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Transformational Leadership, Self-efficacy, and Performance of Volunteers in Non-formal Voluntary Services Education

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study was to determine whether self-efficacy is a key mediator of the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance, based on intrinsic motivation theory. The study extended the literature on self-efficacy to transformational leadership in non-formal voluntary services education.

Design/methodology/approach - One hundred and seventy-eight scouts and scout leaders were sampled from a Hong Kong voluntary service organization that involved volunteers in the process of non-formal education.

Findings – Transformational leadership was positively associated with the volunteers' performance. In addition, self-efficacy mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance.

Originality/value – The study thus yielded novel insights for management development into the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance, suggesting that self-efficacy mediates this relationship for volunteers in non-formal voluntary services education.

Keywords – transformational leadership, self-efficacy, volunteers' performance, voluntary services organization

Paper Type - Research Paper

Introduction

In recent years, transformational leadership framework has continued to become a widely used theoretical approach in the leadership literature (Alrowwad, Abualoush, and Masa'deh, 2020; Charbonnier-Voirin, El Ahnemi, & Vandenberghe, 2010; Keskes, Sallan, Simo, & Fernandez, 2018). The direct impact of transformational leadership on individuals' performance outcomes were well-examined across studies (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; Singh & Krishnan, 2008). Additionally, empirical studies have thoroughly examined the factors mediating the relationships between transformational leadership and individuals' attitudes, such as trust in leader (Jung & Avolio, 2000), perceived supervisory support, and psychological empowerment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). The effects of transformational leadership on individuals' self-efficacy (Dwyer, 2019) and group potency significantly impact individuals' performance (Bono & Judge, 2003; Fitzgerald & Schutte, 2010).

Transformational leadership research has been conducted in educational and military settings (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996) as well as in the business and service sectors (Liao & Chuang, 2007); less attention has been paid to the effects of transformational leadership on performance outcomes in the voluntary service sector (Smith, 1993; Rowold & Rohmann, 2009). There are more attention paid on the effectiveness of transformational leadership in non-formal voluntary education and the non-profit sector (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Kwapisz, Brown, Bryant, Chupka, & Profota, 2019; Pearce, 1993; Peng, Liao & Sun, 2020), focusing on the provision of leisure opportunities and social services (Markham, Walters, & Bonjean, 2001). The nature of activities and the motives of volunteers and their leaders in voluntary service organizations are likely to differ from those in profit-making organizations (Bang, Ross, & Reio, 2012). The decision-making process of managers in profit-making organizations may be limited by constraints on economic and organizational

resources. Volunteer leaders have greater freedom to adopt more transformational or developmental approaches to leadership, and are less concerned with the transactional realities of profit-seeking behavior (Dwyer, Bono, Snyder, Nov, & Berson, 2013; Jaskyte, 2004). Intrinsic motivation is more relevant than extrinsic motivation to volunteers' pursuit of personal development. Extrinsic rewards are less salient to volunteers than to those who work in profit-seeking organizations. This study used Deci's (1975) intrinsic motivation theory to examine the mediation of the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance in non-formal voluntary services education.

This study makes two main contributions to research on management and educational development literature. First, it offers a new understanding of how transformational leadership behaviors are reflected in volunteers' performance (e.g. Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Researchers are paying increasing attention to the mediation of this relationship, as insights into such mechanisms offer a more complete understanding of how exactly transformational leadership influences volunteers' performance (e.g. Dwyer et al., 2013). Second, the processes mediating transformational leadership and individuals' outcomes in different contexts were widely examined in the literature (Casimir, Waldman, Bartram, & Yang, 2006; Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003). However, limited research has been conducted on the effects of leadership in voluntary service organizations (e.g. Gordon & Gordon, 2017; Rowold and Rohmann, 2009). This study explored the mediation of the influence of transformational leadership on the performance of volunteers in non-formal voluntary services education.

Theory and Hypotheses

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership articulates a vision of the future, fosters the acceptance of group goals, and provides individuals with individualized support and intellectual stimulation

(Bass, 1985; Burn, 1978; Bycio, Hackett, & Allan, 1995). Bass (1985) theorized four key components of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Idealized influence represents leaders' willingness to put benefit of the group as priority, set a good role model, and maintain high standard of ethics. Inspirational motivation represents the creation of an attractive vision, the demonstration of optimism and enthusiasm. Individualized consideration involves leadership behaviors such as supporting, encouraging, and coaching individuals. Intellectual stimulation entails raising awareness of problems and seeking to overcome problems from new perspectives.

Transformational leadership transforms the values and priorities of individuals and motivate them to perform beyond their expectation (Bass, 1985; Burn, 1978).

Transformational leaders exert and inspire individuals to look behind the self-interests. They enhance individuals with confidence to achieve high in their expectations. A meta-analysis examined a full range of transformational leadership and indicated a significant impact on individuals' motivation, job performance, and organizational performance (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). Recent works have stated how transformational leadership behaviors are transmitted to individuals' performance outcomes (Kale, 2020; Lai, Tang, Lu, Lee, and Lin, 2020).

Transformational leaders encourage high belief and empower individuals at work, which enhances the self-efficacy of individuals (Mao, Chiu, Owens, Brown, & Liao, 2019).

The key theoretical relationships between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance is presented in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Transformational Leadership and Volunteers' Performance

Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as leadership that stimulates individuals to exchange ideas and generate goals within organizations (Avolio & Gibbons, 1998). Transformational leaders effect change by building individuals' confidence and empowering them to perform their work tasks. Accumulated findings found that transformational leadership significantly affects individuals' motivation and performance (Gao, Murphy & Anderson, 2020; Kammerhoff, Lauenstein, & Schütz, 2019; Waldman, Ramirez, House, & Puranam, 2001). Transformational leadership has posted a positive sign on individuals' job satisfaction, innovation, motivation, and performance (e.g. Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999; Sheehan, Garavan, and Morley, 2020).

Transformational leadership has strong positive effects on individuals' performance (Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005). Three meta-analyses confirmed the positive relationship between transformational leadership and individuals' performance (DeGroot et al., 2000; Lowe et al., 1996; Patterson, Fuller, Kester, & Stringer, 1995). Their findings explained how leadership styles influence individuals' basic values, beliefs, and attitudes and the collective interests of groups and organizations (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). It is expected that transformational leadership would extend its influence to volunteers' in-role and extra-role performance. Therefore, this study defined in-role performance as behaviors adopted by individuals to responsibly complete their work (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Extra-role performance was represented by organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), defined as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988, p. 4). It is hypothesized that transformational leadership would be positively related to both in-role and extra-role performance.

Hypothesis 1. Transformational leadership is positively associated with volunteers' (a) in-role and (b) extra-role performance.

Self-efficacy as mediator. Amabile (1988) and Oldham and Cummings (1996) examined three key mediating mechanisms by which transformational leadership influences individuals' performance: giving directions, providing opportunities, and highlighting the importance of performing tasks. Shamir et al. (1993) used a self-concept based motivational approach to explain the mediation of the relationship between transformational leadership and individuals' performance. Bass and Avolio (1990) and Redmond, Mumford, and Teach (1993) found that transformational leadership is positively associated with self-motivation. Self-motivation of followers would satisfy the psychological needs for personal motives and interpersonal connection.

According to Deci's (1975) intrinsic motivation theory, transformational leadership is an engagement behavior that actively strives to find interest and enjoyment to support individuals. The intrinsic motivation is acted as a primary motive on how leadership behaviors are transmitted on individuals' performance. Transformational leaders can use a motivational approach to allow individuals to share their experiences and give them the authority to perform at work. Brown, Jones, and Leigh (2005) highlighted the importance of self-efficacy to individuals' intrinsic motivation to perform tasks. Also, studies have indicated that transformational leadership that fosters high self-efficacy enhances individuals' work commitment, motivation, and satisfaction (e.g. Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). By expressing high expectations of subordinates' ability to meet their goals, transformational leaders increase volunteers' self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his/her capability to perform a work task. Bandura (1986) defined "self-efficacy as people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of individuals'

performance. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the “belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce a given achievement” (p. 3). Self-efficacy influences the choice of activities, goal levels, and performance of individuals in different contexts (Settoon et al., 1996). Volunteers who perceive themselves as high level and strength of self-efficacy, are determined the effort they can contribute to their performance outcomes.

Volunteers’ self-efficacy is stronger when transformational leaders express confidence in their abilities and celebrate their accomplishments. Research has shown that self-efficacy strongly and consistently mediates the relationship between its antecedents and volunteers’ subsequent performance (Kark et al., 2003). When volunteers have a high level of perceived self-efficacy, they are more willing to put considerable effort into carrying out their tasks. This intrinsic motivation helps subordinates to build positive attitudes toward both their in-role and their extra-role performance (Luthans, Zhu, & Avolio, 2006). Based on these arguments, it is expected self-efficacy to mediate the relationships between transformational leadership and volunteers’ in-role and extra-role performance. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 2. The positive relationships between transformational leadership and volunteers’ (a) in-role and (b) extra-role performance are mediated by self-efficacy.

Research Method

Sample and Procedure

The sample comprised 178 scout leader-scout dyads from a group of adult scout members of a non-formal voluntary service organization in Hong Kong. Approximately 70,000 youth members and 30,000 adult members volunteer for the Association. The goals of this voluntary service organization are to involve volunteers in a non-formal educational process, give volunteers agency in their own development as self-reliant, supportive,

responsible, and committed individuals. The purpose is to help others and establish value systems based on positive spiritual, social, ethical, and personal principles. The leader of the association works with members to plan and organize activities for youth members.

Convenience sampling method was used in the methodology design to collect data. The author obtained access to the regular activities through personal contact with the scout leaders. The participants of scout leaders and scouts were all in voluntary basis. The researcher administered a package of materials, which include a questionnaire, a return envelope and a letter to introduce the objective of the research study to the scout leaders. The scout leaders were then re-distributed the questionnaires to their scouts during regular period at the organization's monthly meetings. Both scout leaders and scouts were invited to spend around 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires. They returned the completed questionnaires to the researcher separately and anonymously. The responses were kept strictly confidential.

Each questionnaire included a researcher-assigned identification number in order to allow us to match the scouts' responses with their scout leaders' evaluations. In order to avoid the susceptible to problems of common method variance (CMV), the variables were rated by scout leaders and scout followers respectively. Scout leaders were asked to response a separate questionnaire, which contained items on in-role and extra-role performances of the scouts and their demographic information. Scouts were involved to rate the independent variable (transformational leadership), mediator (self-efficacy), and control variable (transactional leadership).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the variables, the study performed two-way translations by two bilinguals with English and Chinese proficiencies to ensure equivalency of meaning. In addition, two researchers involved to review the relevancy of the items in the variables. They were free to provide comments to clarify the appropriateness of the each individual items in the questionnaire. The feedback and comments from this pretest generated

changes or modifications to the questionnaire. Afterwards, a group of scout leaders was involved in the pilot test to ensure consistency of meaning with the measurements in the volunteer context.

There were 198 completed responses out of 210 dyads, in which 44 scout leaders, and the scout members returned 178 questionnaires. In total, 178 completed pairs of responses were analyzed, reflecting a response rate of 84.7%.

Males made up 52.8% of the scouts, and 45.5% had received education to degree level or above. The mean age and organizational tenure of the scout members were 30.6 and 4.0 years, respectively. Males made up 61.8% of the scout leaders, and 55.1% had received education to degree level or above. The mean age and organizational tenure of the scout leaders were 35.08 and 7.9 years, respectively. The average duration of the scout leader-member relationship was 4.5 years.

Measurements

Transformational leadership (independent variable), transactional leadership (control variable), and self-efficacy (mediator) were rated by the scouts, and volunteers' in-role and extra-role performance (dependent variables) were rated by the scout leaders. An oblique rotation of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to assess the construct validity of the variables and test the expected correlation among them.

Transformational leadership. The 23-item scale developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990) to measure transformational leadership in six dimensions: identifying and articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model, fostering the acceptance of group goals, expressing high expectations of performance, providing individualized support, and supplying intellectual stimulation, were used. Responses were given on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The instrument originally developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990) had multiple dimensions. The several corresponding indexes of transformational

leadership into a composite index were combined (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007).

Cronbach's alpha for transformational leadership was .86.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy using a 10-item scale developed by Schwarzer, Babler, Kwiatek, Schroder, and Zhang (1997), was measured. The items were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*perfectly true*). The items included "I am confident in my ability to deal efficiently with unexpected events" and "I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort." Cronbach's alpha was .87.

In-role performance. The scout leaders were involved to assess individual scout members' in-role performance using Williams and Anderson's (1991) five-item measure, with responses given on a 7-point scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*). For example, one item asked whether "the member adequately completes assigned duties." Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Extra-role performance (operationalized as OCB). Extra-role performance was measured using eight items from the extra-role performance scales developed by Lee and Allen (2002). The scout leaders were asked to rate individual scouts' behaviors on a 7-point scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*). Eight items measured extra-role performance, such as "[the scout member] offers ideas for improving the functioning of the organization." Cronbach's alpha for extra-role performance was .85.

Control variables. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership, which increases individuals' aspirations, differs from transactional leadership, which identifies existing needs and goals and provides rewards for fulfilling them. Judge and Piccolo's (2004) meta-analysis revealed that the close relationship between transformational leadership and transactional leadership may make it difficult to distinguish their effects. Therefore, the effect of transactional leadership on volunteers' performance was controlled. The five-item measure of transactional leadership of Podsakoff et al. (1990) was used, with responses given on a 7-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sample item was as

follows: "always gives me positive feedback when I perform well." Cronbach's alpha was .86.

The study also controlled for gender, education level, age, tenure at organization, and tenure of scout leader-follower dyad (Bauer & Green, 1996; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001), because research has shown that these variables influence volunteers' performance. Gender was dummy coded (1 = *male*, 2 = *female*). A dummy variable was also used to measure the education levels of the respondents (0 = *below college*, 1 = *college or above*). Age, tenure at organization, and tenure of scout leader-volunteer dyad were self-reported in years.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order Pearson correlations for all of the key variables are presented in Table I.

Insert Table I about here

Baron and Kenny's (1986) three-step procedure was used to test the mediation model. First, the independent variable should be significantly associated with the mediating variable. Second, the independent variable should be significantly associated with the dependent variable. Third, the mediating variable should be associated with the dependent variable, with the independent variable controlled for in the model.

To test the hypotheses, hierarchal regression analysis was used. Hypothesis 1 predicted that transformational leadership would be positively associated with volunteers' (a) in-role performance and (b) extra-role performance. Transformational leadership was found to be positively related to both in-role performance ($\beta = .20, p < .01$) and extra-role performance ($\beta = .23, p < .01$). Thus Hypotheses 1(a) and 1(b) were supported. Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' (a) in-role performance and (b) extra-role performance would be positively mediated by self-

efficacy. As shown in Table II, transformational leadership was positively related to self-efficacy ($\beta = .49, p < .001$), fulfilling the first requirement for mediation. Second, transformational leadership was positively related to both in-role performance and extra-role performance. Transformational leadership was directly and strongly associated with both the in-role performance and the extra-role performance of the volunteers, meeting the second requirement for mediation. Next, the mediator was entered to test its effect on the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance. Self-efficacy was found to be significantly associated with in-role performance ($\beta = .60, p < .001$) and extra-role performance, ($\beta = .53, p < .001$). When self-efficacy was included in the equation, the coefficient for transformational leadership was no longer statistically significant. Therefore, self-efficacy fully mediated the influence of transformational leadership on both in-role performance and extra-role performance, supporting Hypotheses 2(a) and 2(b).

Insert Table II about here

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the mechanism mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance. This relationship was mediated by self-efficacy, suggesting that intrinsic motivation theory explains the mediating process for volunteers in non-formal voluntary services education. The results confirmed earlier evidence of the relationships between transformational leadership, self-efficacy, and volunteer performance (e.g. Settoon et al., 1996; Mao et al., 2019). This study added value to aid in the identification and development of suitable leadership education and training and the provision of effective guidance for individuals (Grunberg, Barry, Callahan, Kleber, McManigle, and Schoomaker, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, transformational leaders in non-formal education settings mainly focus on intrinsic motivation and personal development for volunteers. The results were

consistent with the importance of volunteers' work in the management and education literature (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Pearce, 1993). As a result of their heightened sense of self-efficacy and competence, volunteers are intrinsically motivated to perform activities. This research study further validated the impact of transformational leadership and the role of self-efficacy on volunteers' performance in the context of in non-formal voluntary services education (Dwyer et al., 2013).

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study extends understanding of the mechanism mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance. In a sample drawn from a voluntary services organization devoted to fostering its volunteers' personal development, transformational leaders influenced their followers primarily through intrinsic motivation. The impacts of transformational leadership on volunteers' performance were influenced by the mission and nature of the organization. This may be due to the emphasis placed by voluntary service organizations on morally responsible action, a democratic ideology, and volunteers' self-motivation.

Unlike organizations in the business sector, voluntary service organizations make a distinct contribution to society, seeking to meet social responsibility and needs (McDonald, 2007). Voluntary services involves in a certain proportion of a society's economic and social welfare activities. Volunteer leaders link organizations' goals with their own goals, and guide their followers to attain higher level goals (Stig & Lars, 1996). The findings of this study are relevant to policy makers developing management education for non-formal voluntary organizations.

Organizations should give more opportunity and encouragement to take volunteers to the welfare of society. The study provided insights into the applicability of the transformational leadership model in the voluntary sector, thus assessing the generalizability

of this model beyond the business sector. Volunteers typically receive less supervision of leaders, and they are capable to work independently. A transformational leader with high inspiration and involve participation of volunteers can lead them to find the meaning of the volunteer services and work provided to non-profit organizations.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study had several important strengths, it also showed certain limitations. First, it was based on cross-sectional data in data collection. As a result, the direction of causation was potentially ambiguous. However, previous longitudinal studies have supported the direction of causation inferred here (Keller, 1992). Second, the study examined self-efficacy as the main variable mediating the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance, as it was assumed to best suit the nature and mission of voluntary service organizations. However, future research continues to examine other mediating processes in voluntary sector would be useful. Third, the study's focus was restricted to the impact of transformational and transactional leadership on volunteers' performance. To gain a fuller understanding of leadership behaviors in the voluntary sector, future studies would examine the impacts of alternative leadership styles, such as authentic leadership (Novicevic et al., 2006), on volunteers' performance.

To conclude, this study examined the mediating impact of the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance. Self-efficacy emerged as a significant mediator, consistent with an intrinsic motivational view of the effects of transformational leadership on volunteers' performance. The results may reflect the distinctive leadership goals of top management and motives of volunteers in voluntary service organizations.

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Table I Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities of measures

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	1.48	.51	--									
2. Age	30.51	8.23	.20 **	--								
3. Education	.85	.26	-.05	-.28**	--							
4. Organization Tenure	6.11	4.97	-.18 *	.04	-.07	--						
5. Dyad Tenure	4.03	2.48	-.09	.06	-.09	.39 **	--					
6. Transactional Leadership	5.68	.82	-.11	.16 *	-.07	.02	.19 *	.86				
7. Transformational Leadership	5.43	.42	-.19 *	.18 *	-.11	.18 *	.24 *	.44**	.86			
8. In-role Performance	5.82	.78	-.15 *	.32 **	-.26**	.14	.15 *	.33**	.38**	.90		
9. Extra-role Performance	5.58	.80	-.07	.21 **	-.22**	.22 **	.19 *	.20**	.32**	.23**	.81	
10. Self-efficacy	3.26	.42	-.17 *	.13	-.07	.13	.14	.41**	.59**	.38**	.27**	.87

Notes:

^a, n = 178^b The correlation coefficients are significant at *P<0.05, **P<0.01.^c Reliability coefficients appear along the diagonal.

Table II Tests of mediation for transformational leadership

Variables	<u>Self-Efficacy</u>	<u>In-role Performance</u>			<u>Extra-Role Performance</u>		
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<u>Control Variables</u>							
Gender	-.07	-.15 *	-.13	-.09	-.05	-.02	.01
Age	.03	.28 ***	.26 ***	.22 ***	.19 *	.16 *	.12
Education	.04	-.10	-.08	-.07	.02	.03	.05
Organization Tenure	.03	.07	.05	.04	.17 *	.15	.14 *
Dyad Tenure	-.03	.04	.02	.03	.08	.06	.07
Transactional Leadership	.19 **	.25 ***	.17 *	.12	.14	.06	.01
<u>Independent Variable</u>							
Transformational Leadership	.49 ***		.20 **	.01		.23 **	.06
<u>Mediating Variables</u>							
Self-efficacy				.29 ***			.25 **
N	178	178	178	178	178	178	178
Df	7	6	7	10	6	7	10
R ²	.38	.23	.26	.50	.12	.16	.37
Δ R ²	.18	.23	.03	.24	.12	.04	.21

Notes:

*P< .05, ** P< .01, ***P<.001

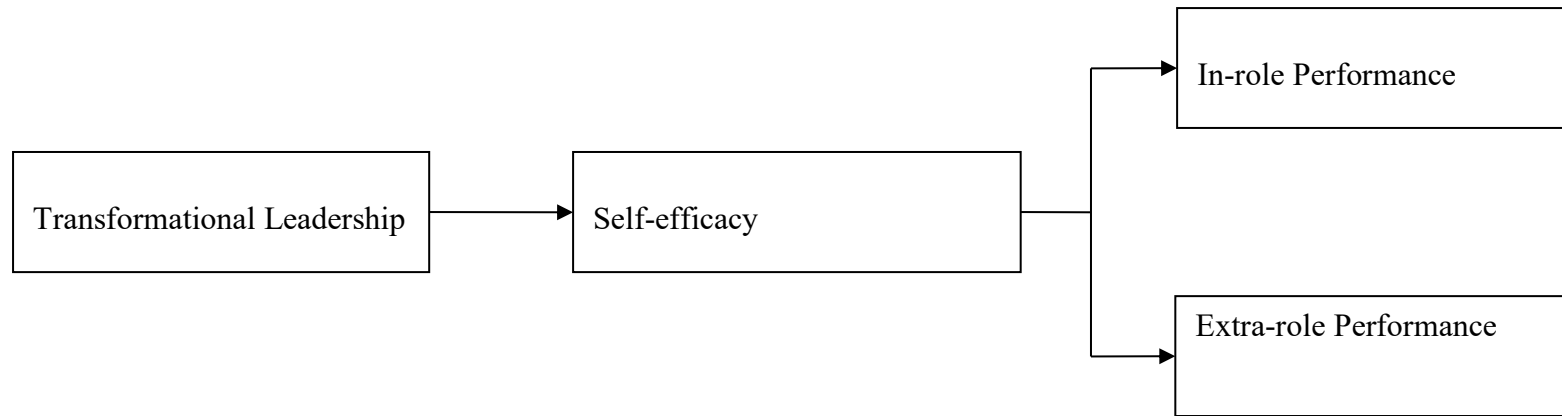


Figure 1. Framework for research on the relationship between transformational leadership and volunteers' performance.