commitment to quality and innovation, provide a unique context for exploring transformational leadership's role. The diversity in governance structures and leadership styles allows for insights into how transformational leadership influences university governance, particularly in advancing educational quality and innovation.

In summary, this study aims to analyze how leadership attributes, such as moral exemplarity, leadership charisma, vision inspiration, personalized care, sense of work meaningfulness, emotional commitment and intellectual stimulation, can foster effective governance in institution operating mechanisms, teacher development support, organizational culture building, technology integration and application, and research and innovation support. By focusing on internal governance mechanisms through the lens of collaborative governance theory and stakeholder theory, the research will assess how visionary leadership can address challenges. Ultimately, the goal is to identify best practices that can strengthen internal governance structures through transformational leadership attributes.

### **Research objectives**

1. To study the level of transformational leadership in higher education institutions in Guangzhou city.
2. To study the level of internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city.
3. To analyze factors affecting transformational leadership impact internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city.
4. To provide recommendation of the development of internal governance of higher education institutions under transformational leadership

### **Literature Review**

This research aimed to study the impact of transformational leadership on the internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city. The researcher has applied the concepts, theories, and related research to combine various information and important content as a guideline for the research study. which can be summarized as follows:

1. Concepts and theories related to educational administration

### 1.1 Concepts of educational administration

The framework of educational administration emphasizes the systematic management of educational institutions to achieve desired outcomes. According to Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007), educational administration is not just about managing resources, but also about leading people, fostering collaboration, and creating a shared vision.

### 1.2 Organizational behavior theory

Organizational behavior theory provides valuable insights into how individual and group dynamics affect institutional performance. Robbins and Judge (2013) suggest that leadership within an organization significantly shapes behavior, motivation, and productivity. In higher education institutions, Bass and Avolio's (1994) theory of transformational leadership highlights the importance of inspiring employees, fostering a culture of trust, and promoting innovation. These factors are crucial in driving effective internal governance by encouraging active participation and shared responsibility among faculty and staff.

### 1.3 Change management theory

Kotter's (1996) change management theory outlines the processes by which leaders can guide organizations through significant transformations. Effective change management in higher education requires leadership that is both visionary and adaptable. Transformational leaders who apply Kotter's eight-step model, which includes building urgency, forming coalitions, and consolidating gains, are better equipped to address challenges such as financial constraints, faculty development, and resource allocation in educational institutions.

### 1.4 Educational leadership theory

Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) argue that transformational leadership in education focuses on developing the capacity of others through a shared vision and distributed leadership. This theory aligns with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that leaders serve as role models, setting ethical standards that are emulated by followers.

## 2. Concepts related to transformational leadership

### 2.1 Definition of transformational leadership

Transformational leadership refers to a style of leadership where leaders work to inspire and motivate their followers to exceed their own interests for the sake of the organization. This type of leadership is characterized by a high level of influence and inspiration, focusing on developing the potential of followers through personal example, vision, and a strong commitment to organizational change. Burns (1978) first introduced the concept,

distinguishing it from transactional leadership, which is based more on exchanges and rewards for performance. Bass (1985) further refined the concept, highlighting four key dimensions of transformational leadership: leader charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These elements are pivotal in driving organizational innovation, commitment, and change, particularly in complex and dynamic environments like higher education institutions.

## 2.2 Relate content of transformational leadership

The literature on transformational leadership in education often emphasizes its role in facilitating organizational change, improving governance, and fostering a culture of continuous development. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) underscore that transformational leadership in educational settings involves developing a shared vision, setting high expectations, and providing intellectual stimulation to both faculty and students. By fostering a culture of trust and collaboration, leaders can encourage innovation and effective decision-making processes.

In higher education institutions, Caldwell et al. (2002) suggest that transformational leaders drive organizational success by aligning their leadership practices with institutional goals, fostering a climate of openness, and creating opportunities for professional development. Shields (2010) expands on this by linking transformational leadership to social justice, arguing that educational leaders must not only focus on improving performance but also on addressing systemic inequalities within educational governance. This approach is particularly relevant in the diverse and competitive educational landscape of higher institution, where transformational leadership can help balance academic excellence with equitable governance practices.

In terms of governance, Northouse (2018) emphasizes that transformational leaders are not only concerned with organizational performance but also with the well-being of their staff. They work to foster emotional commitment, which has been shown to enhance job satisfaction and organizational loyalty. In the case of higher education institutions, where governance is often distributed across various departments, transformational leadership plays a critical role in unifying different factions, encouraging collaboration, and ensuring alignment with institutional objectives.

## 3. Concepts and theories related to internal governance of higher education institutions

### 3.1 Concepts of internal governance of higher education institutions

Internal governance in higher education institutions refers to the frameworks and processes that shape decision-making among stakeholders such as faculty, administrators, and students. Trowler (2010) emphasizes the importance of clear roles and relationships for accountability and transparency.

### 3.2 Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory, developed by Freeman (1984), posits that organizations must consider the interests of all affected parties, including students, faculty, and the community. This theory highlights the need for balancing diverse stakeholder interests, as noted by Rowley (1997). Engaging stakeholders leads to improved communication and collaboration, driving institutional effectiveness (Bourne and Walker, 2006). This approach aligns with transformational leadership, where leaders who involve stakeholders foster a collaborative environment that promotes shared goals.

### 3.3 Collaborative governance theory

Collaborative governance theory focuses on stakeholder cooperation in decision-making. Ansell and Gash (2008) define it as public agencies engaging non-state stakeholders. Trust and mutual respect are essential for successful collaboration. This theory enhances institutional adaptability to external pressures, as emphasized by Bryson, Crosby, and Middleton Stone (2006). Leaders who encourage collaboration empower stakeholders, enhancing commitment and fostering innovation. Collaborative governance ultimately strengthens institutional resilience, as noted by O'Leary and Bingham (2009).

## Research Conceptual framework

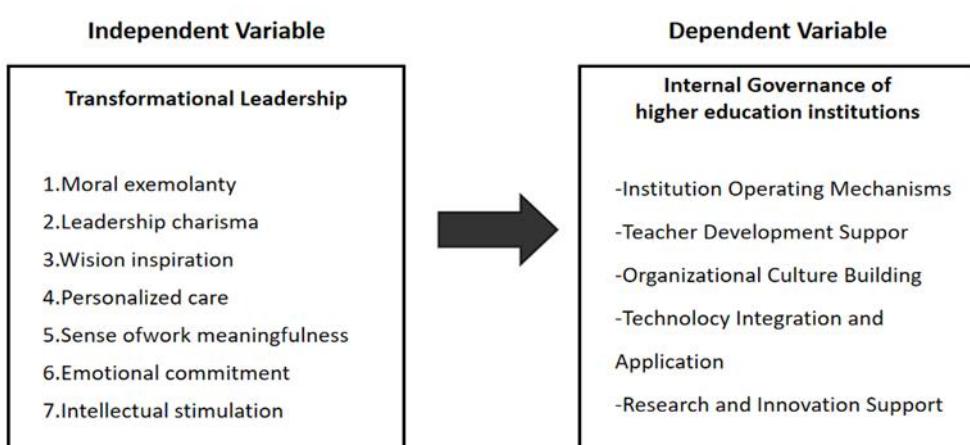


Figure 1: Research conceptual framework

## Research Method

### Population

In 2023, Guangzhou had a total of 12 regular higher education institutions. According to the data published by these institutions on their official websites, these institutions had a total of 18,015 faculty and staff members.

### Sample

The researcher determined the sample size at 95% confidence level by referencing Taro Yamane's (1973) sampling table. The total sample size used in this research was 403 persons and then random sampling was used.

### Research Tools

This research used a questionnaire as a research instrument, which was divided into 4 parts as follows: Part 1 : Questionnaire on the personal factors of the respondents, consisting of 4 questions: 1) the gender of the respondents, 2) the age of the respondents, 3) the teaching or educational experience of the respondents, and 4) the identity of the respondents. Part 2 : Questionnaire on the main factors affecting transformational leadership of higher education institutions in Guangzhou. Part 3 : Questionnaire on the main factors affecting internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou. Part 4: Questionnaire on the factors affecting transformational leadership on internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou.

### Data Analysis

This research The researcher performed the analysis using descriptive statistics, including percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and used inferential statistics using multiple regression analysis and set the statistical significance value at the 0.05 level.

## Research Results

### Part 1 Personal factors of the respondents

Among the 403 respondents, 54.1% are male (218) and 45.9% are female (185). The age distribution shows that 35.7% (144) are between 25-34 years, 30.5% (123) are 35-44 years, 20.6% (83) are 45-54 years, 10.7% (43) are under 25, and 2.5% (10) are 55 or older. In terms of work experience, 36.5% (147) have 3-5 years, 33.3% (134) have 6-10 years, 23.6% (95) have 11-20 years, 4.5% (18) have less than 3 years, and 2.2% (9) have more than 20 years. Regarding titles, 28.3% (114) have no title, 45.2% (182) hold a junior title, 21.3% (86) have an intermediate title, and 5.2% (21) hold a senior title. Most respondents are frontline instructors

(51.4%, 207), followed by administrative staff (20.8%, 84), researchers (21.8%, 88), and other teaching support staff (6%, 24).

**Table1 :** Results of analysis of the level of the key factors affecting transformational leadership of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city.

Transformational Leadership	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Rank
X1 Moral exemplarity	403	3.59	0.948	1
X2 Leadership charisma	403	3.59	0.956	1
X3 Vision inspiration	403	3.53	0.942	4
X4 Personalized care	403	3.49	0.939	5
X5 Sense of work meaningfulness	403	3.46	0.947	7
X6 Emotional commitment	403	3.55	0.954	3
X7 Intellectual stimulation	403	3.49	0.942	5

From Table 1, it was found that moral exemplarity and leadership charisma have the highest average score (mean=3.59), indicating that these two factor have the greatest impact on leadership levels among all factors. Emotional commitment (mean=3.55) also have relatively high average scores, ranking 3rd, showing their significant impact on transformational leadership. Vision inspiration (mean=3.53), intellectual stimulation (mean=3.49), and personalized care (mean=3.49) rank in the middle, indicating their influence on leadership levels is less than the aforementioned factors. Sense of work meaningfulness has the lowest average score (mean=3.46), ranking 7th, suggesting its impact on transformational leadership is relatively minor.

**Table 2 :** Results of analysis of the level of the key factors affecting internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city.

Internal Governance	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Rank
Y1 Institution Operating Mechanisms	403	3.49	0.947	5
Y2 Teacher Development Support	403	3.66	0.939	3
Y3 Organizational Culture Building	403	3.63	0.961	4
Y4 Technology Integration and Application	403	3.74	0.975	1
Y5 Research and Innovation Support	403	3.67	0.961	2

From Table 2, it was found that technology integration and application is the most critical factor influencing internal governance, with the highest average score (mean=3.74). Research and innovation support (mean=3.67) also has a relatively high average score, ranking 2nd, showing its significant influence on internal governance. Teacher development support (mean=3.66) and organizational culture building (mean=3.63) rank 3rd and 4th respectively, indicating their moderate influence on governance levels. Institution operating mechanisms has the lowest average score (mean=3.49), ranking 5th, suggesting its impact on internal governance is relatively minor compared to the other factors.

**Table 3** : Results of factors affecting transformational leadership impact internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city.

	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	Y
X1	1							
X2	.510**	1						
X3	.505**	.526**	1					
X4	.386**	.451**	.435**	1				
X5	.426**	.418**	.413**	.470**	1			
X6	.433**	.406**	.451**	.449**	.332**	1		
X7	.433**	.390**	.472**	.385**	.328**	.467**	1	
Y	.653**	.664**	.597**	.604**	.600**	.598**	.602**	1

From Table 3, there is a significant positive correlation between each of the X variables and Y ( $r = 0.597-0.664$ ), which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The correlations in descending order are as follows: X2 (leadership charisma) has a correlation of 0.664, X1 (moral exemplarity) has a correlation of 0.653, X4 (personalized care) has a correlation of 0.604, X7 (intellectual stimulation) has a correlation of 0.602, X5 (sense of work meaningfulness) has a correlation of 0.600, and X6 (emotional commitment) have a correlation of 0.598.and X3 (vision inspiration) have a correlation of 0.597.

**Table 4 :** Results of analysis of factors affecting transformational leadership impact internal governance of higher education institutions in Guangzhou city.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
...						
6	(Constant)	0.206	0.102		2.015	0.045
	X2	0.205	0.026	0.248	7.796	0.000
	X7	0.165	0.025	0.204	6.725	0.000
	X5	0.170	0.025	0.207	6.808	0.000
	X1	0.173	0.026	0.216	6.762	0.000
	X6	0.139	0.026	0.169	5.433	0.000
	X4	0.119	0.024	0.157	4.979	0.000

From Table 4, the analysis of factors affecting transformational leadership on internal governance in higher education institutions in Guangzhou found that Moral exemplarity (X1), leadership charisma (X2), personalized care (X4), sense of work meaningfulness (X5), emotional commitment (X6), and intellectual stimulation (X7) all had positive effects on internal governance ability, leader charisma. The coefficients showed the extent of the effects of each variable, and all variables were statistically significant, indicating their relevance in explaining the differences in internal governance ability. The resulting regression equation was:

$$Y=0.206+0.173*X1+0.205*X2+0.119*X4+0.17*X5+0.139*X6+0.165*X7$$

## Discussion

The data results indicate that the key to transformational leadership lies in leaders' ability to inspire trust and admiration from team members through moral exemplarity and personal charisma. Emotional commitment also plays an important role in enhancing leadership influence. As noted by Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders foster an environment of trust and respect, which enhances team members' emotional commitment and overall performance. Although factors such as personalized care, intellectual stimulation, and sense of work meaningfulness have less impact, they still contribute to shaping leadership.

For instance, research by Hu et al. (2018) highlights that while personalized care may rank lower in influence, it is essential for creating a supportive work environment that promotes team collaboration and innovation.

Besides, the research results indicate that in the internal governance of higher education institutions, technology integration and application are key factors in improving governance efficiency. This suggests that in the current era of information technology, the adoption and utilization of new technologies by universities play a crucial role in enhancing governance levels. As noted by Teichler (2016), effective integration of technology in higher education can streamline administrative processes, improve communication, and enhance data management, thereby increasing overall governance efficiency. Additionally, teacher development support and research and innovation support are also important aspects that impact internal governance, as they are directly related to improving teaching quality and enhancing innovation capacity. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), targeted professional development for educators is essential for fostering an environment that encourages innovative teaching practices and supports student learning outcomes. Organizational culture building provides a solid cultural foundation for university governance, contributing to a positive campus atmosphere and cohesion. In comparison, the role of institutional operating mechanisms is relatively minor but remains an essential governance element. Therefore, to comprehensively enhance the governance level of higher education institutions, it is necessary to coordinate development in multiple areas, particularly strengthening technology application and teacher support to promote sustainable growth.

In analyzing the relationship between transformational leadership and internal governance in higher education institutions, it is evident that enhancing internal governance requires the comprehensive application of various elements of transformational leadership. The personal charisma of leaders and their moral exemplarity have the most significant positive impact on internal governance, indicating that leaders' role as role models and their ability to inspire are crucial for improving governance efficiency. Moral exemplarity not only enhances team members' sense of trust but also establishes the organization's core values, encouraging members to hold themselves to higher standards in their daily work. The sense of work meaningfulness and intellectual stimulation also positively influence internal governance. By attributing greater meaning to work, leaders can ignite employees' intrinsic motivation, making them more willing to take on responsibilities and challenges proactively. In this process, emphasizing intellectual stimulation, such as encouraging innovative thinking and

diverse solutions, brings more innovation vitality and long-term development potential to the organization. Moreover, the roles of emotional commitment and personalized care in internal governance should not be overlooked. Emotional commitment enhances team members' identification with the organization's goals, facilitating the smooth implementation of organizational changes. Additionally, leaders' attention to the individual needs and career development of employees can increase job satisfaction and a sense of belonging, thereby improving the organization's cohesion and work efficiency.

Although vision inspiration is generally considered an important component of transformational leadership, this study found that its impact on internal governance capacity is not significant. This may suggest that relying solely on vision-driven motivation may not lead to substantial governance improvements in higher education institutions. In practice, implementing vision-based motivation faces numerous challenges, such as a disconnect between the vision and its practical application, insufficient understanding and acceptance of the vision among employees, and a lack of organizational culture and environmental support for the vision, all of which may weaken its effectiveness. Research has shown that the absence of specific action plans and effective communication mechanisms can diminish the impact of vision-based motivation, which aligns with the study by Chen and Kuo (2020), who emphasize the importance of clear communication and consistency of action in the implementation of visions.

## Conclusions

Research indicates that the key to transformational leadership lies in leaders' ability to inspire trust and admiration among team members through moral exemplarity and personal charisma. Emotional commitment also plays an important role in enhancing leadership influence. Although factors such as personalized care, intellectual stimulation, and a sense of work meaningfulness have relatively smaller impacts, they remain significant in shaping leadership. Technology integration and application are considered critical factors in improving the internal governance efficiency of higher education institutions, as appropriate use of technology can optimize administrative processes and enhance communication efficiency. Additionally, teacher development support and research innovation support are essential for improving teaching quality and enhancing innovation capacity, while building a positive organizational culture provides a solid foundation for university governance.

In light of the research findings, higher education institutions should focus on the following points to enhance their internal governance level: First, strengthen leaders' moral exemplarity and personal charisma to create an atmosphere of trust and respect. Second, increase investment in technology application and teacher support to promote sustainable development. Finally, promote the construction of organizational culture to better adapt to change and enhance employees' understanding and acceptance of the vision, thereby improving governance efficiency. When implementing vision-driven motivation, it is important to develop specific action plans and establish effective communication mechanisms to ensure the smooth realization and lasting impact of the vision.

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