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The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Intimacy with Mediating Role of Organizational Empathy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational intimacy with mediating role of organizational empathy. This study is an applied and correlation research method based on structural equation modeling. 105 teachers of Saravan city were studied by stratified random sampling method. To collect information, three questionnaires were used: transformational leadership, organizational intimacy and organizational empathy. For data analysis the Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation modeling were used by SPSS and Lisrel software. Based on results the amount of correlation coefficient of transformational leadership with organizational empathy (r=0.459, p<0.01), transformational leadership with organizational intimacy (r=0.580, p<0.01), organizational empathy with organizational intimacy (r=0.516, p<0.01) was significant. The direct effect of transformational leadership on organizational intimacy (β=0.43, t=3.93), direct effect of transformational leadership on organizational empathy (β=0.48, t=4.19) and direct effect of organizational empathy on organizational intimacy (β=0.36, t=3.373) was significant. The indirect effect of transformational leadership on organizational intimacy was also significant with the mediator role of organizational empathy (β=0.172). Therefore, it can be concluded that transformational leadership has a positive and significant relationship, directly and indirectly, through the organizational empathy mediation variable with the organizational intimacy.

1. Introduction

Today's, intimacy among the employees is essential in the organizational environment. Intimacy can solve many problems or prevent their occurrence. For this reason, organizations try to create this intimacy or support its indications. Nowadays intimacy among employees is one of the organizational life requirements. Intimacy is about sharing one's inner desires with others, or it involves empathy and deep understanding with others (Reis & Gable, 2003). Intimate behavior refers to a set of verbal and nonverbal behaviors in face-to-face interactions that leads to an understanding of the physical or psychological closeness between the messengers and involves the communication along with the influence and that leads to "closeness" between individuals (Ellis, Carmon, & Pike, 2016). Regarding organizational intimacy, it should be noted that work intimacy and intimacy in working relationships in the employer-employee interaction is recognized as a tool for improving the work, while intimate relationship is defined as the communication way in the work place. Intimacy in work place can be as a relationship or interaction and communication through sharing working demands with other employees. As employees gain an in-depth understanding and sensitivity to work-related problems.

Because of this, intimacy in the organization is a flexible process that occurs over the time (Bashir & Nasir, 2013).

Reduced occupational stress and promotion of organizational health level, reduced crimes, and occupational disorders, reduced cost of coordination and communication, use of mental and physical power for progress of organizational goals, attempt for improving performance regardless of any organizational and individual supervision are outcomes of organizational intimacy. Overall, the space rich of intimacy and trust in the organization creates vitality and a spirit of hope at the organization level and in the social and human system of the organization, and it can improve individual, group, and organizational performance (Shariati, Mohammadi Moghaddam, & Bagherian, 2017). Intimacy behaviors such as teacher teaching style and, contrary to other unchanging teacher characteristics, such as intelligence and personality, are flexible and changeable, and if used by teachers it would be accompanied by optimal performance in classroom management, increase in learners' learning, attitude, self-esteem, and self-concept (Velez & Cano, 2008). Schools can be considered as human beings, with life and identity and culture; attraction, repulsion, intimacy, empathy and aversion, health and illness, vitality and depression, etc. All are manifestations of this school identity and character. Above all, they can make such organizational intimacy as sustainable and stable, and it is guidelines of management system and ethical and logical approaches of the school leadership system. Undoubtedly, role of transformational leaders cannot be denied in construction of this identity. In reviewing the research background Theocharous and Philaretou (2011) found that intimacy in the inter-organizational setting should be existed to help the organization achieve organizational goals Naghi Aghdasi, Samari, & Bageri (2008) found that an intimate and supportive organizational climate has a positive impact on organizational performance. Kark (2012) found that workplace intimacy has a positive impact on in leader–follower relationships. Viviana (2009) found that intimacy plays an important role in the organizational performance and optimizing the financials of companies in the business relationships and organization. Johansen (2015) found that there are three types of emotional, communicative, and perceptual intimacy in the educational environment, which are related to teachers' organizational commitment. Osei (2017) found the higher the level of intimacy in marketing, the greater the performance and commitment of marketers. Robert and Bernard (1973) found that organizational intimacy affects job performance and individual satisfaction.

Transformational leadership is one of the newest leadership approaches, which was introduced by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). Previous leadership theories all were focused on transactional leadership. Transnational leadership is a transactional relationship between the leader and the subordinate, in which the subordinate receives the rewards associated with the primary needs in response to meeting the demands of the leader and manager. Transactional leaders specify what subordinates should do to achieve the organization's goals. The leader pays money or designated reward for the performance. They have smart eyes for opportunism and have good hands for transaction, persuasion, and counteract (Ramzaninezhad, Hematinezhad, Andam, Zare, & Sadeghpoor, 2011). Transformational leaders convey inspiration, respect, honesty, loyalty, and a sense of shared responsibility with their intelligent behaviors modeled on their employees. Undoubtedly, these feelings cause strengthening autonomy and job identity and responsibility among the individuals (Elkins & Keller, 2003). Transformational leader is applied on the individual who empowers the followers, motivates them for performance beyond their expectations, and encourages them to follow collective goals rather than transitional personal ones (Kark, 2011). Transformational leadership style expresses that how it is possible to encourage follows to doe works beyond the expectations through stimulating high-level needs (Boglar, Caspi, & Roccas, 2013). The main difference between transactional and transformational leadership is that transformational leader inspires a collaborative vision, empowers followers and appreciates their progress transforming the followers into leaders and defines new paths for the organization. Nevertheless, the transactional leader is only concerned with maintaining the status quo (Ramzaninezhad, 2011).

Researchers introduced four main factors of inspirational motivation, idealized influence, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation as the major behavioral components of transformational leadership. Inspirational motivation means presenting a fascinating vision of the future, using emotional reasoning, and displaying optimism and passion; idealized influence includes behaviors such as sacrifice for the benefit of the group, setting a personal pattern, and expressing very high ethical standards; individual consideration means providing support, clear instruction, and encouragement for followers, and intellectual stimulation means the

behaviors that increase followers' awareness of challenges and problems from a new perspective (Sun, Zhang, & Xiong, 2012). Transformational leadership has received much praise for its positive aspects, including its positive relationship with employee satisfaction, performance, motivation, and commitment (Ivey & Kline, 2008). Transformational leaders are those who are able to draw novel necessary paths for the new organizations. This type of leaders provides the basis and foundation of organizational long-term changes, they move the organizations from the present to the future, identify environmental needs, and facilitate transformation (Dargahi, Rajabnezhad, & Reshadatjo, 2016). Transformational leaders attempt hard for increasing trust, morality, working spirit among the leaders and directing organization to the optimal status, and cause improvement of organizational performance by inspiring their followers and developing their abilities. Thus, it is significant to study this leadership style. In reviewing the research background Gumusluoglu & Ilsev (2009) reported that transformational leadership can positively influence organizational innovation. Aragon-Correa, Garcia, and Cordon (2007) found that transformational leadership has a positive effect on organizational learning and innovation. Limsila and Ogunlana (2008) found that transformational leadership has a relationship with organizational excellence. Shariati et al. (2017) found that there is positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational intimacy. Kellett, Humphre, & Sleeth (2002) reported that transformational leadership style can influence organizational empathy. Ghasemiram, Amini Sabegh, and Ghorban Hoseyni (2016) found that organizational empathy is regarded as one of the consequences of a transformational leadership style.

Intimate relationships require empathy among individuals. Empathy is defined as the ability to understand other's feelings in such a way that one can identify with him (Brunel, 1989). Empathy includes a range of social visions to the ability for understanding emotional and cognitive states and experience of similar emotions with others (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). Empathy is a necessary element for successful interpersonal performance, and it is the one's emotional reaction to others' emotional reactions (Ali, Amorim, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009). Empathy is one of the principles of efficient communication and an important feature that causes development of human relationships. Organizational empathy is a powerful force for achieving the goals and programs of the organization and the most efficient reason for promoting personal growth and human relationships and communication with others. In an organization with the power of empathy, many complex nodes can be opened and paved the way for achieving the organizational goals (Hunter, Figueredo, Becker, & Malamuth, 2007). Empathy is the fundamental capacity of individuals to form relationships, support collaborative activities, and group cohesion. This ability plays an essential role in social life, and it is the driving force behind social behaviors and behaviors that lead to group cohesion (Rieff, Ketelaar, & Wiefferink, 2010). It is essential to recognize the thoughts and feelings of others that include empathy at all levels of managers with personal, group, and organizational awareness. Empathy means inclusion of employee emotions in the considerations, and then adopting smart decisions in which those emotions are considered and expressed (Sousa, McDonald, Rushby, Li, Dimoska, & James, 2010). In reviewing the research background Bjorkqvist (2007) found that there is no significant relationship between empathy and aggression. Gery, Miljkovitch, Berthoz, & Soussignan (2009) found that there is a significant difference in empathy between the two genders. Kusche and Greenberg (2011) found that training empathy skills is effective in interpersonal and emotional self-regulation problems. Therefore, training empathy skills increases sociability, intimacy, and responsibility. Beyrami, Jafari, and Bahrami (2014) found that there is a relationship between empathy and happiness. Further, having a high empathy leads to high emotional and cognitive interpersonal relationships, which is effective in creating positive and happy emotions. Eisenberg, Spinrad, and Sadovsky (2005) found that empathy plays a vital role in ethical reasoning, arousing pro-social behavior, and aggression deterrence.

Lack of intimacy and empathy between teachers and administrators is considered as one of the problems in the schools. There is a significant gap between teachers and managers and their demands. Due to this gap, some administrative problems are raised in the decisions because teachers do not usually show hardiness in its implementation. Conversely, the managers lack needed intimacy and empathy with the teachers and do not involve them in the decision-making process, leading to the creation of a distrusting environment in the school. Lack of intimacy and empathy results in emerging behaviors such as rumor mongering, conflict, politicizing and slumber. At such school, talking about issues like self-management and self-control, cooperation and mutual understanding is useless, and most efforts to increase effectiveness do not produce

the desired results. In addition, fulfilling the goals of the school requires cooperating among its members and the most important way is to facilitate cooperation, and increase trust, intimacy, and mutual empathy among teachers school administrators. Organizational empathy and intimacy in schools can be influenced by the school's leadership style. Considering the studies in the recent years in the world, and significance of transformational leadership as the successful management in educational organizations and investigation of organizational intimacy and empathy as the factors affecting spirit and performance of teachers, rare numbers of studies are available in this regard. To this end, current research aims at answering this question that if there is significant relationship between transformational leadership and organizational intimacy with mediator role of organizational empathy?

Research hypotheses
1. Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational intimacy.
2. Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational empathy.
3. Organizational empathy has a positive and significant effect on organizational intimacy.
4. Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational intimacy through the mediation of organizational empathy.

2. Method

2.1. Design and Setting

The current study is experimental in terms of the objective and correlational based on structural equation model in terms of methodology. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership as the independent variable and organizational intimacy as the dependent variable with the mediating role of the organizational empathy. The study model is shown in Figure 1.
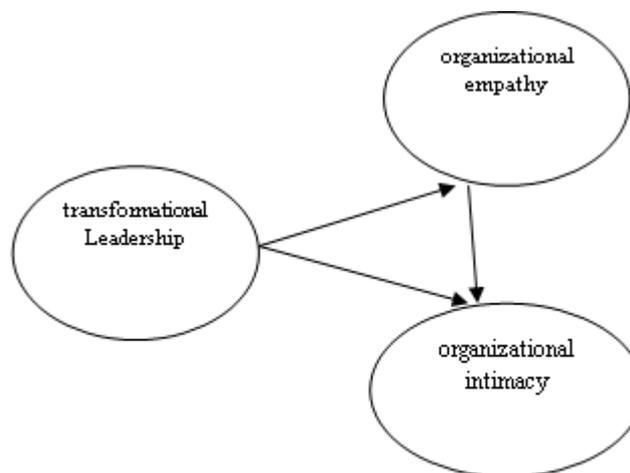

Figure 1. Hypothesis Model

2.2. Participants

The statistical population included 144 teachers (76 males and 68 females) in first high school in Saravan city in the educational year 2018-2019. Given that the individuals' gender was not equal in number (52.78% male and 47.22% female), 105 teachers, consisting of 55 males and 50 females, were randomly selected in proportion to the gender and Cochran's sampling formula. The inclusion criterion was having at least two years of teaching experience in school. Therefore, the teachers with less than two years of teaching experience were excluded. The researcher personally referred to the schools and selected the appropriate sample based on the inclusion criterion. Before distributing the questionnaires, the teachers were informed about the subject and purpose of the study and their verbal consent was obtained. The teachers participated in the study voluntarily,

and they were assured of the confidentiality of the data. The teachers completed the questionnaire for 20 minutes.

Table 1 provides the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

	Variable	Frequency (percent)		Variable	Frequency (percent)
Gender	Male	55 (52.78%)	Educational Degree	Bachelor	71 (67.62%)
	Female	50 (47.22%)			
Marital Status	Married	85 (81%)		Master	34 (32.38%)
	Unmarried	20 (19%)			
Employment Status	Permanent	93 (88.57%)	Work Experience (years)	<11	38 (36.17%)
				11-20	53 (50.47%)
	Contractual	12 (11.43%)		>20	14 (13.33%)

2.3. Instrument

Three questionnaires including transformational leadership, organizational intimacy, and organizational empathy were employed for collecting the data.

A) Transformational leadership Questionnaire

The transformational leadership questionnaire was designed by Bass and Avolio in 2000. The questionnaire evaluates transformational leadership using 20 items and 4 dimensions including inspirational motivation (8 items), idealized influence (4 items), individual consideration (4 items) and intellectual stimulation (4 items). It was organized on 5-point Likert scale from "quite disagree" to "quite agree", being represented by scores 1 and 5. The minimum and maximum scores in the questionnaire were 20 and 100, respectively. The closer to 100 score it is a sign of more use of transformational leadership style. The content validity of the questionnaire was approved by the experts. Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire that the coefficient was 0.92.

B) Organizational Intimacy Questionnaire

The organizational intimacy questionnaire was designed by Walker and Thompson in 1983. The questionnaire contained 17 items and 3 micro-scales of emotional closeness (5 items), self-sacrifice (7 items) and satisfaction (5 items). It was organized on the 7-pint Likert scale from "never" to "quite always", being represented by scores 1 and 7. The minimum and maximum scores of the questionnaire were 17 and 119, respectively. The closer to 119 score it is a sign of more organizational intimacy. The content validity of the questionnaire was approved by the experts. Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire that the coefficient was 0.957.

C) Organizational Empathy Questionnaire

The organizational empathy questionnaire was designed by Davis in 1983. The questionnaire consisted of 21 items and 5 dimensions of emotional concerns (7 items), viewpoints (7 items) and personal disorder (7 items). It was organized on the 5-point Likert scale from "quite disagree" to "quite agree", being represented by scores 1 and 5. The minimum and maximum scores were 21 and 105, respectively. The closer to 105 a sign of more organizational empathy. The content validity of the questionnaire was approved by the experts. Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire that the coefficient was 0.896.

2.4. Data analysis technique

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, and inferential statistics, involving Pearson correlation coefficient and structural equation model, employed to analyze the data in SPSS21 and Lisrel software.

3. Findings

Structural equation modeling was used to investigate the hypotheses of the study. Table 2 represents descriptive indexes of variables including mean, standard deviation, and skewness and kurtosis.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the study variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Transformational leadership	44	100	82.085	12.991	-0.742	0.230
Organizational intimacy	26	89	73.142	13.308	-1.210	1.493
Organizational empathy	53	105	76.647	10.988	0.481	0.164

In causal modeling, the distribution of variables should be normal. Thus, the absolute value of the skewness and kurtosis of the variables should not be greater than 2. As shown in Table 2, the absolute value of the skewness and kurtosis of all variables is in line with the desired standard. Thus, the assumption of the causal modeling means the normality of variable. In addition, before designing structural equation modeling, the relationship between variables of the study was investigated by Pearson correlation coefficient test. Further, a significant relationship was observed between transformational leadership with organizational empathy and organizational intimacy (r=0.459 and 0.580, respectively), while Organizational empathy was positively related to organizational intimacy (r=0.516). Structural equation model was used for evaluating the relationship between the variables of the study. Model fit was assessed before investigating the assumptions of the study. The size of model fit was utilized in determining the relationship between overt and covert variables. According to researchers, fit indexes include Goodness-of-Fit Index (*GFT*), comparative Fit Index (*CFI*), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (*RMSEA*), and Root Mean Residual (RMR). Regarding the last three indexes, the appropriate amounts of fit are less than 0/8, 0/08, and 0/05 respectively. As shown in Table 3, the fit results are appropriate.

Table 3. Fit indexes of the theoretical model of the study

Index	Amount achieved in the model
Goodness of Fit (*GFI*)	0.91
Root Mean Residual (*RMR*)	0.061
comparative Fit Index (*CFI*)	0.98
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (*RMSEA*)	0.077

To analyze the data, the theoretical model for each assumption should be processed to determine the amount the collected data can support the theoretical model. To answer this question, the quantitative indexes of model fit (*CFI, GFI, SRMR*…) were used. If the general indexes are acceptable or in other words, the theoretical model is approved, and then in-model relationships are assessed. These mutual relationships are the regression coefficients related to assumption and factor loads of each item. Figure 2 displays all relationships of covert variables and factor loadings of each item.
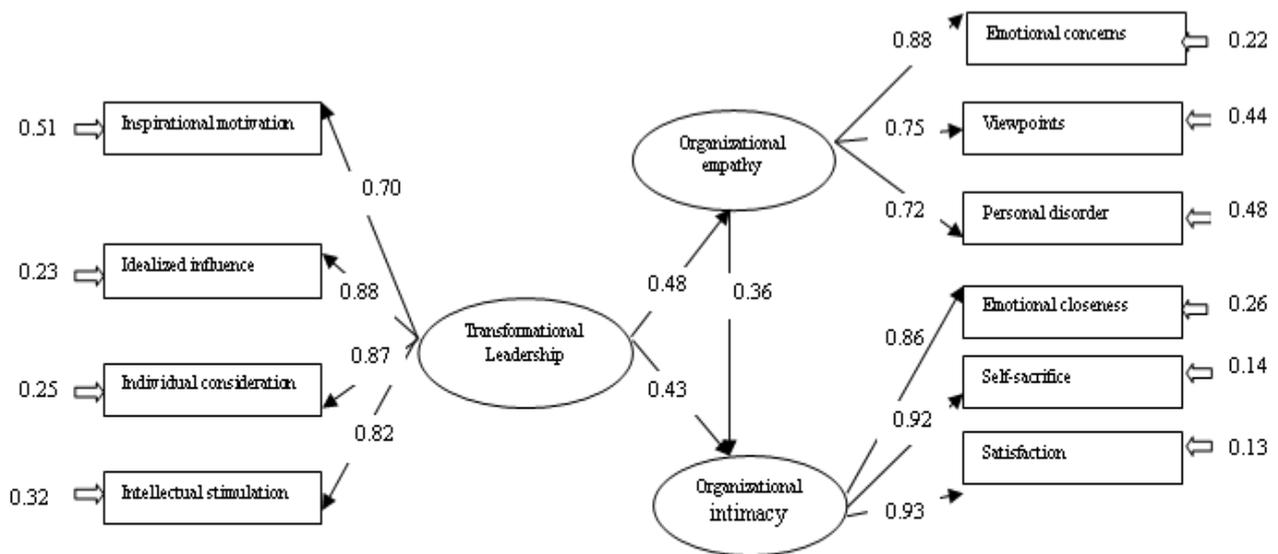
Figure 2. Fitted model of the study (standard coefficients)

According to the model (Figure 2), the research hypotheses can be analyzed as follows:

Table 4. Path coefficients for the study of research hypotheses

Hypotheses	β	T	Conclusion
Transformational leadership ⟶ Organizational intimacy	0.43	3.93	Accept
Transformational leadership ⟶ Organizational empathy	0.48	4.19	Accept
Organizational empathy ⟶ Organizational intimacy	0.36	3.37	Accept
Transformational leadership ⟶ Organizational empathy ⟶ Organizational intimacy	0.172		Accept

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational intimacy with mediating role of organizational empathy. The finding indicated that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational intimacy. It should be stated that transformational leaders expand the interests of employees under their command, accept and focus group goals with focus and awareness, motivate employees, think beyond their own personal interests, and provide the ground for their employees in a way that all of them are able to easily express their goals (Flores & Ekstedt, 2016), result of which is organizational intimacy. Shariati et al. (2017) also found that there is a positive significant relationship between transformational leadership and organizational intimacy.

The second finding showed that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational empathy. It should be stated that the transformational leader places himself in the position of his followers. He does this by empathy. Empathy is a conscious reaction that causes transformational leaders perceive the weaknesses and problems of the followers and attempt to eliminate these problems. Transformational leaders accept weaknesses of the follows and always seek for finding solutions for them. Transformational leaders direct spirit of their followers toward the excellence through empathy. In this way, they raise spirit of their team members and their tendency for cooperation (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The relationship between transformational leadership and organizational empathy has been proved in the studies of Kellett et al., (2002), Wan Afezah (2017).

The third finding showed that organizational intimacy has a positive and significant effect on organizational empathy. It should be stated that empathy is one of the efficient communication principles and an important feature that shapes foundation and basis of human relationship development. Empathy creates such an atmosphere in the organization where the employees can identify themselves as the managers and perceive them, and the managers can get through into the mind and spirit of employees and see the issues and affairs form their point of view, they can listen to each other's recommendations carefully without any prejudice, and pay attention to the issues that are important for each party (Thompson, 2001), and thus empathy can improve organizational intimacy. Ghasemiram et al (2016) also found that there is a positive significant relationship between organizational intimacy and organizational empathy.

The other finding indicates that transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational intimacy with mediator role of organizational empathy. Transformational leader promotes organizational intimacy through effective participation in employee group activities, listening to and reviewing their suggestions, resolving intergroup conflicts, non-discrimination among employees, and encouraging their positive activities in a timely manner. Organizational empathy leads to organizational intimacy in the organization in the way that for creating empathy atmosphere, both managers and employees need to be honest and sincere and away from any display of selfishness, and to have a true understanding of each other, and have a timely and appropriate response to it. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Shariati et al. (2017), Kellett et al., (2002), Wan Afezah (2017), Ghasemiram et al. (2016).

In summary, transformational leadership is positively and significantly associated with organizational intimacy both directly and indirectly with the mediating role of the organizational empathy. Thus, when the school principals have high self-confidence, attractive, show their competence (using idealized influence), ask the teachers to challenge the issues, and use their analysis and creativity power, remind them that they would be punished if they make mistake (intellectual stimulation), draw a shared vision of the future, have logical and achievable expectations form the teachers, so that they can make step in line with the educational programs (inspired motivation), develop supportive atmosphere in the school, carefully listen to the needs of the teachers, act as a consultant and trainer, pay attention to professional and personal progress of their teachers (individualized consideration),they can develop organizational empathy and organizational intimacy among the teachers. One of the limitations of the present study was restriction of scope of research to a specific part of Iran. Obviously, the opinions of teachers in Saravan city may not be a complete representative of the views of staff across the country, and this issue confines the spatial generalization of research. To increase the power of generalizing the results, similar research should be conducted in other cities and on other teachers.

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