



Effective Transformational Leadership Model for Middle-level Administrators in Private Colleges and Universities under Shaanxi Province

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Abstract

The research objectives of this dissertation were: 1) To determine the components and indicators to the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province; 2) To propose the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province; 3) To develop the guidelines to apply effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province. This research combined quantitative and qualitative methods. It selected 309 administrative personnel, assistant deans, department heads, and teachers of private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province. Using a stratified sampling method, data were collected through IOC tools, five-point scale questionnaires, and focus group interviews. The questionnaire response rate was 100% and all were valid. Data analysis was conducted through CFA to explore the effective transformational leadership model of middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province. The research results show: 1) The effective transformational leadership model of middle-level administrators consists of 5 components: Ideal Influence (II), Inspirational Motivation (IM), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), Individualized Consideration (IC), and Learning Innovation (LI), including 41 measurement indicators; 2) Model of effective transformational leadership for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province was fit with the empirical data; 3) Five key guidelines were identified for the effective transformational leadership capabilities of middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province.

Keywords: Effective, Transformational Leadership, Model, Private Colleges and Universities

Introduction

In recent decades, transformational leadership has garnered increasing attention as a powerful leadership style that fosters organizational innovation, promotes long-term development, and enhances employee engagement. Originating from the foundational work of Burns and further developed by Bass and Avolio, transformational leadership emphasized key components such as vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support. Numerous studies have confirmed its effectiveness across corporate and public sectors, including educational institutions (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Moreover, in the field of higher education, transformational leadership had been shown to improve teaching quality, promote faculty development, and strengthen organizational



cohesion. However, most existing research had focused on public universities or Western education systems, while empirical studies on Chinese private universities remained limited. As private universities in China rapidly expand, they face significant challenges. Middle-level administrators in these institutions served as crucial bridges between strategic planning and operational execution, and thus required effective, adaptive leadership. However, many middle-level administrators in higher education faced barriers to leadership development due to inadequate institutional resources and preparation. Therefore, it was essential to design context-specific leadership development programs to address these gaps and enhance retention, leadership effectiveness, and overall institutional success (Collingwood, 2023).

This research strongly supports the view that transformational leadership played a vital role in enhancing the leadership capabilities of middle-level administrators in Chinese private universities. While prior studies had primarily focused on public institutions or the business sector (Feng et al., 2016), few have examined how to localize and adapt transformational leadership to address the structural challenges, resource constraints, and policy environments of private higher education in China (Zhao & Liu, 2020). Therefore, this research aimed to fill this gap by developing an effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province. Drawing upon transformational leadership theory, organizational learning, and digital innovation frameworks, this research employed a mixed-methods approach to identify a culturally appropriate and contextually effective leadership model. Additionally, it proposed practical guidelines for applying this model to improve the management efficiency and educational quality of the private higher education sector.

Research Questions

1. What are the components and indicators of the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province?
2. What are the effective transformational leadership models for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province?
3. What are the guidelines to apply the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province?

Objectives

1. To determine the components and indicators of the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province.
2. To propose an effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province.
3. To develop the guidelines to apply the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province.

Hypothesis

The model of effective transformational leadership for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province fits with the empirical data.



Literature Reviews

Transformational leadership was widely recognized as a powerful leadership style that facilitated organizational change, drives innovation, and enhances employee engagement. Originating from Burns' foundational work and later expanded by Bass and Avolio (1994), it comprised four core components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These components collectively enabled leaders to articulate a vision, stimulate creative problem-solving, and address individual developmental needs (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). In the higher education sector, transformational leadership has been shown to improve teaching quality, foster faculty development, and strengthen institutional cohesion. Numerous studies have validated its effectiveness in public universities and Western educational systems (Liu & Chen, 2020). Despite the rapid growth and increasing significance of Chinese private universities, empirical research on transformational leadership in this context has remained relatively limited (Feng et al., 2016).

Private colleges and universities in China faced unique challenges, including constrained resources, difficulties in faculty retention, and the need to adapt to rapidly evolving policy and technological environments (Wang & Li, 2021). Scholars noted that middle-level administrators' responses to digital transformation vary widely. Some were positive, while others were negative. However, many felt that they were increasingly being given more power and were crucial to the success of the organization (Kusmaryanto, S., & Santoso, C. B., 2025). Berto, Adenusi, and Khanna (2023) conducted a comprehensive review of middle leadership in secondary schools from 2002 to 2021, emphasizing the interplay between organizational processes and environmental complexity. Drawing on complexity theory, their studies highlighted the emergent, adaptive, and interconnected nature of middle leadership, offering nuanced insights into their roles and challenges. Nevertheless, research was still scarce on how these administrators could effectively integrate transformational leadership with Chinese cultural values and the specific governance structures of private institutions.

Recent studies have reinforced the importance of contextual adaptation. Smith and Vass (2019) emphasized that effective leadership in private higher education should align with the local organizational culture, leverage digital transformation, and promote a culture of continuous learning. As Benavides et al. (2020) suggested, the digital transformation of education is not simply a technical shift but requires fundamental changes in institutional culture and leadership practices. Chen et al. (2022) highlighted that post-pandemic educational governance required hybrid leadership combining transformational vision with agile decision-making to address resource volatility. Similarly, facing the development of technology, Hou, Ahmad, and Zhao (2024) studied that combining visionary leadership with AI technologies can significantly enhance educational administration, instructional effectiveness, and overall learning outcomes, and the strategic role of leaders in creating adaptive, innovative school environments responsive to the demands of digital transformation. During the transformation towards diversified and innovative human resource practices, inclusive leadership moderates the direct impact of it on employees' psychological safety. Furthermore, transformational leadership played a crucial role in strengthening institutional innovation capacity; Asbari, M. (2024) found that it significantly influenced both learning culture and organizational structure, which, in turn, positively affected institutional innovation. Findings from the literature review underscore the importance of creating an effective transformational leadership model for



middle-level administrators in Chinese private universities that aligns with local cultural contexts and offers both theoretical and practical contributions. To address this research gap, the present study developed and empirically validated a transformational leadership model specifically designed for administrators at private universities in China. The model was examined against the contemporary imperatives of digital competence and adaptive innovation, and was contextualized within China's cultural milieu and the national "Double First-Class" higher education initiative. The results offered a theoretically grounded and practically relevant framework for cultivating high-performing management teams capable of driving reform, fostering innovation, and enhancing quality in higher education.

Methodology

This research adopted a mixed-methods design to develop and validate an effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, China. The population comprised 1,564 individuals, including university leaders, department chairs, administrative heads, and faculty from eight representative private undergraduate institutions. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table and cluster random sampling, 309 participants were selected. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with nine key informants to determine model components and indicators, followed by a 41-item, five-dimension questionnaire—Idealized Influence (II), Inspirational Motivation (IM), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), Individualized Consideration (IC), and Learning Innovation (LI)—validated by five experts through the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability testing (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with fit indices including GFI, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Convergent validity was confirmed when Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.50 and Composite Reliability (CR) > 0.70 ; discriminant validity was established when the square root of AVE exceeded inter-construct correlations. For guideline development, focus group discussions were conducted with 9 senior administrators as key informants (including 2 Presidents, 1 Vice President, 1 Dean, 1 Associate Dean, 2 Heads of the department, 1 Director of Student Affairs, 1 Director of Human Resources) with over ten years of experience. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups underwent content analysis—systematic coding, categorization, and thematic synthesis—to triangulate results and strengthen validity. This integrated approach ensured methodological rigor, model robustness, and practical applicability in the local higher education context.

Results

1. The research findings on the components and indicators of the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province.

A systematic review of relevant literature, grounded in Bass and Avolio's (1995) transformational leadership theory and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), identified seven potential components and 62 indicators of an effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities. Through frequency analysis of 20 representative studies, five components and 49 indicators were selected. Semi-structured interviews with nine key informants (3 deans, 2 vice deans, 2 directors,



and two department heads) further refined the components and indicators. Variables supported by more than five experts were selected. Using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic coding method, 43 key indicators were confirmed as essential for measuring transformational leadership. These indicators were categorized under five components: Idealized Influence (II), Inspirational Motivation (IM), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), Individualized Consideration (IC), and Learning Innovation (LI).(Table 1)

Table 1 Components and Indicators

Component	indicator
Component 1	Idealized Influence
1.	Ethical Standards and Integrity
2.	Role Modeling by Leaders
3.	Leader Credibility and Trust
4.	Vision Building and Strategic Foresight
5.	Sense of Responsibility and Commitment Fulfillment
6.	Leader’s Personal Charisma
7.	Promoting Organizational Innovation
8.	Leader Integrity and Sense of Responsibility
9.	Ethical Values Shaping
10.	Fairness and Transparency
Component 2	Inspirational Motivation
11.	Vision Communication and Goal Clarity
12.	Goal Orientation and Motivation Mechanisms
13.	Team Collaboration and Employee Participation
14.	Psychological Support and Emotional Motivation
15.	Organizational Commitment and Morale Enhancement
16.	Leader’s Vision Articulation Ability
17.	Sense of Achievement and Team Spirit
18.	Trust Building and Team Cohesion
Component 3	Intellectual Stimulation
19.	Innovation Culture and Creativity Stimulation
20.	Knowledge Sharing and Cross-Department Collaboration
21.	Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Ability
22.	Learning Orientation and Reflective Ability
23.	Employee Engagement and Organizational Commitment
24.	Knowledge Acquisition and Application Ability
25.	Data-Driven Decision-Making and Change Management
Component 4	Individualized Consideration
26.	Personalized Support and Employee Needs Focus
27.	Individual Coaching and Career Development Support
28.	Cultural Sensitivity and Team Inclusiveness
29.	Employee Satisfaction and Work Stress Management
30.	Psychological Safety and Team Recognition
31.	Flexible Work Arrangements and Work-Life Balance
32.	Employee Empowerment and Autonomy
33.	Emotional Resonance and Empathy
34.	Leader Accessibility and Communication Efficiency
Component 5	Learning Innovation
35.	Knowledge Sharing and Organizational Learning Ability



Table 1 Components and Indicators

Component	indicator
36.	Innovative Thinking and Change Management
37.	Knowledge Acquisition and Skill Enhancement
38.	Organizational Adaptability and Competitiveness Improvement
39.	Collaborative Learning and Team Knowledge Integration
40.	Problem-Solving Ability and Creative Thinking
41.	Digital Learning and Technology Integration
42.	Change Strategy and Execution
43.	Organizational Learning and Continuous Improvement

These 5 components and 43 validated indicators provided a solid theoretical and practical foundation for further research and tool development to enhance leadership capacity in private colleges and universities.

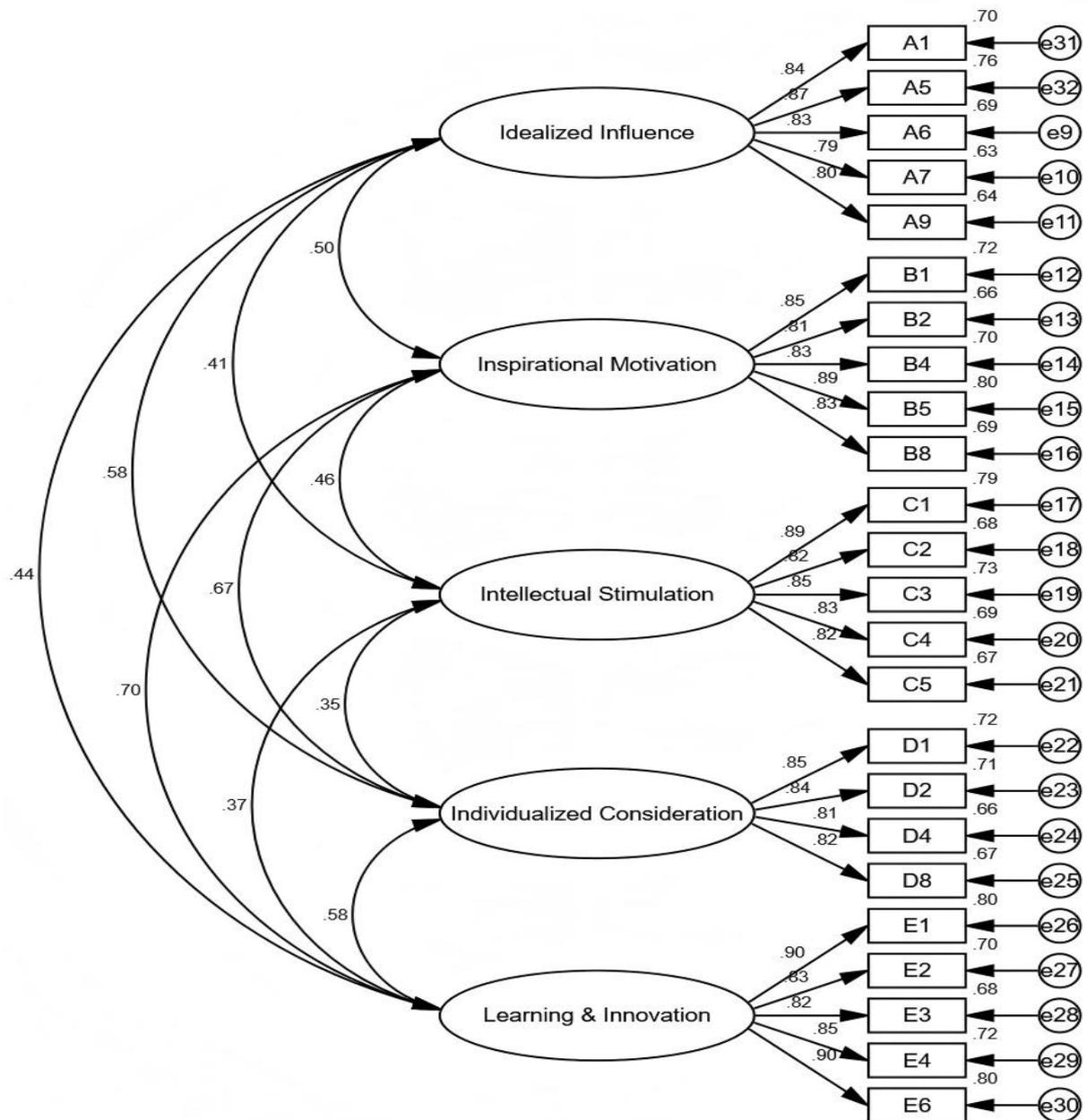
2. The research findings on the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province.

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed based on variables identified in the previous phase. The questionnaire was refined through expert feedback, reducing the original 43 items to 41 after calculating the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). A pilot test with 30 respondents confirmed its reliability, and the final version was distributed to 309 participants, achieving a 100% response rate.

Survey data from 309 respondents, including middle-level administrators (38.2%) and subordinate teachers (61.8%) from eight private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, indicated balanced gender distribution (54% male, 46% female) and high educational attainment (86.1% holding master’s or doctoral degrees). Most respondents had 4–6 years (46.3%) or over 7 years (26.5%) of administrative experience, and were employed primarily in comprehensive (46.9%) or applied technology universities (30.4%) of medium-to-large size. All observed variables met normality criteria (absolute skewness < 3, kurtosis < 10), with mean scores ranging from 3.26 to 3.94 and standard deviations ranging from 0.58 to 1.20. Significant inter-item correlations ($r = 0.351-0.699$, $p < .001$) confirmed the suitability of the indicators for confirmatory factor analysis and structural modeling.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the proposed transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province. The model consisted of 5 components and 24 indicators (Figure 1) :

- Idealized Influence (II): A1, A5, A6, A7, A9
- Inspirational Motivation (IM): B1, B2, B4, B5, B8
- Intellectual Stimulation (IS): C1, C2, C3, C4, C5
- Individualized Consideration (IC): D1, D2, D4, D8
- Learning Innovation (LI): E1, E2, E3, E4, E6



Standardized estimates Default model

$\chi^2=406.864$; $P= .081$; $df=242$; $\chi^2/df=1.681$; $GFI=.901$; $AGFI=.877$;
 $NFI=.935$; $IF=.972$; $TLI=.968$; $CFI=.972$; $RFI=.925$; $RMSEA=.047$

Figure 1: The measurement results of the combinations of various variable indicators

The overall measurement model demonstrated excellent fit: $\chi^2 = 406.864$, $P= .081$; $df = 242$, $\chi^2/df = 1.681$, $GFI = 0.901$, $AGFI = 0.877$, $NFI = 0.935$, $IFI = 0.972$, $TLI = 0.968$, $CFI = 0.972$, $RFI = 0.925$, and $RMSEA = 0.047$, all exceeding the recommended thresholds. Internal consistency was strong, with Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.880 (IS) to 0.943 (LI), and Composite Reliability (CR) values from 0.899 (IC) to 0.935 (LI). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.684 (II) to 0.741 (LI), all above the 0.50 threshold, confirming convergent validity (Table 2). All standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.79 ($p < .001$), supporting item reliability.



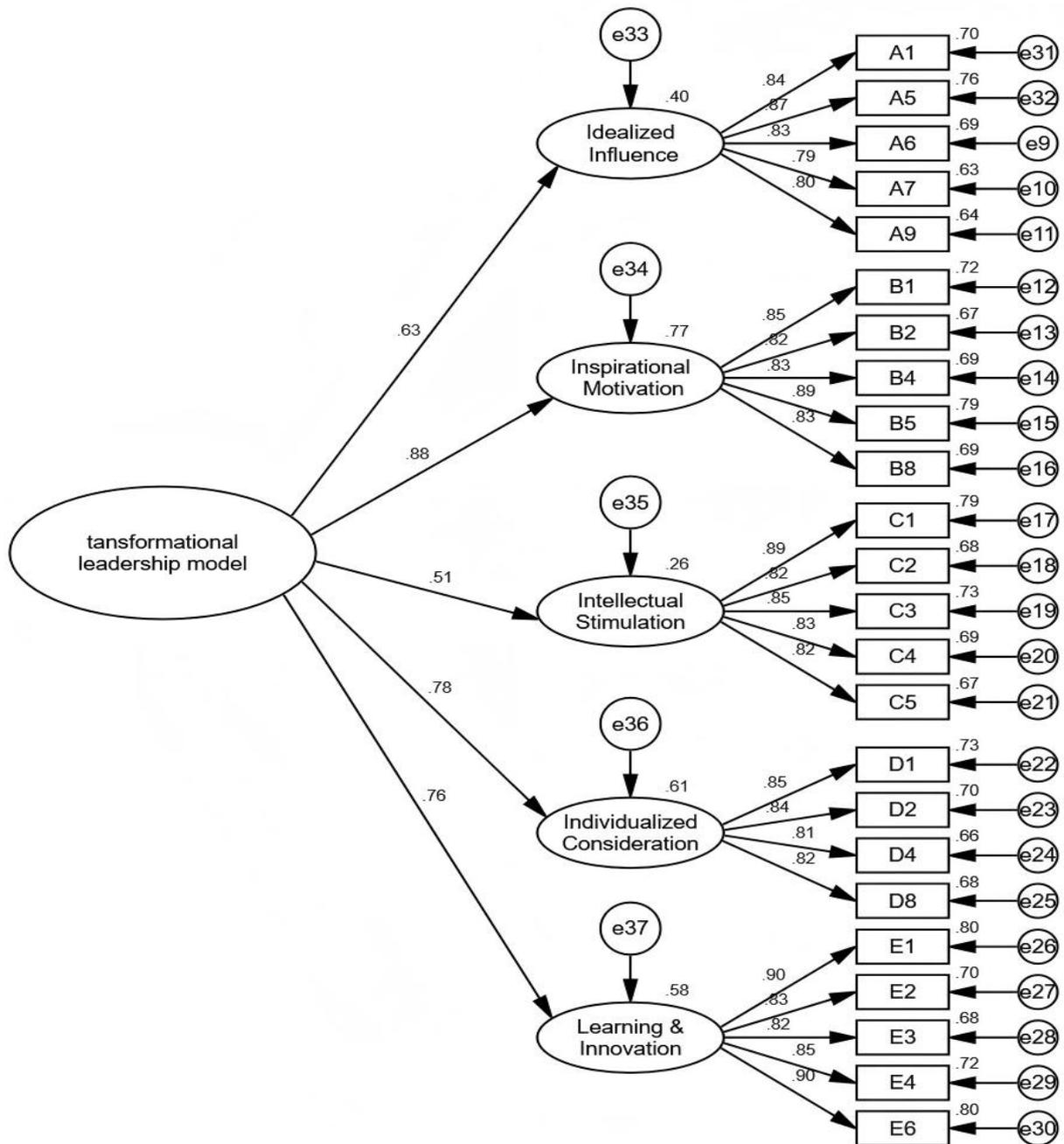
Table 2: The Result of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	Variate /Item	STD. Estimate	R ²	S.E.	C.R.	p	CR	AVE
Transformational leadership model	II(0.629)							
	A1	0.839	0.395				0.915	0.684
	A5	0.873		0.060	19.014	.00**		
	A6	0.829		0.064	17.566	.00**		
	A7	0.791		0.062	16.370	.00**		
	A9	0.800		0.058	16.625	.00**		
	IM(0.877)							
	B1	0.851	0.767				0.926	0.714
	B2	0.817		0.055	17.815	.00**		
	B4	0.834		0.057	18.436	.00**		
	B5	0.891		0.051	20.674	.00**		
	B8	0.831		0.060	18.344	.00**		
	IS(0.513)							
	C1	0.888	0.263				0.925	0.712
	C2	0.823		0.047	19.123	.00**		
	C3	0.853		0.044	20.452	.00**		
	C4	0.832		0.048	19.490	.00**		
	C5	0.820		0.045	19.006	.00**		
	IC(0.780)							
	D1	0.853	0.608				0.899	0.691
	D2	0.838		0.045	17.92	.00**		
	D4	0.811		0.054	17.075	.00**		
	D8	0.822		0.047	17.423	.00**		
	LI(0.763)							
	E1	0.895	0.582				0.935	0.741
	E2	0.835		0.049	20.246	.00**		
	E3	0.824		0.045	19.733	.00**		
	E4	0.850		0.043	21.006	.00**		
E6	0.897	0.042		23.590	.00**			

Note: **<0.01---significant level

The second-order CFA results validated the proposed transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private universities. The model demonstrated good fit, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Inspirational Motivation ($\beta = 0.877$), Individualized Consideration ($\beta = 0.780$), and Learning Innovation ($\beta = 0.763$) were the components with the greatest contributions to the transformational leadership model, followed by Idealized Influence ($\beta = 0.629$) and Intellectual Stimulation ($\beta = 0.513$). These results

provided empirical support for the model and offered valuable insights for leadership development in the field of higher education administration.(Figure 2)



Standardized estimates Default model

$\chi^2=429.462$; $P=.081$; $df=247$; $\chi^2/df=1.739$; $GFI=.896$; $AGF1=.874$;
 $NFI=.931$; $IFI=.969$; $TLI=.966$; $CFI=.969$; $RFI=.923$; $RMSEA=.049$

Figure 2 Secondary Level of Model (CFA)

Discriminant validity was established; the square roots of the AVE values for each construct exceed the inter-construct correlations, confirming strong discriminant validity. All factor loadings for the selected measurement items exceeded 0.8, meeting the required standard (Table 2). These findings confirm that the five components and their 24 indicators form a robust,



reliable, and valid measurement framework for the effective transformational leadership model in the context of private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province.

Table 3 Discriminating Validity

	II	IM	IS	IC	LI
II	0.827				
IM	0.504**	0.845			
IS	0.413**	0.462**	0.844		
IC	0.583**	0.675**	0.351**	0.831	
LI	0.435**	0.699**	0.365**	0.576**	0.861

Note: The bolded numbers represent the square root values of AVE. The values below the diagonal are the correlation coefficients between each variable.

Therefore, the Model of effective transformational leadership for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province was fit with the empirical data.

3. The research findings on the development of the guidelines to apply the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province.

This research was conducted with focus group discussions with nine key informants, including presidents, vice presidents, department heads, and directors from private universities. Based on the discussion results, the research developed strategies to enhance the effective transformational leadership model of middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province and formulated the following guidelines:

Guideline 1 to Idealized Influence (II): Strengthen moral leadership training, promote the mechanism of role model guidance, and improve the process of responsibility definition and accountability to enhance the authority and credibility of middle-level administrators.

Guideline 2 to Inspirational Motivation (IM): Establish a strategic communication mechanism, regularly carry out vision promotion activities, and strengthen the institutional guarantee of combining emotional incentives with humanistic care.

Guideline 3 to Intellectual Stimulation (IS): Establish an organizational learning platform, encourage cross-departmental collaborative projects, and promote problem-oriented and reflective management cultures.

Guideline 4 to Individualized Consideration (IC): Promote individualized incentive policies, establish psychological support systems, and strengthen inclusive culture building and feedback mechanisms.

Guideline 5 to Learning Innovation (LI): Establish digital learning mechanisms, implement pilot programs for organizational change, and systematically enhance the innovation leadership capacity of middle-level administrators.

These guidelines are aimed at enhancing leadership practices and strengthening governance in private universities by addressing challenges such as flexibility, limited resources, and the need for continuous innovation. The findings provided practical insights for building a strong leadership team capable of fostering organizational resilience and adaptability.



Discussion

1. Regarding Objective 1 (Components and Indicators)

The research conducted an in-depth exploration of the components and indicators of the effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, thereby constructing a targeted theoretical framework. Idealized Influence (II), Inspirational Motivation (IM), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), Individualized Consideration (IC), and Learning Innovation (LI). These components were developed based on transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), theories of organizational learning and innovation, and adapted to the specific context of private universities in China. Idealized Influence emphasized leaders acting as role models to build trust and commitment, with moral integrity and fairness playing central roles, especially in more flexible environments (Xie & Ma, 2021). Inspirational Motivation reflected the ability to inspire and unify teams, a critical factor in private universities facing resource constraints (Zhao & Liu, 2020). Unlike the Western focus on Intellectual Stimulation, this research found that Inspirational Motivation was more vital in the context of private institutions. Intellectual Stimulation encouraged innovation and critical thinking, aligning with Amabile's (1996) theory on leadership's role in creativity. This component was crucial in fostering curriculum innovation in teaching-focused private universities (He & Zhang, 2022). Individualized Consideration involved supporting individual development and fostering emotional connections, which are essential for staff retention in less-structured management environments (Li & Hou, 2018).

Finally, Learning Innovation, a newly introduced component, emphasized leaders' ability to foster continuous learning and adapt to digital transformations in education (Weng, 2022). This component reflected the growing importance of innovation-driven leadership in the context of contemporary educational reforms. In conclusion, this study contributes to the literature by offering a localized model of transformational leadership for private universities in Shaanxi Province. The inclusion of Learning Innovation as a new component represented a theoretical innovation that addressed the evolving needs of higher education in China, providing both theoretical support and practical insights for leadership development.

2. Regarding Objective 2 (The effective transformational leadership model)

The research developed an effective transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province, consisting of 5 components: 1) Idealized Influence (II); 2) Inspirational Motivation (IM); 3) Intellectual Stimulation (IS); 4) Individualized Consideration (IC); 5) Learning Innovation (LI), with 24 indicators. The model was derived through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and focus group discussions. The results revealed that Inspirational Motivation had the most substantial impact on transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.877$), highlighting the importance of vision-driven leadership in motivating teams, especially in private colleges and universities with limited resources (Zhao & Liu, 2020). Individualized Consideration ($\beta = 0.780$) and Learning Innovation ($\beta = 0.763$) were also key contributors, emphasizing the role of personalized support and continuous learning in fostering organizational stability and innovation (Weng, 2022). While Idealized Influence ($\beta = 0.629$) and Intellectual Stimulation ($\beta = 0.513$) showed moderate effects, they remained important for building trust and promoting educational innovation (Xie & Ma, 2021). The introduction of Learning Innovation as a fifth component reflected the



evolving needs of private colleges and universities, addressing digital transformation and resource limitations (Wang & Li, 2021). In conclusion, this model offers both theoretical and practical insights to enhance the effectiveness of transformational leadership and support organizational change in private colleges and universities. It provided a framework applicable not only to Shaanxi but also to other regions with similar challenges.

3. Regarding Objective 3 (Development Guidelines)

Given the relative lack of research on transformational leadership among middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province, developing science-based guidelines is crucial to enhancing the leadership effectiveness of these administrators. Therefore, this research proposed systematic recommendations based on five components—Idealized Influence (II), Inspirational Motivation (IM), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), Individualized Consideration (IC), and Learning Innovation (LI)—to establish a comprehensive system and strategy to support the leadership development of middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities. The findings highlighted the importance of moral leadership in private universities, emphasizing the need for role modeling and accountability mechanisms. This aligned with Bass and Avolio's (1994) concept of Idealized Influence, in which leaders inspire trust and set ethical standards. Furthermore, constructing a clear vision and providing emotional support were critical, particularly in resource-constrained environments, as these elements were key to promoting organizational cohesion (Zhao & Liu, 2020). Intellectual Stimulation focused on fostering innovation and continuous learning, which were essential for adapting to digital transformation in higher education. Creating learning platforms and encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration were key to enhancing innovation and knowledge sharing (Weng, 2022). Individualized Consideration emphasized emotional support and personalized development, consistent with Bass and Avolio's (1994) framework. It was especially relevant for staff retention and career development in loosely structured private institutions (Li & Hou, 2018). Most importantly, middle-level administrators must lead digital transformation and drive institutional innovation. This aligns with China's higher education reform goals and highlights the importance of leadership in adapting to rapid technological changes (Benavides et al., 2020). The five key guidelines were essentially built upon the theoretical framework established in Objective 1 and the model developed in Objective 2. They offered practical recommendations to improve leadership styles in private colleges and universities, promote organizational change, and strengthen governance. These guidelines provide a theory-based, culturally relevant framework applicable to Shaanxi and similar contexts in China.

Originality

Title: Effective Transformational Leadership Model for Middle-level Administrators in Private Colleges and Universities under Shaanxi Province

The study revealed a new conceptual model, the Effective Transformational Leadership Model for middle-level administrators in private universities in Shaanxi Province, consisting of the following key components:

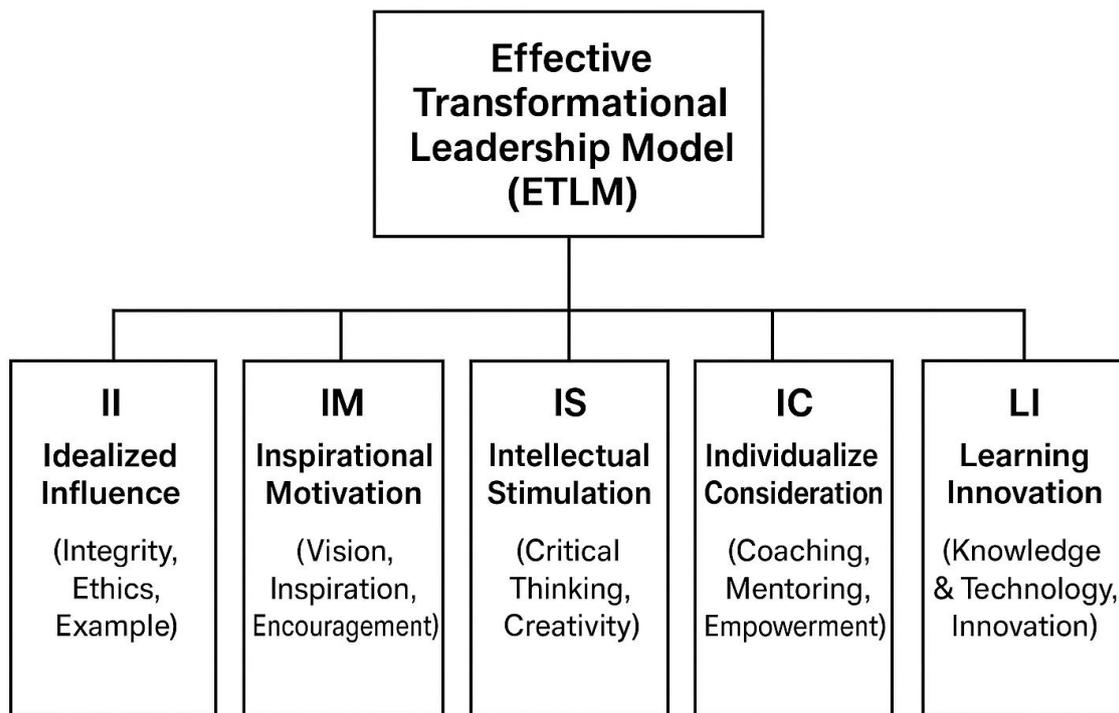


Figure 3: Core Components of the Model

Effective Transformational Leadership comprises five main components and 41 indicators, as follows. Idealized Influence (II) Leaders demonstrate integrity and credibility and serve as moral role models through their actions. Indicators: Honesty, fairness, selflessness, and commitment to organizational goals. 2. Inspirational Motivation (IM) Leaders inspire and motivate others to achieve shared visions and organizational objectives. Indicators: Communicating vision effectively, fostering collective enthusiasm, and recognizing achievements 3. Intellectual Stimulation (IS) Leaders encourage analytical thinking, creativity, and innovation among their subordinates. Indicators: Providing opportunities for expression, supporting critical thinking, and promoting problem-solving. 4. Individualized Consideration (IC) Leaders pay attention to individual needs, provide mentorship, and facilitate personal development. Indicators: Counseling, coaching, and assigning tasks based on individual strengths 5. Learning Innovation (LI) (Newly synthesized component derived from this research). This represents a new body of knowledge, extending the original transformational leadership

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it was found that the effective transformational leadership model of middle-level administrators significantly enhanced organizational performance and educational quality in private colleges and universities under Shaanxi Province, both by directly influencing team cohesion and indirectly by fostering innovation, learning, and staff development, within a context characterized by limited resources, flexible governance structures, and rapid digital transformation. There were recommendations for applying the research results and for future research as follows:



Recommendation for Policy Formulation

Several policy recommendations were proposed to enhance governance and leadership effectiveness among middle-level administrators in private colleges and universities in Shaanxi Province. First, a policy support system for leadership development should be established that integrates transformational leadership into the selection, training, and evaluation of administrators, and introduces mechanisms such as a “leadership development portfolio” to track professional growth and strengthen talent pipelines systematically. Second, organizational learning and innovation should be incorporated into institutional development plans, with indicators such as learning capability and digital governance competence included in quality assessment frameworks, and interdepartmental collaboration and knowledge sharing promoted to enhance adaptability and resilience under current policy initiatives. Third, differentiated training and evaluation mechanisms should be implemented, including behavioral indicators such as motivational influence, organizational coordination, and change facilitation, to support holistic performance assessment and professional development. Fourth, role clarity and participatory decision-making should be optimized by delegating appropriate authority and involving middle-level administrators in goal-setting, resource allocation, and personnel decisions to foster accountability and innovation. Finally, an institutionalized support platform for continuous leadership development is recommended, such as a provincial-level Leadership Development Support Center in partnership with top-tier universities and research organizations, providing standardized, localized, and sustainable training and collaborative opportunities to enhance overall leadership capacity.

Recommendation for Practical Application

The practical application of the effective transformational leadership model in middle-level administrators requires specific strategies to align leadership behavior with organizational goals. First, middle-level administrators should model integrity and responsibility by aligning their personal actions with institutional values. By maintaining fairness, honesty, and accountability in daily management, administrators can build trust and positively influence the organizational climate. Regular leadership evaluations and feedback mechanisms should be implemented to support and reinforce these ethical standards.

Second, administrators need to combine goal orientation with humanistic care to motivate their teams. Clear communication of strategic goals, along with emotional support and recognition of staff contributions, is essential to foster a strong sense of belonging and motivation, especially during challenging times. Encouraging professional development opportunities further strengthens team commitment and performance.

Third, promoting collaborative innovation in teaching and administration is crucial for enhancing organizational adaptability. Administrators should create an open and inclusive environment that encourages faculty to explore curriculum reform and innovate teaching methods. Cross-departmental collaboration mechanisms should be established to integrate resources across administration, teaching, and research, thereby increasing the institution’s resilience to uncertainty.

Fourth, administrators should accurately identify faculty development needs and provide personalized support strategies. This includes offering career coaching tailored to individual faculty members’ professional stages. Effective feedback and communication



mechanisms must be established to ensure that faculty voices are heard and to foster a cohesive and engaged organizational culture.

Finally, strengthening digital literacy and innovation capacity is essential for advancing modern governance in higher education. Administrators should enhance their proficiency in data tools and information technologies to promote digital approaches in areas such as teaching organization, performance evaluation, and resource management. By launching pilot projects and establishing digital teaching platforms, private universities can improve both management efficiency and educational quality.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study has developed a valuable five-dimensional transformational leadership model for middle-level administrators in private universities in Shaanxi Province, there are several directions for future research to expand and deepen these findings:

- (1) Expand the Research Scope to Different Regions and Institution Types.
- (2) Investigate the Causal Relationship Between Leadership and Organizational Performance.
- (3) Conduct Longitudinal Studies to Track Dynamic Changes.
- (4) Analyze the Moderating Role of Cultural and Organizational Contexts.
- (5) Integrate Mixed Methods and Case-Based Approaches.

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