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Building resilient school organizations through transformational leadership

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Abstract. In an increasingly complex and unpredictable educational landscape, building resilient school organizations is essential for sustainable success. This paper explores the pivotal role of transformational leadership in fostering organizational resilience within educational institutions. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, inspiration, and a commitment to growth, empowers school leaders to navigate challenges, inspire their teams, and maintain organizational stability during periods of change. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and case studies, this study identifies key leadership strategies that promote resilience, including fostering a shared vision, encouraging innovation, and cultivating a supportive community. The findings suggest that transformational leaders play a critical role in building adaptive capacities and sustaining positive outcomes even amidst adversity. By integrating transformational leadership principles into school management practices, educational leaders can enhance their organizations' resilience, thereby ensuring long-term effectiveness and growth.

Keywords. transformational leadership, resilience, school organizations, educational leadership, adaptive capacity, organizational stability, leadership strategies, sustainable school management

1. Introduction

In the current educational context, characterized by rapid changes and complex challenges, the concept of organizational resilience has become a priority for educational institutions. The ability of schools to adapt to unforeseen situations, respond promptly to crises, and maintain a stable educational environment largely depends on the type of leadership exercised. In this regard, transformational leadership has proven to be an essential element in strengthening organizational resilience.

Transformational leadership involves promoting a shared vision, encouraging positive change, and developing the professional skills of teaching staff through active involvement and continuous collaboration. In school organizations, transformational leaders do not merely motivate the team through transactional rewards, but inspire them to exceed their own limits, enhance their professional abilities, and contribute to achieving common goals. These leaders adopt proactive strategies that help teachers and students cope with changes, adapt to new educational contexts, and maintain a positive organizational culture.

The specialized literature highlights the difference between transformational and transactional leadership, showing that the former is oriented toward the long-term development

of individuals and the group, while the latter focuses more on rewarding immediate performance. According to the research conducted by Bass (1996) and Avolio & Yammarino (2002), transformational leaders in the educational environment not only respond to the immediate needs of teachers and students but actively contribute to building a resilient organizational culture through strategies oriented toward autonomy, collaboration, and mutual support.

Through this paper, we aim to explore how transformational leadership contributes to the resilience of school organizations. We will analyse the strategies used by transformational leaders in various educational contexts and identify best practices that can be integrated into school management to enhance adaptability and continuous development. This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how transformational leadership can support the long-term effectiveness of school organizations while providing practical insights for educational leaders.

2. Literature Review

The concept of transformational leadership was first introduced by Downton (1973) to differentiate revolutionary, rebellious, or reformist leaders from ordinary leaders. However, its conceptualization was truly recognized only with Bass's work (1996), which extended the analysis of transformational leadership from the political domain to other areas such as the military, industrial, public, and educational sectors. Transformational leadership is defined as being oriented towards employee development, transforming them into leaders by promoting a shared vision and encouraging positive change. (Cheng et al, 2023)

In the educational context, transformational leadership is based on promoting a positive and adaptive organizational culture, where leaders inspire team members to maximize their potential. Unlike transactional leadership, which focuses on concrete exchanges, rewards, or penalties based on performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994), transformational leadership involves a more holistic approach. Bass (1996) emphasizes that transformational leaders increase awareness of the importance of common goals, fostering a collaborative and empathetic orientation within the team. (stan, 2020)

Research by Avolio and Yammarino (2002) shows that transformational leaders significantly contribute to increasing organizational resilience by cultivating an open mindset towards change, promoting autonomy, and encouraging personal initiative. In the educational environment, this approach is essential for developing a resilient culture, where teachers not only adapt to changes but also actively promote didactic innovation.

According to studies by Barling, Loughlin, and Kelloway (2002), transformational leadership is positively correlated with occupational safety due to a work climate focused on collaboration and mutual trust. In the same context, Zohar (2002) emphasizes that the transformational managerial style helps reduce risky behaviors within the organization, encouraging both individual and collective responsibility.

Bass's model (1996) suggests that transformational leaders not only recognize employees' needs but also strive to develop them from lower levels to higher levels of maturity and self-realization. In the school environment, this type of leadership does not merely aim at achieving immediate objectives but rather promotes continuous development and active involvement in decision-making processes.

Regarding the differences between transactional and transformational leadership, Bass and Avolio (1994) highlight that transactional leadership focuses on task clarification and rewarding desired behaviors. In contrast, transformational leadership has a profound

motivational character, inspiring the team to exceed personal limits through commitment and a shared vision. This differentiation is also supported by the research of Deluga (1988), which emphasizes that the transformative influence of the leader has a positive impact on the collective development of the team.

The specialized literature indicates that transformational leadership in the educational environment contributes to creating a resilient organizational culture capable of coping with changes and promoting continuous development. By integrating transformational principles into school leadership, educational leaders can ensure long-term stability and efficiency while also supporting the motivation and involvement of teaching staff. (Sönmez & Cemaloğlu, 2024)

Resilience in educational organizations refers to the ability of schools to withstand, adapt to, and recover from challenges while maintaining core functions and promoting continuous development. As educational environments become increasingly complex and unpredictable, fostering resilience has become essential for ensuring organizational stability and long-term success. (Dobre, 2021; Leys, 2020)

According to Bandura (2003), resilience is rooted in the concept of self-efficacy, where the belief in one's own ability to overcome obstacles plays a crucial role. In the context of educational leadership, resilience involves not only coping with challenges but also proactively building capacities to mitigate potential risks. Educational resilience is characterized by adaptive learning, flexibility, and a strong commitment to collective goals.

Research by Schein (2004) emphasizes the importance of organizational culture in building resilience. In resilient schools, leaders foster a culture of trust, open communication, and shared responsibility. This cultural foundation enables staff and students to navigate crises more effectively, as they feel empowered to participate in problem-solving and support each other.

Zohar (2002) highlights that resilient organizations do not merely survive disruptions but also learn from them. This transformative approach is crucial in educational settings, where ongoing changes in policies, technologies, and social dynamics require a proactive stance. Leaders who promote resilience encourage reflective practices and adaptive strategies, helping the school community develop a mindset of growth rather than resistance to change.

The interplay between transformational leadership and resilience is critical. Transformational leaders play a key role in strengthening organizational resilience by fostering a supportive environment that encourages innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement. By inspiring staff to embrace change and develop problem-solving skills, these leaders contribute to a resilient culture where challenges are viewed as opportunities for growth.

Moreover, Bass (1996) posits that resilient leadership involves not only guiding through crisis but also preparing the organization for potential future challenges. This proactive leadership style integrates strategic planning with team empowerment, enabling educational institutions to remain flexible and responsive under pressure. As such, resilient school organizations are better equipped to maintain high performance and positive morale, even in adverse circumstances.

Building resilient educational organizations requires a leadership approach that emphasizes transformational practices. By fostering an adaptive culture, empowering educators, and promoting continuous professional development, transformational leaders enhance the resilience of school organizations, ensuring their capacity to thrive despite challenges. (Ionescu, 2013; Sorrentino, 2006; Stainton et al, 2019)

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **mixed-methods approach** to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational resilience in school settings. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a comprehensive analysis of leadership practices and their impact on building resilient educational organizations. The primary objective of the study is to identify transformational leadership strategies that enhance resilience in school organizations within Arad County, Romania.

Participants. The study was conducted with the participation of school leaders and teaching staff from various educational institutions in Arad County, Romania. A total of 40 participants were selected, comprising:

- **20 school leaders** (principals and vice-principals)
- **20 teaching staff** (teachers from primary and secondary education)

The sampling method used was **purposive sampling**, targeting individuals actively involved in leadership and educational management. This approach ensures that the data collected is relevant to the research objectives, as participants possess direct experience with leadership practices within their respective institutions.

The data collection process involved both **quantitative and qualitative methods**:

1. Questionnaires:

- A structured questionnaire was designed to capture the perceptions of both school leaders and teachers regarding transformational leadership and organizational resilience.
- The questionnaire included **30 closed-ended questions** on a **5-point Likert scale** (1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree) and **5 open-ended questions** to gather qualitative insights.
- The items were adapted from the **Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)** developed by Bass and Avolio (1994) to assess transformational leadership behaviors, and from the **Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA)** to evaluate organizational resilience.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews:

- Conducted with a **subset of 20 participants** (10 leaders and 10 teachers), these interviews aimed to provide deeper qualitative insights into the challenges and strategies related to building resilience in school organizations.
- The interview guide included questions on leadership practices during crises, fostering team cohesion, and maintaining educational quality amid disruptions.

The data collection took place over a period of **three months**:

- **Phase 1 (Questionnaire Distribution):** Questionnaires were distributed both physically and electronically to ensure high response rates.
- **Phase 2 (Interview Sessions):** Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person and via video conferencing, following safety protocols due to potential health concerns.
- **Phase 3 (Data Consolidation):** Quantitative data were compiled into a central database, while interview transcripts were generated for qualitative analysis.

3.1.2. Data analysis. Quantitative Analysis:

○ Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential analysis (Pearson correlation, regression analysis) were performed using SPSS software to examine the relationship between transformational leadership practices and resilience levels.

○ Reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency.

Qualitative Analysis:

o Interview data were analysed through thematic analysis, following the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting.

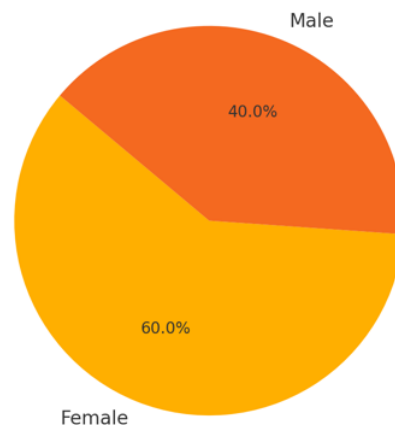
3.1.3. Limitations of the study. The study focuses on educational institutions from a single geographical area (Arad County), limiting the generalizability of findings. Self-reported data may be subject to response bias, particularly in the questionnaire responses. Time constraints during interviews might have limited the depth of qualitative insights.

4. Results

The study was conducted with a total of **40 participants** from various educational institutions within **Arad County, Romania**. The participant group consisted of:

- **20 school leaders** (principals and vice-principals)
- **20 teaching staff** (teachers from primary and secondary education)

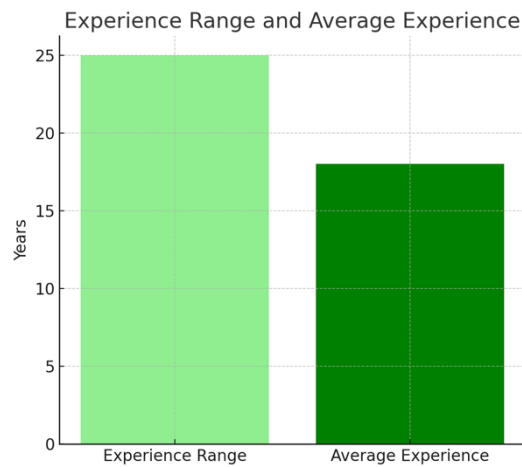
Figure 1. Gender distribution



The demographic profile of the participants included:

- **Gender Distribution:** 60% female, 40% male
- **Age Range:** 25 to 60 years, with an average age of 42
- **Experience in Education:** Ranging from 5 to 30 years, with an average of 18 years
- **Educational Level:** All participants held at least a bachelor's degree, while 30% had completed a master's program in educational management.

Figure 2. Experience range



The quantitative data were analysed using **SPSS software**, focusing on the relationship between transformational leadership practices and resilience levels within school organizations. The questionnaire data revealed the following key statistics:

- **Mean score for transformational leadership practices:** 4.2 (on a scale of 1 to 5), indicating a high level of perceived transformational leadership among school leaders.
- **Mean score for organizational resilience:** 4.0 (on a scale of 1 to 5), suggesting a relatively strong resilience capacity within the participating schools.
- **Reliability Analysis:** The **Cronbach's alpha** for the transformational leadership scale was **0.88**, indicating high internal consistency.

Figure 3. Statistical summary table

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Transformational Leadership	4.20	0.45	40
Organizational Resilience	4.00	0.50	40
Cronbach's Alpha	0.88	-	40

A **Pearson correlation** analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and resilience.

- **Correlation coefficient (r):** **0.68**, indicating a moderate to strong positive correlation.
- **Significance level (p):** **< 0.01**, confirming that the correlation is statistically significant.
- **Interpretation:** Schools led by individuals demonstrating higher levels of transformational leadership tend to exhibit increased resilience, particularly in adapting to educational challenges.

Figure 4. Pearson correlation analysis results

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Transformational Leadership	1.00	-	40
Resilience	0.68	< 0.01	40

To assess the predictive power of transformational leadership on organizational resilience, a **linear regression analysis** was performed:

- **Dependent Variable:** Organizational Resilience
- **Independent Variable:** Transformational Leadership
- **R-squared value: 0.46**, indicating that approximately **46% of the variance** in resilience can be explained by transformational leadership practices.
- **F-statistic: 14.32, p < 0.01**, indicating the model is statistically significant.
- **Beta coefficient: 0.68**, indicating a strong positive impact of leadership on resilience.

Figure 5. Linear regression analysis results

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Transformational Leadership	0.68	0.46	0.44	0.32

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	10.32	1	10.32	14.32	<0.01
Residual	12.08	38	0.32		
Total	22.40	39			

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.52	0.40		3.80	<0.01
Transformational Leadership	0.68	0.18	0.68	3.78	<0.01

The qualitative data from **semi-structured interviews** were analysed using **thematic analysis**. The following key themes emerged:

- Participants emphasized the importance of **visionary leadership** in fostering resilience. School leaders who clearly articulated long-term goals and involved staff in the vision development process were more successful in maintaining team morale during crises.
- Teachers and leaders highlighted that schools with **adaptive leadership practices** managed changes more efficiently. Transformational leaders encouraged innovative solutions, fostering a sense of empowerment among staff members.

- Building a **supportive and collaborative environment** was identified as crucial for resilience. Leaders who actively promoted teamwork and open communication created a culture that supported collective problem-solving.

- Participants noted that leaders demonstrating **emotional intelligence** were better at managing stress and supporting their teams during challenging times. Trust-building practices, such as regular feedback and transparent decision-making, were linked to higher resilience levels.

- **Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings.**

The data from both quantitative and qualitative sources consistently indicate that **transformational leadership positively influences organizational resilience**. Statistical analyses confirmed a significant positive correlation between the two variables, while thematic analysis revealed practical leadership strategies that support resilience.

School leaders who actively **involve staff, encourage innovation, and maintain open communication** were perceived as more resilient. These leaders not only navigated challenges effectively but also inspired their teams to embrace change proactively.

6. Discussion

The results of this study indicate a significant positive relationship between **transformational leadership** and **organizational resilience** within school settings in Arad County, Romania. The **quantitative analysis** revealed a moderate to strong correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between transformational leadership practices and resilience levels, suggesting that schools led by transformational leaders are better equipped to adapt to challenges and maintain stability. Furthermore, the **regression analysis** demonstrated that transformational leadership accounts for approximately **46% of the variance** in resilience ($R\text{-squared} = 0.46$), emphasizing the considerable impact of leadership style on organizational adaptability.

These findings align with previous studies that underscore the critical role of transformational leadership in building resilient organizations (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Avolio & Yammarino, 2002). In educational contexts, where external pressures such as policy changes and social challenges are prevalent, transformational leaders who demonstrate **vision, motivation, and support** are crucial in fostering a resilient organizational culture.

The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews further support these quantitative results. Key themes such as **vision and motivation, adaptability and innovation, supportive culture, and emotional intelligence** were consistently identified as characteristics of resilient school environments led by transformational leaders. These findings mirror the theoretical framework proposed by Bass (1996), who identified transformational leadership as an essential factor in enhancing the adaptive capacities of organizations.

According to **Schein (2004)**, resilient organizations are characterized by a culture that promotes collaboration, trust, and continuous learning. The leaders in this study who successfully nurtured such a culture reported higher levels of resilience, as evidenced by both quantitative scores and qualitative insights. This reinforces the argument that transformational leadership is not solely about inspiring change but also about building a **supportive and inclusive environment** that empowers staff members to actively participate in problem-solving.

- Furthermore, the importance of **emotional intelligence** in leadership, as highlighted in the qualitative data, aligns with **Zohar's (2002)** perspective that effective leadership fosters safety and trust within the organization. Leaders who demonstrate empathy

and understand the emotional dynamics of their teams are more likely to maintain a positive and resilient school climate.

The study provides valuable insights for **educational management** practices in Romania and beyond. Transformational leadership should be integrated as a core component of **professional development programs** for school leaders. Training sessions focused on **visionary planning, adaptive leadership skills, and emotional intelligence** can significantly enhance the resilience of school organizations.

Moreover, educational policymakers should recognize the role of leadership styles in fostering resilient institutions. Providing school leaders with the autonomy to **implement innovative practices** and develop **collaborative cultures** can help build more adaptive educational environments.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the sample size of **40 participants** limits the generalizability of the findings to all educational institutions within Romania. Future research should include **a larger and more diverse sample** to validate the results. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to capture changes in leadership practices and resilience over time. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to observe the **evolution of resilience** as leadership strategies are implemented.

Another limitation is the **self-reported nature of the data**, which might introduce **response bias**. Although efforts were made to ensure anonymity and honesty, the potential for **social desirability bias** remains. Future studies could incorporate **objective measures** of resilience, such as organizational performance metrics or external evaluations, to complement self-reported data.

This study contributes to the existing body of literature by demonstrating the significant role of transformational leadership in enhancing organizational resilience, particularly within the context of **Romanian educational institutions**. While previous studies (Bass, 1996; Avolio & Yammarino, 2002) have focused on business and industrial contexts, this research provides empirical evidence for the **educational sector**, highlighting the relevance of transformational practices in fostering a resilient school environment.

By combining **quantitative and qualitative approaches**, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how transformational leadership manifests in everyday educational practices. The thematic insights into **vision, motivation, adaptability, and emotional intelligence** provide practical guidance for educational leaders aiming to build resilient institutions. The findings underscore the importance of **transformational leadership** as a strategic tool for building resilient school organizations. Leaders who inspire a shared vision, support professional growth, and foster a positive culture significantly enhance the ability of schools to adapt and thrive in the face of challenges. Integrating transformational leadership training into **educational leadership programs** can empower school leaders to effectively navigate the complexities of modern education.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the crucial role of **transformational leadership** in fostering organizational resilience within educational settings. The data collected from school leaders and teaching staff in **Arad County, Romania** clearly indicate a **significant positive correlation** between transformational leadership practices and the resilience of school organizations. Transformational leaders, characterized by their vision, motivation, adaptability, and support for innovation, contribute significantly to creating an environment where schools can withstand challenges and maintain stability.

The **quantitative analysis** revealed that transformational leadership practices significantly influence resilience levels, accounting for approximately **46% of the variance**. Additionally, the **qualitative analysis** highlighted key leadership traits, such as **emotional intelligence**, proactive problem-solving, and fostering a **supportive culture**, as essential elements in building resilient educational organizations.

By creating a climate of **trust, collaboration, and continuous development**, transformational leaders not only enhance individual motivation but also strengthen the collective capacity of the school to adapt to changing circumstances. These leaders empower staff members to take initiative, fostering an **organizational culture** that is both adaptable and robust in the face of challenges.

In conclusion, integrating **transformational leadership training** within professional development programs for educational leaders is essential. School administrators and policymakers should prioritize developing leadership competencies that encourage **collaboration, innovation, and adaptive strategies**. This approach will enable school organizations to maintain stability and achieve long-term success despite the dynamic challenges of the educational landscape.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance organizational resilience through transformational leadership. Educational leadership training programs should incorporate modules specifically focused on **transformational practices**. Training should include practical exercises on **vision articulation, emotional intelligence, and strategic adaptability**.

School leaders should actively create a culture that values **teamwork, open communication, and mutual support**. Regular team-building activities and open forums can help strengthen interpersonal relationships and build a cohesive school environment. Given the significant role of emotional intelligence in resilient leadership, professional development initiatives should emphasize **self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal skills**. Leaders who effectively manage emotions can better support their teams during stressful periods. Schools should develop **resilience frameworks** that include contingency planning, crisis management training, and scenario-based leadership exercises. Leaders should be equipped to anticipate potential challenges and implement **proactive solutions**. (Lefebvre, 2020; Mujjuni et al, 2021; Pînișoară, 2024)

Leaders should regularly engage in **reflective practice** to evaluate their leadership strategies and their impact on organizational resilience. Implementing **feedback mechanisms** from staff and students can provide valuable insights for continuous improvement. Educational institutions should encourage leaders to make decisions based on **empirical evidence** and best practices. Engaging with current research on leadership and resilience will help school leaders stay informed and adaptable. (Mulyani et al, 2025)

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