



Transformational Leadership in the Military's Wartime and Peacetime

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Abstract

Leadership is a fundamental element that determines the effectiveness of an organization, both in wartime and peacetime contexts. This study aims to analyze the application of transformational leadership theory in the military context, during both periods of conflict and peace. Transformational leadership theory is considered relevant because it explains how leaders can inspire, motivate, and collectively develop their subordinates in facing dynamic challenges within the military environment. This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were obtained through a literature review of various scholarly sources on leadership, military organizations, and the transformational theory developed by Bass and Avolio. The findings indicate that transformational leadership can be effectively applied in the military, both to address operational pressures during wartime and to build organizational structure and personnel during peacetime. These findings affirm that principles such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration significantly contribute to improving morale, efficiency, and the resilience of military organizations. However, certain limitations, such as the hierarchical structure and command culture, remain challenges in its implementation. This study recommends strengthening leadership training based on transformational values in the future development of military organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership within military institutions is a fundamental element that determines organizational effectiveness, both in times of war and peace. It not only serves as the driving force behind the command structure but also functions as a moral and ideological strength that upholds soldier loyalty, discipline, and cohesion (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Among the many leadership theories developed within management and organizational

studies, transformational leadership theory holds a central position in discussions of contemporary military leadership, as it emphasizes value change, intrinsic motivation, and long-term vision (Northouse, 2019). Transformational leadership theory was first introduced by Burns (1978) and later elaborated by Bass (1985), who defined it as a leadership style capable of elevating followers' motivation and morale to a higher level. This model emphasizes four core components known as the "4 I's": idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). These four aspects synergistically foster a strong relationship between leaders and subordinates, which is crucial in military environments that demand mission clarity, high readiness, and the courage to take risks under extreme conditions (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

In the military context, the application of transformational leadership plays a role not only in boosting troop morale during wartime, but is also highly relevant to supporting military professionalism in peacetime (Dvir et al., 2002). Peaceful periods require leadership that can maintain discipline, enhance competence, and encourage innovation without relying on the pressures of conflict. Therefore, transformational military leaders in times of peace are expected to act as drivers of organizational change, adaptive to global challenges, technological advancement, and national strategic needs (Yukl, 2014). Moreover, the strict hierarchical structure of the military actually facilitates the effective implementation of this theory, as transformation does not necessarily bypass formal command lines but rather reinforces them through the leader's moral and intellectual influence (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Transformational leaders do not rely solely on formal authority, but also on symbolic power that shapes collective identity and a shared sense of responsibility toward the mission (Keller, 1992). In practice, this leadership style creates synergy between a rigid structure and an innovative spirit, a hallmark of modern military institutions.

In contrast to transactional leadership, which is more oriented toward reward and punishment, transformational leadership focuses on building vision, values, and the meaning behind military actions themselves (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). This makes the theory particularly suitable in the military context, as the military is not merely a physical force institution, but also a value- and ideology-based entity that requires inspiring leadership to shape character (Hannah et al., 2009). Transformational leaders give meaning to military tasks, even the most difficult ones, through narratives of service, patriotism, and collective spirit (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Empirical studies have shown that military units led by transformational leaders tend to perform better, have higher morale, and are more adaptive in facing uncertainty (Dvir et al., 2002). Such success is not solely due to the technical competence of the leaders, but also their ability to build strong emotional bonds and a shared vision with their troops. This relationship enables military team members to take initiative and act proactively, even in high-risk situations, because they feel a moral responsibility for the success of the mission (Podsakoff et al., 1990). During wartime, transformational leadership plays a crucial role in building psychological resilience and fighting spirit. When chaos and danger become daily realities, a transformational leader can serve as a moral and emotional anchor that maintains troop stability (Shamir et al., 1998). They communicate high expectations, provide spiritual meaning to sacrifices, and demonstrate sincere commitment to the welfare of soldiers. Thus, the leader does not merely act as a strategic executor, but also as a builder of the unit's collective resilience.

Meanwhile, in peacetime, transformational leadership holds a vital function in building the military institution's capacity, including the development of soldier professionalism, continuous training, and adaptation to changes in military technology and global geopolitics (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). Transformational leaders can drive organizational learning, cultivate a culture of innovation, and encourage critical reflection on internal structures and procedures that may be outdated or inefficient (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). In this context, transformation means not only physical or technical change, but also a paradigm shift in how the military perceives its duties, roles, and work ethic. Furthermore, this theory also serves as an important framework for military leadership development. Through the transformational model, the development of young leaders is directed not only toward technical competence, but also toward moral quality, integrity, and inspirational capacity (Lowe et al., 1996). This aligns with the needs of modern militaries, which require not only effective commanders but also leaders capable of shaping strategic direction and a sustainable organizational culture (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In other words, transformational leadership offers a holistic approach to cultivating future military leadership.

Nonetheless, the application of this theory in the military context still faces challenges, including a conservative organizational culture, resistance to change, and pressure to maintain an entrenched authoritarian structure (Eagly et al., 2003). Therefore, the implementation strategy of transformational leadership must strike a balance between the need for institutional stability and the need for strategic innovation. In this regard, the transformational approach must be framed contextually so as not to trigger counterproductive disruptions (Tichy & Devanna, 1986). Against this background, this article aims to explore in depth how transformational leadership theory can be effectively applied in the military context, both in times of war and peace. This study will not only analyze the strengths and relevance of the theory, but also the challenges of implementation within the unique environment of the military. Through a conceptual approach and literature review, this article seeks to contribute to the development of a military leadership model oriented toward strategic transformation and the strengthening of the defense institution's moral capacity.

METHODS

This study is a qualitative research project, not merely one that employs a qualitative approach. The term qualitative research refers to a scientific process aimed at understanding social realities or specific phenomena through an interpretive approach that emphasizes meaning, context, and the subjective experiences of actors within particular situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research does not rely on numerical data or statistics but rather on narratives, descriptions, and interpretations of human actions or events, in this case, the practice of transformational leadership within military institutions. Therefore, since this study does not use numbers as the basis for analysis, it is accurately categorized as qualitative research.

The main reason for using a qualitative method in this study is the nature of the topic under investigation: the application of transformational leadership theory in the military, both in times of war and peace. This topic demands a deep understanding of the meanings, perceptions, and actions of actors within the military structure. This research seeks to understand how concepts such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration from transformational leadership theory are practiced within the real-world context of the military. Such an

exploration can only be comprehensively explained through a qualitative approach that allows in-depth exploration of meanings, experiences, and the social contexts behind the actions of military leaders and personnel (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Within the qualitative research framework, this study adopts a descriptive analytical approach. This approach is chosen because the study aims to portray and analyze in detail how transformational leadership theory is applied within the military organization, without manipulating variables or conducting quantitative hypothesis testing. The descriptive analytical approach focuses on the systematic portrayal of facts or characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation, as well as the relationships among its components (Sukmadinata, 2017). Through this approach, the researcher not only explains what is happening but also why and how a particular form of leadership is implemented in the everyday practices of a military institution.

This descriptive approach is also considered the most appropriate for explaining leadership dynamics in two different military operational contexts: wartime and peacetime. These two situations entail different pressures, challenges, and organizational cultures, thus requiring a detailed and contextualized understanding. In other words, this approach enables the depiction of strategic variations in the implementation of transformational leadership and illustrates how this leadership model adapts to different contexts and situations (Miles et al., 2014).

In explaining the phenomenon of transformational leadership in the military, this study employs several major theoretical frameworks as the foundation for analysis. The first is general leadership theory, which is based on the idea that leadership is the process of influencing others to achieve shared goals (Northouse, 2019). Leadership is not merely about formal positions or ranks; it also involves the ability to build trust, inspire, and orient an organization toward core values. In the military context, leadership is especially crucial as it relates directly to individual safety and collective mission success (Hughes et al., 2015).

The primary theoretical framework employed in this research is transformational leadership theory, introduced by Burns (1978) and further developed systematically by Bass (1985). This theory posits that transformational leaders are those who can elevate the motivation, values, and morals of their followers through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Bass, (1985) emphasizes that transformational leadership not only enhances performance but also fosters ethical awareness and long-term commitment to organizational missions. In the military sphere, this is highly important, as many decisions and actions are not purely rational but are also imbued with ethical and emotional dimensions (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Furthermore, in analyzing the contexts of war and peace, this study also refers to Clausewitz's theory of war (1832/1989), which states that war is merely the continuation of politics by other means. This view is crucial to explaining how the dynamics of war influence military leadership structure and orientation. During wartime, leadership often becomes more hierarchical; however, under such extreme pressures, transformational elements, such as moral vision, exemplary conduct, and empathy, become critical to sustaining troop morale and operational effectiveness (Shamir et al., 1998).

Conversely, in peacetime, transformational leadership remains relevant in addressing challenges related to professionalism, military modernization, and long-term organizational capacity building. Therefore, organizational change theory, as articulated by Kotter (1996), will also be used to understand how military leaders act as agents of change within a bureaucratic system. In the peacetime context, transformational leaders

function to reform organizational culture, strengthen professional values, and encourage institutional innovation.

This study also pays attention to the ethical and moral dimensions of leadership, as transformational leadership in practice involves not only influence but also integrity, honesty, and responsibility toward followers. Accordingly, this research adopts the ethical framework of Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) which distinguishes between authentic transformational leadership and pseudo-transformational leadership. In the military context, leader authenticity is vital, as it directly affects trust, obedience, and loyalty among soldiers in extreme situations. By using a robust theoretical framework and a descriptive analytical approach within qualitative research, this study aims to provide a significant contribution to the understanding and development of a contextualized model of transformational leadership in the military. Furthermore, this explanation offers a solid methodological foundation for analyzing leadership practices in two different domains, war and peace, thereby opening opportunities for the development of more strategic and sustainable leadership training and development programs in military institutions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To understand leadership practices in the military, both in times of war and peace, it is essential to first examine the foundational concepts of leadership theory. According to Northouse (2019) leadership is the process of influencing a group of people to achieve a common goal. This definition emphasizes the interaction between leaders and followers in a dynamic process that is not only structural but also psychological and ideological. Yukl (2014) adds that leadership encompasses the ability to direct, motivate, and build commitment within an organization to achieve long-term effectiveness.

One highly relevant form of leadership in the military context is transformational leadership, as developed by Bass (1985) and Burns (1978). This theory highlights a leader's ability to inspire and transform the values and behaviors of followers toward a better direction. Bass & Riggio (2006) identify four core dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four dimensions serve as the main instruments for establishing emotional and moral bonds between leaders and followers.

In the military context, transformational leadership theory has been applied by many leaders to promote performance, discipline, and troop loyalty. During wartime, transformational leaders play a crucial role in building the morale of soldiers who face high risks and immense psychological pressure (Shamir et al., 1998). For example, a leader who demonstrates idealized influence by acting on the front lines creates a model of bravery that strengthens unit solidarity and courage (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Inspirational motivation is also demonstrated through speeches or mission narratives that appeal to noble values such as sacrifice, honor, and nationalism (Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

In combat, intellectual stimulation is evident in a leader's willingness to grant tactical initiative to subordinates, a vital element in the uncertainty of the battlefield (Dvir et al., 2002). Leaders do not merely issue orders but also invite critical and creative thinking to solve field problems. Meanwhile, individualized consideration during wartime is often manifested through the leader's attention to the mental and physical conditions of their soldiers, whether through personal communication, recognition of achievements, or protection of wounded or traumatized members (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). In peacetime, transformational leadership plays a greater role in building a professional,

adaptive, and future-ready military organization. Transformational leaders in peace are expected to create long-term visions for their units, such as modernizing weapon systems, enhancing personnel capacity, and driving organizational reform (Kotter, 1996). In this context, idealized influence appears through the leader's integrity and credibility in managing resources, avoiding abuses of power, and becoming a role model in work ethics (Hughes et al., 2015).

Inspirational motivation during peacetime is realized through the development of corps values, character education, and motivational training that foster esprit de corps and internal social cohesion (Lowe et al., 1996). Intellectual stimulation is seen in efforts to enhance analytical skills, promote innovative training, and apply information technology in military management (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Individualized consideration is more evident in mentoring programs, job rotation, and long-term career development for personnel (Yukl, 2014).

Comparisons between theory and practice show that all elements of transformational leadership theory can be found in military practice, both in wartime and peacetime, though the forms and contextual pressures may vary. In war, the application of the four transformational dimensions emphasizes emotional aspects and mental resilience leaders must serve as symbols of courage and moral cohesion under extreme conditions (Shamir et al., 1998). Conversely, in peace, these dimensions are geared more toward achieving long-term goals and fostering institutional adaptability (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The key similarity between theory and practice is that transformational leaders are always catalysts for change, whether on the battlefield or within the bureaucratic structure of the military. In both wartime and peacetime, transformational leaders play a dual role: as value inspirers and as architects of structural change (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). This validates Bass's theory that transformational leadership is cross-contextual and not bound by specific situations (Bass, 1985).

Nevertheless, there are significant differences in the priority of each transformational dimension depending on the context. In wartime, idealized influence and inspirational motivation tend to dominate due to the urgent need to sustain morale and bravery (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). In contrast, during peacetime, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration are more prominent, focusing on capacity-building and professionalism (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). These findings indicate that the implementation of transformational leadership in the military is situational and adaptive, depending on the challenges at hand. Moreover, the application of theory in practice is not always linear or consistent, due to the influence of a military organizational culture that is typically hierarchical and conservative (Eagly et al., 2003). In some cases, military leaders tend to adopt a transactional style as a complement, particularly to maintain discipline and operational effectiveness (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Thus, military leadership is often hybrid in nature, combining transformational and transactional elements flexibly as needed (Day & Antonakis, 2012).

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that transformational leadership theory is highly applicable in the military context. Although the military environment has unique characteristics, such as strict command structures and high moral pressure, transformational values like inspiration, individualized attention, and innovation remain relevant and even crucial for the long-term success of military missions (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2019). Therefore, strengthening transformational leadership capacity within military institutions through continuous education and training is highly recommended to address complex future challenges.

Transformational leadership in the military context has unique characteristics compared to its application in the civilian sector. This is primarily due to its hierarchical structure, demands for absolute obedience, and the extreme conditions often faced in military situations, both during war and peace (Northouse, 2019). Transformational leadership is characterized by four core elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In practice, these elements not only form the framework of effective leadership but also enhance morale and organizational cohesion under various conditions.

In times of war, idealized influence is the cornerstone for building credibility and trust between leaders and troops. A military leader who demonstrates high integrity, courage, and exemplary conduct will elicit emotional loyalty from their soldiers (Yukl, 2014). This quality is evident in various military historical narratives, where success in battle is not solely due to technical strategy but also due to the moral and spiritual example set by the commander (Day & Antonakis, 2012). This demonstrates that idealized influence is not merely symbolic but plays a substantial role in soldiers' psychological resilience under wartime pressure.

In peacetime, idealized influence contributes to shaping a resilient and professional organizational culture. Transformational leadership emphasizes the importance of ethics, honesty, and role modeling in non-combat duties such as training, logistics, and humanitarian missions (Goleman et al., 2013). In this context, a leader's transformational quality creates a space for character development and deeper institutional loyalty beyond mere procedural obedience.

The element of inspirational motivation also holds an essential role. In wartime, military leaders who can rally the fighting spirit through a vision and a collective goal narrative will strengthen corps morale (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). Motivational messages emphasizing sacrifice, victory, and honor have proven effective in shaping a solid collective identity even amid mortal danger (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). In contrast, in peacetime, motivation takes a more professional form, such as capacity-building, career development, and institutional achievement. This aligns with the inspirational function of transformational leaders who can articulate long-term visions and unite members under strategic goals (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

As for intellectual stimulation, the military presents a unique challenge. During wartime, a leader's ability to encourage improvisation and innovation is critical. The complexity of the battlefield demands quick yet intelligent decision-making and support from soldiers capable of critical and responsive thinking (Kotter, 2012). In this regard, a transformational leader does not merely command but also opens space for intellectual participation and tactical initiative from subordinates. In peacetime, intellectual stimulation is applied through doctrine development, enhanced training systems, and adaptation to new technologies. Leaders who encourage open-minded thinking and problem-solving contribute to overall institutional readiness (Robbins et al., 2017).

The fourth element, individualized consideration, is key to strengthening social cohesion and personal loyalty. During war, leaders who show concern for the psychological conditions, personal needs, and moral development of their members can create emotional bonds that fortify team solidarity (House et al., 1999). This practice is crucial in dealing with trauma, combat fatigue, and extreme psychological stress. In peacetime, individualized consideration appears through career coaching, educational support, and attention to soldiers' family welfare (Bass, 1985). This approach reinforces

a sense of belonging to the military institution and fosters a more inclusive and supportive organizational culture.

By comparing theory and practice, several key similarities and differences emerge. The similarity lies in the foundational principles of transformational leadership, which consistently emphasize positive change, high morale, and strong interpersonal relationships (Northouse, 2019). However, the differences lie in the context and intensity of application. In wartime, transformational leadership is more intense and explicit due to situational pressure, whereas in peacetime, it is more systematic and long-term oriented (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Analytical findings also indicate that the success of transformational leadership depends greatly on the leader's ability to read the context and adapt their leadership style. A leader who relies excessively on bureaucratic procedures without transformational elements will struggle to build trust and fighting spirit, whether on the battlefield or in routine duties (Tichy & Devanna, 1986). Thus, transformational leadership is not merely a moralistic approach but also an effective managerial strategy across different conditions.

It is also important to note that transformation in military organizations occurs not only at the individual level but also in institutional structures and culture. Transformational leaders play a role in shaping shared values, visions, and norms that form the foundation of the organization (Burns, 1978). In peacetime, this is reflected in military bureaucratic reforms, improvements in military education quality, and the transformation of work culture into one that is more adaptive and professional. In wartime, these values are manifested in combat discipline, corps solidarity, and collective courage. One potential weakness of the transformational model arises when leaders rely too heavily on charisma while neglecting structural aspects. In the military context, charisma must be complemented by technical competence, formal legitimacy, and a clear chain of command (Goleman et al., 2013). When leaders rely solely on emotional inspiration without a solid strategic foundation, a gap may emerge between vision and implementation. Therefore, transformational leadership should be paired proportionally with transactional approaches to maintain operational effectiveness (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Overall, the application of transformational leadership theory within military institutions has proven effective in both wartime and peacetime. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to build collective morale, drive positive change, and holistically enhance member capacity (Day & Antonakis, 2012). However, this success greatly depends on the leader's personal qualities, institutional structural support, and adaptation to surrounding socio-political dynamics.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

This study shows that transformational leadership theory is a relevant and significant approach within military organizations, both in times of war and peace. Transformational leadership, which focuses on idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, has proven effective in enhancing morale, loyalty, and personnel effectiveness across various operational conditions. This leadership model not only emphasizes command and control but also fosters emotional connection, shared vision, and innovation in decision-making.

During wartime, transformational leaders play a crucial role in creating unity of purpose and mental resilience. They are able to mobilize soldiers through moral inspiration and exemplary behavior, as well as encourage a spirit of sacrifice under

extreme conditions. Meanwhile, in peacetime, transformational leadership facilitates human resource development, capacity building, and organizational modernization, with an emphasis on professionalism and continuous learning. The analysis results show that implementing a transformational leadership style in the military environment holds great potential for developing a command structure that is not only operationally effective but also ethical and responsive to emerging challenges. This requires military leaders to be skilled not only in strategy and tactics, but also in interpersonal abilities and long-term vision.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that leadership development within military institutions place greater emphasis on transformational aspects. Leadership training and education should adopt models that foster creativity, empathy, and reflective capacity in future military leaders. Through this approach, military organizations can develop leaders who are not only capable of handling physical and technical challenges but are also adept at building cohesion, trust, and collective morale. Other recommendations include the need to develop leadership evaluation systems that are not solely oriented toward task or operational outcomes, but also assess how a leader motivates, empowers, and supports the development of individuals within their unit. Furthermore, military training institutions should encourage study and reflection on contemporary leadership theories, including transformational leadership, to enrich theoretical insight and expand strategic approaches in addressing the evolving spectrum of threats.

However, several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, this research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach based on a literature review, and therefore does not provide empirical evidence from specific military organizational contexts. Second, the study does not deeply explore the role of military organizational culture in the acceptance or effectiveness of transformational leadership styles, even though organizational culture significantly influences communication styles, hierarchy, and how leaders are perceived by their members. Another limitation is the absence of an integrative mapping between transformational leadership theory and other leadership models, such as situational, authoritative, or transactional leadership. In practice, military leaders often apply a combination of leadership approaches simultaneously or interchangeably depending on the situation. Therefore, to complement this study, further research is needed that combines theoretical approaches with field data through interviews, observations, or case studies of leadership dynamics in real military settings. In conclusion, transformational leadership provides a strong framework for developing military leadership character that is not only resilient in facing conflict and pressure but also adaptive and visionary in managing change during peacetime. This theory deserves to be a strategic foundation in the development of superior military human resources and organizations in the future.

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