Perspectives of Colombian Higher Education Deans and Faculty Directors on Transformational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Leadership emerges as a powerful force in the effort toward achieving quality education. The transformational leadership style inspires leaders to work toward a common goal to create change. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore higher education deans' and faculty directors' perspectives on their practice of transformational leadership in higher education institutions in Colombia. Transformational leadership theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with six higher education deans and six faculty directors. Findings from coding analysis revealed seven themes: leadership commitment, shared vision, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, organizational performance, and future orientation. Colombian higher education leaders may use the findings to improve decision-making practices, increase motivation, and enhance organizational commitment and effectiveness.

Keywords: Leadership, Education, Transformation, Social Change.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions in Colombia must achieve the high academic standards required by the Colombian Ministry of Education, which is evidenced by the high-quality accreditation established by the law 30 of 1992 (Camacho, Messina, & Uribe Barrera, 2017). A critical aspect of achieving accreditation for Colombian higher education institutions is to have qualified leaders within the academic organizations (Murillo-Vargas, Gonzalez, & Urrego-Rodríguez, 2020). According to Gumus, Bellibas, Esen, and Gumus (2018), effective leadership practices bring academic success to educational organizations. Transformational leadership empowers leaders to achieve higher levels of performance within their organizations. Transformational leadership in the field of educational leadership permits leaders to increase their commitment and capacity in meeting goals (Bush, 2017). Considering the importance that transformational leadership brings to educational organizations, many countries around the world have focused on improving their leadership practices based on the transformational leadership principles (Maureira Cabrera, 2018). However, in some Latin American countries such as Colombia, transformational leadership has been considered mostly for instructional practices in higher education institutions, and a lack of information exists concerning transformational leadership practices in Colombian higher education institutions at the leadership management level (Mejía, 2018). The purpose of the current study was to explore deans' and faculty directors' transformational leadership practices in higher education institutions in Colombia. As education changes, leaders must become transformational leaders to inspire educational members to go beyond their task requirements and contribute to enhancing quality education for Colombian society (Sierra Villamil, 2016). This study may contribute to the body of knowledge that supports educational leaders in enhancing their leadership roles, improving their decision-making practices, increasing their motivation, and deepening their organizational commitment and effectiveness within their educational organizations.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This basic qualitative study addressed the perspectives of deans and faculty directors regarding their transformational leadership practices in Colombian higher education institutions. Few studies had been carried out that focused on the leadership style of educational leaders who are at the management level in Colombian higher education institutions. The basic qualitative design was used to investigate the central phenomenon of this study, which involved deans' and faculty directors' perspectives on their transformational leadership practices in higher education institutions in Colombia. The educational community may find this study useful for improving the leadership practices of educational leaders within their organizations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, THE following research questions (RQs) were used:
RQ1: What are Colombian higher education deans' and faculty directors' understanding of transformational leadership?
RQ2: What are the perspectives of higher education deans and faculty directors in Colombia regarding how their transformational leadership practice has impacted their organizations?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Leadership in Education

The concept of leadership, as a complex social phenomenon, is influenced by culture, as are the criteria of leadership effectiveness (Aguilar & Correa, 2017). The fact that someone is considered a leader depends on others perceiving that person as such, and that perception is informed by the belief system of a society (Bejarano, 2016). A manager could be considered a good leader in a certain country, whereas in another country the same manager may be seen as a tyrant; the perception of subordinates will determine the effect that leadership practice has on them (Espinosa, Contreras, & Barbosa, 2016).

Transformational Leadership Style

Transformational leadership is a popular topic among scholars around the world. (Anderson, 2017). Research on this topic has appeared in the literature used in the United States in educational research, as well as in practice. In Latin American countries, transformational leadership has been studied as an instructional practice more than as a leadership management practice (Hammad & Hallinger, 2017). Leadership practices encourage leaders to work toward achieving specific goals to improve the quality of organizations through the ideals of equality, fairness, and justice. Transformational leaders understand the importance of motivating followers to go beyond their self-interests and to attend to their necessities.

Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

Effective leadership practices enable leaders to carry out their tasks adequately. Kouzes and Posner (2018) used different techniques to evaluate leadership practice in private and public organizations. They found similar aspects that characterize an effective leader. Honesty was identified as the first essential quality of an exceptional leader, followed by competence, and finally vision and inspiration. The five practices of exemplary leadership are operationalized in the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) to assess leader behaviors from the perspectives of leaders, colleagues, and subordinates (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). Considering the characteristics recognized above, the five effective practices that Kouzes and Posner identified are as follows:
- Modeling the way: leadership by example by aligning one's actions and beliefs;
- Inspiring a shared vision: engaging colleagues and peers toward common objectives;
- Enabling others to act: empowering followers into cooperative and collaborative actions;
- Challenging the process: inspiring innovative ideas to achieve positive change;
- Encouraging the heart: recognizing employees' contributions to the common goals of the group or organization.

Transformational Leadership Practices Within the Educational Context

High-quality education demands that educational institutions innovate in their educational management and instructional processes to encourage a sense of inclusion that can

motivate educational members to create different ideas that apply in their work, improve the performance of the organization, and promote collaboration and integration toward the achievement of common goals. Therefore, educational institutions require leaders who can establish an adequate organizational vision, inspire motivation, understand and communicate emotions, and at the same time, show interest in their followers (Ramos-Garza & Ramos-Garza, 2019). These requirements demand transformational leaders who understand the importance of practicing the principles of this leadership style. Moreover, these same leaders must hold positive perceptions concerning their leadership practices.

Leadership Management in the Field of Higher Education

Leadership in higher education institutions is critical for institutional development and instructional practices, and its impact on the community. Higher education institutions are currently concerned with increasing the elements of leadership that can overcome the constant and vertiginous challenges that are presented today (Arias, Molina, Intriago, & Vera, 2018).

There are clear differences between the function and satisfaction of a group led by a leader and the function and satisfaction of a group which has no leader. In this sense, Campoverde, Rosero, Gonzalez, and Ortiz (2018) maintain that the performance of leaders affects the environment and culture of the organization of higher education institutions, and that this models the dedication that the members of the educational institutions have for their work and the predisposition they have toward change and improvement.

In contrast to previous decades in which leadership was related to authoritarianism or bureaucracy, today effective leadership is characterized by a vision of the future, innovation, and change (García-Martínez, Higueras-Rodríguez, & Martínez-Valdivia 2018). This new way of understanding leadership is defined as transformational and visionary. Gómez, del Valle Díaz, and De la Vega Marcos (2018) point out that educational leaders face a crucial dilemma in their efforts to improve teaching and learning in schools.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

Research Design

The perceptions of the participants were central to an understanding of how educational leaders who are at the management level understand transformational leadership as a critical component that contributes to improving Colombian higher education. Because the perspectives of the participants led to a deeper understanding of the transformational leadership practices within higher education contexts and how this practice has impacted their organizations, a basic qualitative approach was selected. The focus of the basic qualitative approach is to understand how people interpret, construct, or derive meaning from their world and their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that informed this study was based on transformational leadership theory. Burns first introduced the theory in 1978, and Bass (1997) later expanded on Burns's work. The transformational leadership theory was selected to serve as the conceptual

framework for this study because this theory focuses on leaders' perception and practice of transformational leadership, which is reflected in the output of those for whom the leader is responsible. Positive perceptions of transformational leadership improve leaders' decision-making, motivation, organizational commitment, organizational climate, and the basis for enhancing quality education (LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016). Bass and Avolio (1994) established a set of five elements of transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence or attributed charisma, (b) idealized influence or behavioral charisma, (c) inspirational motivation, (d) intellectual stimulation, and (e) individualized consideration. Jiang, Zhao, and Ni (2017) claimed that idealized influence thrives on the leader's perception and acceptable practices. Additionally, Para-González, Jiménez-Jiménez, and Martínez-Lorente (2018) asserted that a leader's positive perception of transformational leadership practice encourages followers to challenge themselves to contribute positively to an organization. Transformational leaders are able to engage, inspire, and empower others to build a thriving organization (Bohorquez, 2016).

Setting, Population/Participants

The sampling procedure was criterion based through purposeful sampling of twelve principals who are leading higher education institutions in Colombia, including two higher education institutions in Colombia. The participants for this study were deans and faculty directors with a minimum of one year of leadership experience who worked at two Colombian higher education institutions. The two higher education institutions were located in the south region of Colombia that encompasses both rural and suburban settings. The two higher education institutions have a total of 1,407 professors, 784 administrators, and student populations that exceed 20,000 students. Deans and faculty directors belong to the administrative area, but deans hold a higher rank than faculty directors. Moreover, the leadership tasks of deans in higher education institutions in Colombia are different from those of the faculty directors.

Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis

Data was collected from two Colombian higher education institutions through virtual conference with each of the twelve participants. Data from each recorded interview was transcribed, translated into English, and coded. Verbatim transcription allowed an integral analysis and interpretation of verbal data, and it facilitated the process of coding (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). The transcriptions were e-mailed to the participants for their review. Participants did not offer any changes or corrections. The data was presented within the context of the two research questions and the two participants groups (deans and faculty directors). Then, the data was organized according to the themes that emerged through the coding of the interviews (transcripts). A qualitative data analysis software, Atlas ti 7.5, was utilized to conduct a Thematic Analysis. Thematic analysis was a logical method to explore people's views, opinions, knowledge, experiences or values from a set of qualitative data such as interview transcripts, social media profiles, or survey responses (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Then, the interviews were coded and stored from each participant since this is a useful data analysis tool in qualitative research (Friese, 2019). According to Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2016), coding involves grouping together conceptually similar data in the respective nodes after the desegregation of textual data based on similarities and differences. The thematic analysis was conducted, the six steps developed by Braun and Clarke were followed (2019)

- Familiarization: During this step, an overview of all the data was made before starting analyzing individual items.
- Coding: sections of the interview transcripts were highlighted, these were phrases or sentences, labels or "codes" came up to describe their content.
- Generating themes: patterns were identified, and started coming up with themes.
- Reviewing themes: In this step, revisions were made, the themes were useful and accurate representations of the data. Here, data was reviewed to set and compare the themes against it.
- Defining and naming themes: Once a final list of themes was assembled, I named and defined each of them.
- Writing up: In this last step, an analysis of the data was written. According to the research question, the aims and approach of participant groups (deans and faculty directors) in this study was inductive because it involved allowing the data to determine the themes.

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore higher education deans' and faculty directors' perspectives on their practice of transformational leadership in higher education institutions in Colombia. It was important to know how Colombian deans and faculty directors understand transformational leadership and how the practice of this type of leadership affects their organizations.
Research Question 1
Research Question 1 asked the following: What are Colombian higher education deans' and faculty directors' understanding of transformational leadership? The following three themes were identified:

- leadership commitment
- shared-vision
- idealized influence

Theme # 1: Leadership Commitment

Leadership commitment was the first theme that emerged from coding data. Leadership commitment, according to Kim and Beehr (2019), is a critical characteristic that transformational leaders need to have to lead an organization. Commitment requires the leader's capacity to engage their people with responsibility, punctuality, and organization to work toward a common objective. Faculty directors and deans demonstrated a positive understanding of leadership commitment by identifying aspects such as *encouragement*, *managing situations*, and *commitment*. The code *commitment* represented graphically in Fig. 1. depicted a direct relationship to leadership commitment. General characteristics of commitment are used in leadership commitment with the difference being that in the field of leadership commitment, it is the leader who inspires others to commit and guide the human talent to give their best every day (Asif et al., 2019). The *codes encouragement* and *managing the situations* proved to be associated to leadership commitment. Transformational leaders bring out the best in other

people, encouraging and motivating them to manage difficult situations with precaution. Both group of participants, deans and faculty directors, recognized the positive value of leadership commitment and the aspects associated to it.
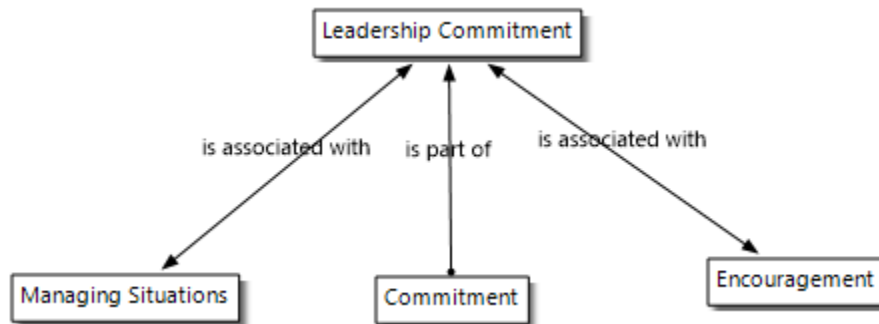

Fig. 1 Leadership Commitment

Theme # 2: Shared Vision

  Shared-vision was the second theme that emerged from coding data. Shared-vision in leadership allows the leader to identify the essential role that each member of the organization can play in achieving their shared goals. When a leader assumes a shared-vision aspect, there is a permanent group identity, stronger team cohesion, and, ultimately, effective performance, and organizational outcomes (Qadach, Schechter, & Da'as, 2019). The codes presented in Fig. 2. displayed the association among the codes *feedback*, *team working*, *decision making*, and *good* communication as critical elements for leaders to achieve a shared-vision characteristic. *Feedback* is important in the field of transformational leadership because it can be constructive to help people grow by learning, and by reinforcing the activities they are doing well (Lee, Idris, & Tuckey, 2019). The code *team working* allows a leader to create organizational structures around common goals. A transformational leader allows followers to work cooperatively with others to achieve group objectives (Ellis, 2018). The figure 2 showed that decision making is part of a good communication and good communication has a direct relationship to shared-vision. According to the majority of the participants, communication influences Deans and faculty directors presented an understanding of the importance of holding a shared-vision characteristic and the elements described above when assuming a leadership role. Moreover, participants recognize the significance of constructive feedback and the difficulties of maintaining positive communication with employees. Khan, Ahmad, and Ilyas (2018) stated that transformational leaders focus on the entire organization as a whole and not on themselves. Transformational leaders' vision extends beyond their immediate goals. Deans and. Working as a team maximizes resources and minimizes efforts. Working together allows learning which bring positive benefits to the organization. The fig. 2. displayed that effective communication and decision making were codes that were associated with organizational consciousness. According to deans, communication is a critical tool to manage an organization. Based on deans' and faculty directors' responses, there was an evident importance of organizational consciousness into these leaders' practices. They described the significance of focus on the entire organizations rather than specific individuals only. The element of teamwork played a critical role that has affected deans' organizations positively. Some deans recognized the need to manage attitudes and authoritarian personalities when working in a team with the aim of achieving better results into

the organization. Finally, communication was a significant factor for participants, since it enables organizations to have clarity on the objectives to achieve and processes into their organizations. Moreover, according to the participants motivating individuals, respecting their opinions, having a clear vision of the organization, and sharing ideas with stakeholders are positive practices that deans and faculty directors use as part of their transformational leadership roles to affect positively their organizations.
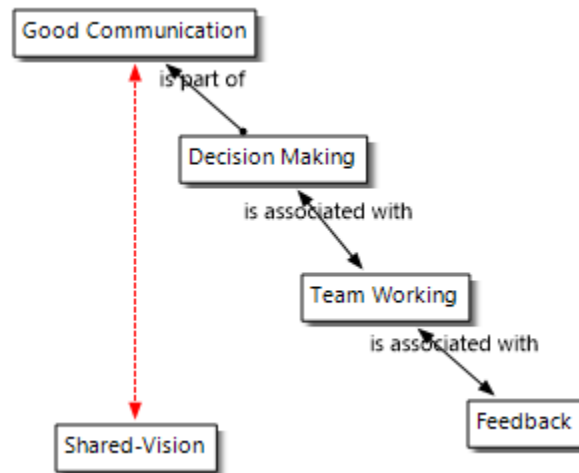

Fig. 2 Shared Vision

Theme # 3: Idealized Influence

Idealized Influenced was the third theme of this study, and it showed to have a relationship with the codes *inspiration*, *change adaptability*, and *ethics.* According to Puni, Mohammed, and Asamoah (2018), idealized influence is related to leaders' behavior to inspire their followers to be respected and trusted and to become role models. The code *inspiration* was associated with idealized influence. Deans and faculty directors considered that being a transformational leader means to become a role model who inspires others to be better professionals and better human beings. For the participants, inspiring others was one of the most important characteristics that a transformational leader must possess. Moreover, one of the deans thought that followers were in charge of judging leaders concerning their role of inspiring others. In relation to the code *change adaptability*, Hetland, Hetland, Bakker, and Demerouti (2018) stated that change means the leader's capacity to adjust and connect to a new environment usually requires a new organization's culture to develop a new structure that has to be aligned of its demands. Participants acknowledged the significance of change adaptation and recognized this trait as one of the most important transformational leader's characteristics. According to these results, deans and faculty directors evidenced a sound understanding of transformational leadership dimensions and the aspects associated with it. When considering the code *ethics*, deans and faculty directors agreed on the idea that transformational leaders should hold a deep sense of ethics during all their leadership tasks and behavior.
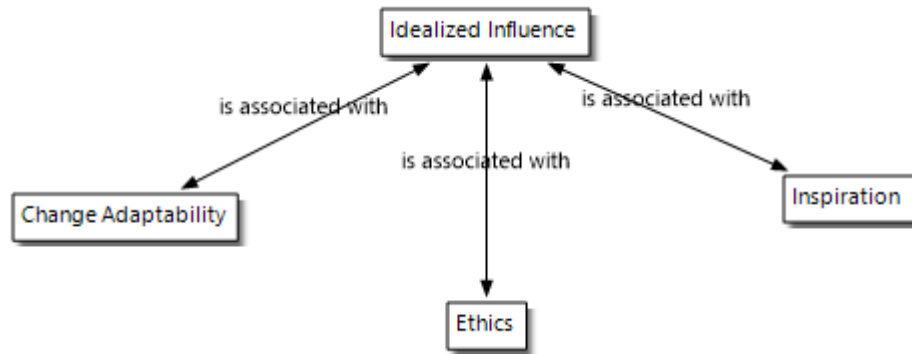
Fig. 3 Idealized Influence

Research Question 2
Research Question 2 asked, What are the perspectives of higher education deans and faculty directors in Colombia regarding how their transformational leadership practice has impacted their organizations?
The following themes were identified:
- Inspirational Motivation
- Intellectual Stimulation
- Organizational Performance
- Future Orientation

Theme # 4: Inspirational Motivation.

Inspirational motivation was the fourth theme that emerged from participants' responses. According to Mousa and Puhakka, (2019), inspirational motivation is related to leaders' abilities to inspire confidence, motivation, and a sense of purpose in their followers. Moreover, transformational leaders must develop a clear vision for the future, keep clear lines of communication with followers concerning expectations of the group, and demonstrate a sense of responsibility and commitment to the goals that have been laid out. The codes under this category were *consideration* and *empowering language*. It was evident based on faculty directors' responses, that the fact of motivating employees by providing positive and sensitive feedback produces a positive motivation which allows inspirational motivation to take place within their organizations with the aim of obtaining successful results. Participants considered that empowering languages included open and good communication strategies within the organization to enhance its productivity and to achieve positive outcomes. Deans and faculty directors showed that motivation, conviction, and communication are critical aspects related to consideration and empowering language, all of which have positively affected their organizations.
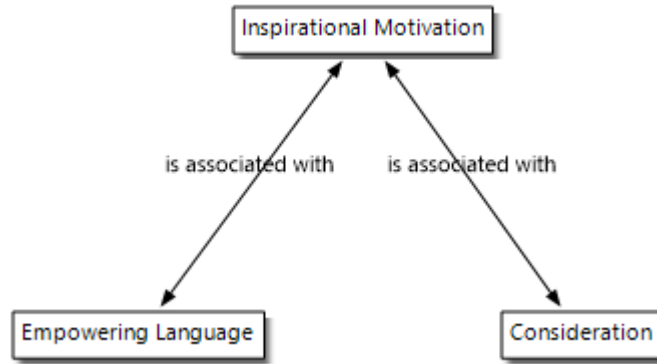
Fig. 4 Inspirational Motivation

Theme # 5: Intellectual Stimulation.

Results showed that there was a direct relationship between the theme *intellectual stimulation* and the codes *training and orientation* and *professional development* (See. Fig.5.). According to Sánchez-Cardona, Salanova Soria, and Llorens-Gumbau, (2018), intellectual stimulation refers to some aspects and skills that a transformational leader needs to hold such as innovation, creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Besides, intellectual stimulation involves arousing followers 'skills by stimulating their ability to identify and solve problems creatively through professional development and intellectual growth. Based on deans and faculty directors' responses, professional development alternatives have affected their organizations effectively by having a skillful and well-prepared human capital which has risen its options to succeed.
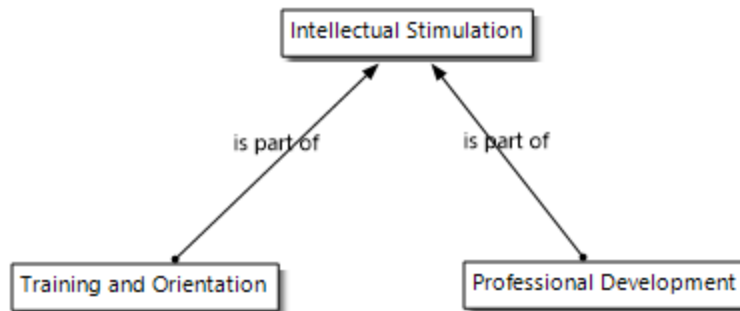
Fig. 5 Intellectual Stimulation

Theme # 6: Organizational Performance

Organizational performance was the sixth theme that emerged in this study. Transformational leadership influences the relationship of organizations and their associated success. Transformational leaders are those who shape institutional strategies, including their execution and effectiveness by determining values, culture, change tolerance, and employee motivation (Al Khajeh, 2018). Fig. 6. showed a direct relationship between organizational performance and organizational development. According to Subramony, Segers, Chadwick, and Shyamsunder (2018), transformational leadership practices play a significant and crucial role in the development of any organization. Organizations without effective leadership cannot work

efficiently. Transformational leadership is an important function of the educational management, which helps to enhance productivity and to achieve organizational goals (Kim & Thapa, 2018). Based on faculty directors' responses, Fig. 6. also showed that the code *strategic plans* was associated with performance, and the code *performance* were part of organizational development. As evidenced from the participants' responses, practicing good leadership strategies enhances organizations' performance and effective development, which contributes to ensuring the positive functioning of any organization.

Fig.6. Organizational Performance

Theme # 7: Future Orientation.

Future orientation was the seventh theme that emerged in this study. Muralidharan and Pathak (2018) stated that future orientation refers to the degree to which strategies that a transformational leader uses to encourage and reward future-oriented behaviors from their followers helps enhance planning and creating a vision for their organizations. Fig. 7. presented a direct relationship between the theme *future orientation* and the code *change*. According to deans' responses, change is a critical element that must take place within the organization to dynamize the structure of the organizations, to innovate, to achieve better results, and to be in line with the progress of the society. Faculty directors thought that taking risks is always important to achieve change and to dynamize the working climate because it allows transformation and improvement. Based on the participants' responses, the codes *confidence* and *vision and strategy* are associated with the future orientation and change of any organization. Participants agreed that being confident of followers' and leaders' skills when managing an organization is critical for planning its future. Moreover, participants thought that holding a vision for the future of the organization allows leaders to formulate strategies that guarantee the success of the organization.
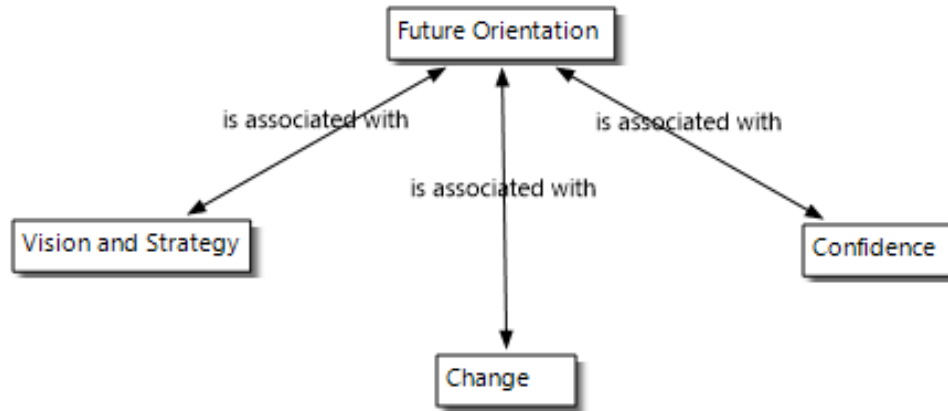
Fig. 7 Future Orientation

A diagrammatic representation of the codes and themes is contained in Fig. 8.

Themes	Codes
Idealized influence	Ethics, Inspiration
Leadership commitment	Commitment, Encouragement, Managing Situations
Shared vision	Decision Making, Effective Communication, Feedback, Team working
Future orientation	Change, Confidence, Vision and Strategy
Inspirational motivation	Consideration, Empowering Language
Intellectual stimulation	Professional Development, Training and Orientation
Organizational performance	Development, Performance, Strategic Plans

Fig. 8 Summary Codes and themes

Interpretation of Findings

To interpret the findings of this study, the two research questions were considered. RQ1 allowed for exploration of deans' and faculty directors' perspectives on their transformational leadership understanding. RQ2 allowed for the exploration of deans' and faculty directors' perspectives on how their transformational leadership practice has impacted their organizations. The findings of this study in relation to RQ1 were consistent with reports in existing literature, which were related to the effective practices of transformational leadership that occur when a leader inspires and motivates other people to share a vision and gives them the resources needed for developing their full potential and achieving a common goal. According to deans and faculty directors interviewed in the study, a transformational leader should be an example to others and become a role model who inspires others to be better human beings and professionals. This finding was consistent with the literature, which indicated that transformational leaders become role models within their organizations, they are optimistic and cooperate to generate organizational commitment, and they focus on their subordinates' needs for growth and improvement (see Rosenbach, 2018). According to Ghavifekr et al. (2017), transformational leaders encourage problem-solving practices and accept new ideas from their followers. The

findings in the current study were consistent with this part of the literature review because deans and faculty directors considered the importance of accepting other people's ideas to enhance communication and promote problem-solving strategies within the organizations.

Deans and faculty directors in the current study recognized the importance of promoting professional learning, orientation, and training in the organizations to achieve better results from their followers and improve job performance. This finding was consistent with the literature that indicated a transformational leader is an individual who generates and facilitates learning opportunities for followers and may play the role of a coach or a mentor. The findings were also consistent with the literature because the current study participants had an understanding of the four transformational leadership dimensions promoted by Bass (1985). The first dimension is charisma. The charismatic leader inspires, gains respect and trust, and increases optimism. Inspiration is the second dimension, which focuses on leaders' behavior as a role model for followers and subordinates. The third dimension is individual consideration. This dimension enables leaders to recognize and determine followers' needs and provide them with opportunities for customized training sessions and activities for their growth within their positions. The last dimension of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation, which focuses on decision, creativity, and innovation.

Based on the literature reviewed, transformational leaders who recognize themselves as leaders are strong individuals who are able to stimulate and inspire their subordinates to achieve extraordinary results while developing their leadership skills (see Nguyen et al., 2017). Deans in the current study highlighted the importance of improving this aspect because they considered that leaders need to be recognized by others and not by themselves. Deans understood the importance of improving this transformational leadership practice through achieving a deeper sense of leadership and self-recognition.

Findings in the current study were consistent regarding the importance of having positive and open communication with others. According to deans and faculty directors, establishing dialogue and providing positive feedback creates debates, discussions, meetings, and other means of communication; reduces the risks of issues and misunderstanding; and enhances comprehension among employers to set up clear and coherent goals. Based on the literature review presented in this study, leaders must have strong skills of communication to guide the direction of the organization through their leadership practices. According to current study participants, transformational leadership practices enhance creativity and motivation, which enables employees and other leaders to achieve better results within their organizations. This finding was consistent with the literature, which established that transformational leaders create an environment conducive to innovation because they generate positive perceptions and job satisfaction by properly driving feedback that serves to guide followers and keep them motivated toward achieving the goals of the organization (Tintoré, 2019).

Regarding RQ2, the findings in this study were consistent with the literature review concerning the importance of analyzing the leadership style of an organization because it is reflected both in the culture of the organization and in its relationship with society; in this way, if a leader distrusts their power, it is likely that other members of the social organization will act in a similar way when interacting with colleagues, as well as with the community (Bligh et al., 2018). If a leader works collaboratively and is open, they are likely to promote the same attitudes among staff and may collaborate with other organizations. In most cases, organizational culture is defined by the style of its leader. If the organization is faithful to its philosophy and mission, the style of its leader must be consistent with them (Contreras et al., 2016). Deans and faculty

directors in the current study recognized the critical role that a leader has in organizations because their behavior may impact the correct functioning of the organization, its organizational culture, and its vision. Deans and faculty directors described the significance of cooperation, teamwork, and working collaboratively to achieve better results within the organization. Moreover, deans and faculty directors reflected on the critical role that adapting to change means to an organization and its members. According to participants, change is a strategy that brings to the organization innovation, creativity, and progress. Deans and faculty directors thought that changes should be carefully implemented within the organization in order to avoid failures, even though it was understood that failing would always be part of the risks taken in the process. According to the literature reviewed in this study, leaders of the organizational field agree on the changes they are experiencing and how those changes have been opportunities to progress and succeed (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017).

Based on the literature reviewed, transformational leaders should motivate followers to go beyond their self-interests and attend to their necessities. This motivation should be implemented using positive reinforcement and avoiding negative behaviors, such as punishment or authoritarianism (Espinoza-Solis & Elgoibar, 2019). Consistent with the literature review, deans and faculty directors thought that effective leadership practices encourage leaders to work toward achieving goals to improve the quality of organizations through the ideals of equality, fairness, and justice. Participants noted that some behaviors recognized among their leadership practices, such as authoritarianism, must be changed.

The findings in this study also increased the body of knowledge concerning transformational leadership at Colombian higher education institutions. Research on transformational leadership in Colombian higher education institutions has focused on professors' perception of this leadership style within their instructional activities, but there was a lack of information on how Colombian higher education leaders at the management level perceived and practiced transformational leadership within their leadership roles (Mesa et al., 2017). Therefore, this study may contribute to the expansion of knowledge regarding this topic. Additionally, the findings in this study increased knowledge concerning transformational leadership in Latin American countries such as Colombia because this style of leadership has been explored mostly in elementary and secondary educational settings and has focused on instructional practice (Bernasconi & Rodríguez-Ponce, 2018).

The conceptual framework that informed this study was based on transformational leadership theory. Burns introduced the theory in 1978, and Bass (1997) later expanded on Burns's work. The transformational leadership theory was selected to serve as the conceptual framework for this study because this theory focuses on leaders' perception and practice of transformational leadership, which is reflected in the exceptional output of the leaders' followers. Positive perception of transformational leadership also improves leaders' decision-making, motivation, organizational commitment, organizational climate, and ability to enhance the quality of education (LePine et al., 2016).

The findings in this study supported the transformational leadership theory as they expanded knowledge regarding transformational leadership style. The findings presented perspectives from deans and faculty directors concerning their transformational leadership practices at Colombian higher education institutions and promoted the importance of the five elements of the transformational leadership theory: (a) idealized influence or attributed charisma, (b) idealized influence or behavioral charisma, (c) inspirational motivation, (d) intellectual stimulation, and (e) individualized consideration (Mahmood, Uddin, & Fan, 2019).

The findings aligned with transformational leadership theory because the themes that emerged from the participants' responses focused on the transformational leadership dimensions and principles that best describe leaders, such as respecting others, having positive communicative skills, inspiring and motivating followers, improving self-recognition as leaders, having a vision, and working collaboratively with others to achieve common goals. Moreover, the findings reflected the importance of transformational leadership in organizations because this approach generates change in people's lives and within organizations (see Khalili, 2016). Transformational leadership restructures values, perspectives, expectations, and aspirations of employees to contribute to building and practicing effective leadership skills. The components of the transformational leadership theory supported this study to facilitate the exploration of transformational leadership practice and determine participants' perceptions concerning the outcome of their transformational leadership skills to contribute to improving the quality of Colombian higher education institutions.

IMPLICATIONS

Significance to Practice

This study may contribute to enhance quality education by enforcing the practice of transformational leadership within higher education institutions. This study may provide information for educational leaders to understand the importance of transformational leadership style and the principles that conform it to enhance and improve leadership practices within educational organizations. Furthermore, this study may uncover effective transformational leadership practices already used by deans and faculty directors that can be used by other leaders to improve their leadership roles.
    The results of this study may improve transformational leadership practices, such as communication, teamwork, training and orientation, inspiration, change adaptation, and achievement of a vision of the future to realize positive outcomes and sustainable goals within higher education institutions.

Significance to Theory

This study is a scholarly attempt to support the body of literature in relation to transformational leadership in higher education. Transformational leadership practices from deans and faculty directors in Colombian higher educational institutions included all perspectives to understand current educational leaders' skills and practices, while combining the existing literature to increase the knowledge into this field.

Significance to Social Change

The results of this study could potentially be used by educational managers and those responsible for holding leadership roles into higher education institutions. Deans and faculty directors may consider their leadership skills and reevaluate the effectiveness of their current transformational leadership practices. Actively involving followers in the planning and curriculum design could improve job performance, commitment, organizational performance, and motivation, as well as enhance positive communication among educational managers,

professors, and positively impact the quality, effectiveness, and success of the educational organizations. Professors may feel more committed and encouraged to advance professionally within their organizations because their experiences, concerns, and needs would be met and students learning might improve. Developing a deeper understanding of the perspectives about transformational leadership practices from deans and faculty directors may contribute to enhance higher education quality by improving decision-making practices, motivation, and potentially enhance organizational commitment and effectiveness leading to a positive social change. Effective transformational leadership practice into educative organizations is said to be responsive to the educational members' necessities and causes positive change in management practices that meet followers need (Adhikari, 2019).

Effective transformational leaders within the higher education field must work toward adapting positively to a rapidly changing environment. They must understand and effectively manage internal and external social changes to ensure success into the educational organizations and the society in general (Heaton, 2020). Additionally, transformational leaders into the educational field must understand the phenomenon of transformational leadership and learn effective practices that enable them to deal with the issues that sometimes may surround them, to find problem-solving strategies, to move forward and make progress within and outside of their organizations, and to manage future-oriented organizations that contribute to positive changes in the community at all levels.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore higher education deans' and faculty directors' perspectives on their practices of transformational leadership in higher education institutions in Colombia. As the findings confirmed, transformational leadership understanding and practice by deans and faculty directors in Colombian higher education institutions are positive with only small percentage of these leaders reporting negative views of transformational leadership behavior, such as authoritarianism and lack of leadership self-recognition.

This study is important as it may increase understanding of the knowledge of deans and faculty directors related to transformational leadership in Colombian higher education institutions at the management level. Based on deans and faculty directors' perspectives on their transformational leadership practices, this study may contribute to increase the body of knowledge about transformational leadership, which may enable leaders within educational environments to enhance quality education by improving decision-making practices, motivation, job performance, and potentially organizational commitment and effectiveness leading to progress and success.

The results of this study indicate that best transformational leadership practices within higher education institutions are necessary to establish and maintain an open communication among leaders and followers, to improve team working, to implement professional development opportunities and to work actively toward achieving common goals with the aim of creating future-oriented educational organizations.

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