



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN HEALTHCARE: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON WORKFORCE OUTCOMES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

Healthcare organizations worldwide have operated in an increasingly complex and volatile environment where leaders face challenges, such as workforce burnout, staff shortages, increased operational costs, rapid technological advancements, and high demands for safety, quality, and equity. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the challenges, uncovered the vulnerabilities of the healthcare systems, and intensified the need for effective leadership to uphold organizational performance and effectiveness. This paper presents a comprehensive review of the required healthcare leadership competencies, focusing on transformational leadership as a significant framework to address challenges existing in contemporary healthcare organizations. This review underscores the importance of transformational leadership, which includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, in impacting organizational culture, employee motivation, engagement, job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and lower turnover rates. Empirical evidence has also demonstrated that transformational leadership is associated with reduced burnout and turnover intention, enhanced performance among healthcare professionals, improved patient health outcomes, and increased organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The paper further unveils the role of transformational leadership in influencing organizational culture and fostering innovation, resilience, and high efficiency in healthcare settings globally. Finally, this paper emphasizes that since transformational leadership is a highly effective approach for healthcare organizations, decision-makers should intentionally invest in leadership development, especially among middle and frontline managers, and improve workforce well-being to strengthen healthcare delivery systems. Consequently, better quality care with patient-centered doctrines will be achieved in an evolving healthcare landscape.

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, healthcare organizations worldwide have faced significant challenges. The already overburdened healthcare system faced a new challenge with the sudden emergence of COVID-19 (Tanveer et al., 2023). Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic compelled healthcare systems and leaders to devise innovative approaches for delivering medical services and addressing challenges (Moreno, 2025). Those significant challenges include severe workforce burnout and shortages, increased mental health burdens for staff and patients, higher operational costs, financial instability, supply chain issues, as well as critical issues with cybersecurity, emerging health technologies, improving health equity, and patient safety (Oskarsson & Vik, 2024). Healthcare organizations need to explore innovative approaches to enhance efficiency and address key challenges and critical issues. Healthcare organizations need effective leaders to navigate the complexity of the external environment, provide vision and direction, foster collaboration, and adapt to new challenges, ensuring operational efficiency, improved care delivery process by creating a better resilient system to provide high-value, patient-centered care that meets the rising demands from various stakeholders (Jaafaripooyan et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2024).

The arrangement of this paper is as follows. First, this paper starts with an introduction stating the need for effective leadership in healthcare. Second, this paper will examine the key issues and components existing in contemporary healthcare organizations. Third, a review of transformational leadership will be presented. Fourth, a survey of past research studies concerning the roles of transformational leadership in healthcare organizations will be explored. The fifth and final section will discuss the best practices and solutions derived from the literature review and the author's professional experience.

2. Organizational Issues and Potential Solutions in Healthcare

2.1. Burnout and Mental Health

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare professionals burned out due to a combination of issues and the demands of their jobs. Inadequate staffing and excessive workloads force healthcare professionals to work long hours (Zisook et al., 2022). Demanding working conditions force healthcare professionals to experience chronic stress, fatigue, burnout, and moral injury, which can result in other illnesses like depression and an increased risk of heart disease (Rink et al., 2023). As healthcare professionals become sick, quit their jobs, or consider leaving the profession, the likelihood of staff shortages is amplified among existing staff who work long hours and experience excessive workloads (Zisook et al., 2022). Administrative burdens arising

from electronic health records, lengthy and unpredictable hours, and a lack of control over one's schedule are also common factors causing burnout (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). Additionally, the emotionally draining nature of the work, for example, caring for sick and dying patients, significantly initiates burnout, which is intensified by understaffing, resource limitations, and a lack of organizational support (Rink et al., 2023; Yücel, 2021).

COVID-19 has accelerated burnout among healthcare professionals, with several factors contributing to this phenomenon. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, patient surges have overwhelmed healthcare professionals, who have also experienced constant fear of infection and extended work hours (Gomes et al., 2024). Other contributing factors include severe personal protective equipment shortages, moral distress from impossible choices, chronic exhaustion, lack of support in childcare and sick leave, and emotional trauma such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, drastically worsening pre-existing issues (Burrowes et al., 2023). Numerous healthcare professionals retired early or changed their careers due to COVID-19. Healthcare organizations have faced increased difficulty recruiting and retaining employees owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (Shen et al., 2024).

2.2. Turnover

The turnover rate is the percentage of employees who leave their positions within an organization during a specific timeframe (Dessler, 2023). It is a key health indicator for an organization because it signals employees' level of satisfaction and potential organizational issues (Yücel, 2024). Turnover intention refers to the conscious and deliberate desire to relocate or leave an organization to find a better job (Ahmad Saufi et al., 2023; Gagnon et al., 2024). Employees tend to establish a positive intention to engage in their job if they have a positive attitude towards various aspects of their organizations (Ahmad Saufi et al., 2023). Turnover in healthcare organizations is a serious concern (Gagnon et al., 2024) due to the significant challenges currently confronting all healthcare organizations. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become increasingly challenging to retain employees and foster a strong sense of loyalty to the organization, which generates higher turnover rates (Shen et al., 2024; Yücel, 2024). The persistent challenges that healthcare organizations face involve workload, staff shortages, high turnover intentions, retention difficulties, and inadequate or insufficient compensation (Abu-Qutaish et al., 2025). A high turnover rate leads to a shortage of skilled healthcare workers and burnout among existing workforces, which is associated with poorer patient outcomes (Shen et al., 2024). Shen et al. (2024) conducted a cohort study using the US Census Bureau state unemployment insurance data to examine the exit and entry rates for the healthcare industry from January 2018 through December 2021. Their findings revealed that healthcare workforces experienced a substantial and persistent increase in turnover after the pandemic. Thus, healthcare leaders must understand the reasons behind employee turnover and devise a strategic plan to retain their existing staff (Shen et al., 2024). Healthcare organizations and leaders should recognize and support valuable

and productive employees, ensuring they have the necessary resources to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities (Shen et al., 2024; Yücel, 2024). The satisfaction of various employees' needs at the workplace will lead to the reduction of employees' turnover intention (Ahmad Saufi et al., 2023).

2.3. Organizational Culture

Organizational culture encompasses the fundamental values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by all members of an organization (Walston & Johnson, 2022). The organizational values are the shared standards that an organization's members use to evaluate whether they have contributed to the organization achieving its goals. Tambosi et al. (2021) claimed that organizational culture encompasses various components, such as values, norms, and behavioral patterns, that characterize the organization and dictate how individuals interact within it and engage with their work and the organization itself. Paais and Pattiruhu (2020) defined organizational culture as the procedures and methods that must be absorbed by all members of an organization and perceived as effective and acceptable to all, as it clearly affects organizational performance and the achievement of competitive advantages.

Organizational culture is shaped by leadership and employees, and can foster either high-performance outcomes, such as compassion and collaboration, or adverse outcomes, including burnout or errors (Tambosi et al., 2021). On the other hand, organizational culture can also influence the behaviors of leaders and employees (Abbas & AL-Abrow, 2023). Organizational culture impacts everything from safety and quality to patient satisfaction and financial health, characterized by layers of visible actions, such as procedures, and deep assumptions, like ethics (Walston & Johnson, 2022). Differences in perceptions of organizational culture among employees can affect their behavior and attitudes (Gomes et al., 2024). Numerous studies highlight the significance of organizational culture for an organization's growth and sustainability (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Some healthcare organizations adapt their organizational culture in response to developments and complexities in the external environment; otherwise, the healthcare organizations will not live up to their required levels of performance (Abbas & AL-Abrow, 2023).

2.4. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to an employee's sense of contentment, fulfillment, and attitude toward their work (Walston & Johnson, 2022). Spector (1997) defined job satisfaction as the extent to which individuals dislike (or dissatisfy) their jobs or like (or satisfy) their jobs. Job satisfaction is a combination of physiological, psychological, and environmental factors that influence an individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their work (Anderson, 2021). Job satisfaction is a crucial indicator of employees' emotional well-being, measuring their contentment with their jobs and the sense of fulfillment derived from the job (Walston & Johnson, 2022). Multiple factors affect the level of job satisfaction, including the nature of work, workload, pay, fringe benefits, contingent rewards,

promotion, organization's culture, professional development opportunity, leadership, and relationships with coworkers, managers, and patients (Alkhateeb et al., 2025; Notarnicola et al., 2024; Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). These factors are vital because they boost productivity, quality of care, loyalty, and retention while reducing turnover and healthcare costs, ultimately benefiting both the individual and the organization's success (Alkhateeb et al., 2025; Notarnicola et al., 2024). When individuals are satisfied, they are less likely to leave their jobs, which leads to higher morale and more productivity for the organization (Alkhateeb et al., 2025; Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Job satisfaction has been regarded as the primary dynamic that collectively shapes an organization's efficiency and effectiveness (Alkhateeb et al., 2025).

2.5. Motivation and Work Engagement

Borkowski (2022) defined motivation as the willingness behind healthcare professionals' behaviors to work at a certain level of effort. Motivation plays a central role in work performance and has been a key element in the success of healthcare organizations. Herzberg's two-factor theory, also known as the hygiene-motivation theory, is the most appropriate theory to explain the concepts of motivation and is often cited in healthcare literature. Herzberg categorized the factors into intrinsic (motivation) and extrinsic (hygiene) (Borkowski, 2022; Walston & Johnson, 2022). Motivational factors related to job content that can motivate employees include the work itself, advancement, achievement, opportunities for professional growth, and recognition (Abu-Qutaish et al., 2025; Gomes et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). Conversely, hygiene factors do not motivate employees and comprise working conditions, interpersonal relations, salary, job security, company policies and administration, and relationships with supervisors (Abu-Qutaish et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2022). Abu-Qutaish et al. (2025) suggested that addressing hygiene factors is essential to improving motivation among employees. Therefore, understanding these factors can help develop plans to boost employees' motivation. Healthcare leaders might consider offering organizational and leadership support, improving the working environment, and providing more opportunities for professional development (Zhang et al., 2023).

An organization's employees are the most precious and unique assets in determining the organization's competitive advantage and success (Ahmad Saufi et al., 2023). Work engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling state of mind related to work that is characterized by absorption, vigor, and dedication (Szilvassy & Širok, 2022). Absorption is portrayed as being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, while vigor reflects high levels of energy and mental resilience (Cao et al., 2023). Dedication is denoted as being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of enthusiasm and importance (Cao et al., 2023; Szilvassy & Širok, 2022). Work engagement in healthcare refers to healthcare professionals' enthusiasm, dedication, and connection to their job (Abu-Qutaish et al., 2025). Healthcare professionals are involved beyond the scope of their job responsibilities and are empowered to support their organization's goals (Abu-Qutaish et al., 2025; Szilvassy & Širok, 2022). When healthcare

professionals are devoted and engaged, they feel valued, empowered, and contented and gain their confidence (Cao et al., 2023). They have the necessary resources, freedom to work and act independently (Alkhateeb et al., 2025). Having a favorable working climate, empowering employees to perform their job with high satisfaction and efficiency, which results in better patient care, improved patient experiences and outcomes and stronger organizational performance (Alkhateeb et al., 2025; Cao et al., 2023; Gagnon et al., 2024). In an increasingly competitive and challenging healthcare environment depicted as high work demands and limited resources, providing a working environment that encourages positive work attitudes and behaviors is crucial for delivering high-quality patient care, reducing errors, ensuring safety, and lowering turnover (Gagnon et al., 2024; Szilvassy & Širok, 2022).

2.5. Organizational Performance

Al Khajeh (2018) stated that organizational performance is the actual outputs of an organization, and it is measured by comparing such outputs with the organization's predetermined goals. Organizational performance is a measure of an organization's progress and development through its ability to achieve its goals, and it is the broadest indicator as it includes quality of patient care, cost efficiency, operational effectiveness, employee engagement, patient satisfaction and others (Abbas & Al-Abrow, 2023). Organizational performance is a multi-faceted measure of the success of an organization going above financial health with a focus on delivering value and improved health outcomes (Tanveer et al., 2023). The bottom line of measuring organizational performance is to see how the organization successfully accomplishes its goals in the long term to grow and survive (Walston & Johnson, 2022). Goal attainment is associated with organizational effectiveness and efficiency. To achieve predetermined goals, healthcare leaders must make the right decisions about the acquisition, allocation, and distribution of resources among various departments of the organization (Borkowski, 2022). Therefore, organizational performance is a reflection of leaders' practices and efforts, requiring organization success in a variety of aspects, including satisfaction from employees and patients (Tanveer et al., 2023). Since organizational performance is mainly related to individual performance arising from job satisfaction and job commitment, it is crucial to improve employee attitudes, which is likely to produce positive outcomes, including increased organizational effectiveness, patient satisfaction and profits (Gomes et al., 2024).

2.6. Effective Leadership

The healthcare delivery system in the United States has become increasingly complex, providing a diverse array of services across multiple levels to address the care needs of a changing population (Spanos et al., 2024). In response to the increasing complexity of healthcare delivery, healthcare leaders are navigating ever more complex actors in the system, comprising doctors, nurses, technicians, other healthcare professionals, managers, insurers, and patients (Amal et al., 2023). Effective healthcare leaders strive to

provide strategic directions, balance priorities, foster collaboration, and lead the organization toward a high performing organization (Amal et al., 2023; Tangatarova & Gao, 2021) Competent healthcare leaders are considered to be crucial for raising the effectiveness of healthcare teams and improving organizational performance, quality of care, and patient safety (Spanos et al., 2024).

Amini et al. (2025) highlighted that effective leadership is not solely a function of individual traits or competencies, but is also significantly influenced by the cultural environment in which leadership occurs. Leaders operate within the system shaped by policies, institutional traditions, and socio-political dynamics, all of which can either sustain or impede leadership effectiveness (Gomes et al., 2024; Notarnicola et al., 2024). Effective leadership has been deemed as a leading influence on organizational culture, including workplace commitment, that fosters innovation, team collaboration, professional growth and employee satisfaction, and prevents workforce burnout (Abbas & Al-Abrow, 2023; Abu-Qutaish et al., 2025; Gomes et al., 2024; Notarnicola et al., 2024; Zisook et al., 2022). Amal et al. (2023) argued that effective leadership can steer operational improvements, decrease costs, and increase patient satisfaction. Effective leadership in a healthcare organization is essential to its success (Chen et al., 2022).

3. Transformational Leadership for Today's Healthcare Leaders

Leadership refers to the ability to influence individuals or teams to work toward a common goal (Eaton et al., 2024; Tanveer et al., 2023). Undeniably, leadership is a critical component of effective healthcare management and the main driver impacting organizational performance (Chen et al., 2022). Various leadership theories have been developed over the past 100 years to explain what makes a successful leader (Singh et al., 2024). These well-established leadership theories offer insights into the traits, behaviors, and situations that further effective leadership. However, this review will center around transformational leadership.

In 1973, sociologist James V. Downton first invented the term "transformational" (Abbas & Al-Abrow, 2023). James MacGregor Burns further advanced the concept of transformational leadership in his 1978 book by distinguishing between transactional and transforming leadership and describing transformational leadership as a leadership style that inspires followers to become better versions of themselves and develop their full potential (Burns, 2012; Eaton et al., 2024). In 1985, building on Burns's work, Bernard M. Bass not only further differentiated between transactional leadership and transformational leadership but also applied the theory to business settings and launched the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to assess a leader's transformational qualities (Chen et al., 2022; Gagnon et al., 2024; Notarnicola et al., 2024; Tangatarova et al., 2021). Bass believed that most leaders display both transformational and transactional leadership to varying degrees.

Bass (2008) characterized transformational leadership as comprising four key qualities: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and

individual consideration. Bass's conception of idealized influence, as well as the attributed charisma dimension, is a central element of transformational leadership (Eaton et al., 2024). Transformational leaders serve as charismatic role models who gain followers' respect, trust, and confidence (Notarnicola et al., 2024; Tangatarova et al., 2021). Leaders with an idealized influence model exhibit exemplary behaviors and values of ethics, commitment, and integrity that align with organizational goals (Eaton et al., 2024). They encourage followers to approach problems and issues in innovative ways (Bass, 1985). Such leaders build strong credibility, motivating teams to follow their vision and embracing similar values and work ethics (Chen et al., 2022). Transformational leaders lead by example and prioritize team goals over their own personal goals. Conversely, followers tend to mimic their leaders and the emotions associated with them (Eaton et al., 2024; Gagnon et al., 2024).

Inspirational motivation is a core attribute of transformational leadership, where leaders articulate a compelling vision to arouse their followers for achieving collective goals and outcomes (Bass et al., 2003; Gagnon et al., 2024). Such leaders share the vision with a sense of authority, while being enthusiastic and optimistic, which creates a sense of energy (Chen et al., 2022). Transformational leaders with inspirational motivation communicate a vision with confidence, energizing followers and empowering them to transcend their self-interest and surpass expectations (Abu-Qutaish et al., 2025; Yücel, 2024). Such leaders raise followers' awareness of the importance and value of organizational goals, emphasize the connections between their personal and organizational goals, and strengthen their commitment, engagement, and creativity through clear communication (Abbas & AL-Abrow, 2023; Tangatarova et al., 2021). Such leadership utilizes inspirational motivation to influence followers both intrinsically and extrinsically, enabling them to exceed expectations, overcome obstacles, and reach their full potential (Bass et al., 2003; Chen et al., 2022; Yücel, 2024).

The third characteristic of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1990). This characteristic enables transformational leaders to stimulate their followers intellectually, encourage them to think creatively, challenge assumptions, and find innovative solutions (Amal et al., 2023; Gomes et al., 2024). Such leaders pay attention to the personal needs of each of their followers (Amal et al., 2023). Transformational leaders foster a culture of learning and curiosity, and empower followers to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills independently (Burns, 2012; Jaafaripooyan et al., 2020). Transformational leaders who provide intellectual stimulation will identify followers' strengths and inspire them to utilize their strengths, creativity, and ingenuity to find novel solutions to challenges, taking personal initiative (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020; Yücel, 2024).

The final characteristic of transformational leadership is individual consideration (Bass, 2008). Transformational leaders with individual consideration listen to their followers, demonstrate genuine concern for each follower's needs, aspirations, and challenges, and provide followers with personalized support, encouragement, and mentorship (Bass, 1985). Such leaders are sensitive to each follower's needs, making

efforts to accommodate various individuals and ensuring they feel heard and valued (Oskarsson & Vik, 2024; Singh et al., 2024). Leaders who consider individual needs encourage followers to unlock their potential, show compassion, be receptive to other people's perspectives, and be willing to explore their followers' perspectives (Thomas, 2024; Yücel, 2024). Consequently, it would lead to an increase in the followers' confidence (Tangatarova & Gao, 2021).

4. Empirical Research of Transformational Leadership in Healthcare

The scholarly interest in understanding the role of transformational leadership in health has increased over the past few decades. Many empirical studies indicate that transformational leaders play a central role in leading healthcare organizations through the turbulent environment.

Abbas and AL-Abrow (2023) investigated the association between transformational leadership style and organizational performance. The findings showed that transformational leadership boosts organizational performance, which is positively related to individual performance because of job satisfaction and job commitment. Optimistic outcomes are generated when employees understand the importance of their role and participation in decision-making. Additionally, the results confirmed the importance of organization culture moderating the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance since organizational culture can also influence the leader's behaviors (Abbas & Al-Abrow, 2023).

In Amal et al.'s (2023) study, they explored transformational leadership's impact on nurses' performance while work engagement served as a mediator. Their findings confirmed that work engagement, linked to transformational leadership, strongly influenced job performance among nurses. Amal et al. (2023) advised that healthcare leaders should enhance nurses' job performance through instilling transformational leadership. Similarly, Abu-Qutaish et al. (2025) examined the relationship between transformational leadership, work engagement, and work motivation among nurses. The results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and work motivation as well as between transformational leadership and work engagement. Abu-Qutaish et al. (2025) concluded that transformational leaders foster a supportive and encouraging work environment that can significantly enhance nurse engagement and motivation.

Gagnon et al. (2024) examined the contribution of top management's transformational leadership behaviors on nurses' turnover intention. The results revealed that top management's transformational leadership behaviors noticeably predicted turnover intention through specific nurses' states of engagement. In times of nurse shortage, Gagnon et al. (2024) suggested that healthcare organizations should cultivate top management's transformational leadership to maintain the nursing workforce. Chen et al.'s study (2022) substantiated the role of transformational leadership in reducing the

risk of burnout among hospital employees, as burnout is a key driver of high turnover rate.

5. Conclusion

As evidenced, transformational leadership is the most pertinent leadership style for effectively managing healthcare organizations in today's complex and dynamic environment. Even though a wealth of healthcare management literature has demonstrated the need for transformational leadership in transforming and leading healthcare organizations, not all managers and leaders exhibit transformational leadership behaviors. Given that leadership is born and bred, Kleine et al. (2024) advocated that organizations must establish a comprehensive ongoing development plan to cultivate their leaders toward transformational leadership skills to drive a successful effective organizational performance.

Building leadership capacity is the key to meeting the daunting challenges that healthcare organizations confront now and in the future. However, for mid-sized and small healthcare organizations, there is likely an inadequate amount of funding budgeted for leadership development training in the unpredictable economy. Leadership development is indeed costly. Given that leadership development is a time-consuming and expensive endeavor, organizations need to invest wisely and plan prudently to maximize the benefits of training. Moreover, healthcare organizations need to ensure that middle managers, who have direct contact with frontline staff, will be able to apply transformational leadership daily, which is vital to the future of the healthcare delivery system and the well-being of society.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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