

The role of transformational leadership in successful management with pandemic challenges in the companies in Republic of North Macedonia

Imer Zenku

*ESM JSC Skopje, North Macedonia
imer.zenku@elem.com.mk*

Marija Kotevska Dimovska

*ESM JSC Skopje, North Macedonia
marijadimovski@yahoo.com*

Abstract

The pandemic has become a ubiquitous threat to humanity that has marked the contemporary social reality and stressed the importance of leadership for the survival of organizations. This paper focuses on transformational leadership as the most effective way to lead change and ensure business sustainability in the coronavirus era. The main goal of the paper is to examine the conditionality of transformational leadership from the personality of the leader, with a focus on emotional intelligence as an imperative competence to practice this contemporary emotionally motivational leadership style. The applied methodology was on the data obtained from a sample of 115 managers from companies in North Macedonia through self-assessment on two questionnaires. Statistical analysis confirmed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.69$) between the emotional intelligence of managers and transformational leadership styles, which is significant at the level of 0.01. The result of a regression study found that about 47% of transformational leadership variations are explained by emotional intelligence. Such findings emphasize the importance of effective leadership in companies mediated by transformational and emotionally intelligent leadership as a leading tool in organizational functioning throughout this era. The contribution of this type of research is that it contributes to changing the paradigm in business operationalization in the companies in North Macedonia with a leadership philosophy that promotes transformational leadership styles that generate confidence and proactivity. By developing emotional competencies as the basis for transformational leadership, managers and policymakers could mitigate the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on a better business world and safer society.

Keywords: pandemic, transformational leadership, emotional intelligence.

Introduction and Background

The current pandemic has caused a crisis that has put managers under great stress and uncertainty and faced them with a huge number of questions. Among those questions are those that refer to leadership approaches and styles that are most effective for the sustainability of companies in such critical conditions. The answer to this question can be sought in the already established principles of leadership with organizations in situations of crisis, which has the task of creating a framework in organizations that will reduce the vulnerability of disaster management (MENA, 2008). The authors mention four principles of leadership in organizations in situations of crisis:

comprehensiveness, progressiveness, integration, and professionalism (Kaufman, 1988), which aim to ensure the certainty and readiness of organizations to cope with and recover from the consequences of potential crises. In this crisis period, a vast amount of scientific research is needed in order to identify and promote leadership behaviors that practice the principles of leadership in situations of crisis, as an essential component for the sustainability of companies during and after the pandemic. The current literature suggests that leaders who can adopt a transformational leadership style will deliver the best organizational results, which is fundamentally needed in the current corporate economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic (McKinsey, 2020; Sahu, 2020). The effectiveness of a transformational leadership style in a pandemic stems from the characteristics of this contemporary emotional-motivational style that emphasizes people and their abilities, creativity, motivation and values, and reflections on proactive employee behavior (Bass, 1994). Particular emphasis is placed on the question of the importance of leaders' emotional intelligence, a construct that is theoretically conceptualized and empirically validated by Daniel Goleman, as a necessary prerequisite for practicing effective transformational leadership styles (Goleman, 2007). The pandemic is a threat to the performance and sustainability of companies around the world, especially in less economically developed countries, including North Macedonia. The sustainability and competitiveness of companies in North Macedonia are facing great challenges, and the ability of leaders to practice transformational leadership behavior is one of the possible solutions to the crisis. This paper focuses on the synthesis of the terms: pandemic crisis - transformational leadership - emotional intelligence, which are intertwined in their actions in the context of the organizational success of North Macedonian companies. Such integration expands the scope through which leadership in situations of crisis can be observed through a new paradigm called emotional intelligence that unites the rational and emotional components of personality functioning (Goleman, 2007), in order to contribute to effective leadership transformation as most effective in conditions of crises and changes.

The subject of the study is to examine the relationship between leadership style and emotional intelligence of managers in companies in North Macedonia, from the aspect of the organizations successfully dealing with the challenges of the pandemic. The paper contains a theoretical elaboration of the main concepts, transformational leadership and emotional intelligence, and their significance in conditions of a pandemic as well as empirical examination of the relationship between these variables. The aim of the paper is based on the diagnosed condition regarding the preference of leadership styles and the level of emotional intelligence of leaders, to contribute to the construction of an institutional strategy to improve the quality of leadership in organizations in North Macedonia. Scientific findings in modern countries imply that transformational leadership, which takes emotional intelligence as its focal point, is a leading style in organizational functioning through this pandemic. These findings, empirically confirmed in this paper, can help managers, researchers, and policymakers in North Macedonia to understand the role of modern leadership styles as well as to encourage leadership behavior that generates coping with challenges in companies in a pandemic.

Transformational leadership

The theory of transformational leadership emerged as one of the dominant paradigms of leadership that sought to explain the unique relationship between leadership and management. Transformational leadership is one of the most influential organizational theories of leadership today, known as Bass's theory of leadership, which answers the question of effective, active, and successful leadership styles (Fuullan, 1991). In times of critical organizational moments such as challenges with Covid-19, the leader's behavior with a transformational approach as an active, emotionally motivating style that emphasizes people and their abilities, creativity, motivation, and values result in improved employee behavior (Bass, 1994). The most important characteristics of transformational leadership can be listed as:

- the first feature of transformational leadership is to integrate the concepts of management and leadership allowing leadership to fit into management processes,
- the second characteristic is that this contemporary style is based on satisfying the higher motives in order to create full involvement and creativity of the followers (Bass, 2006)
- transformational leadership has the power to change or transform employees (Avolio, 1991)
- Transformational leadership is considered to be most effective in times of change and crisis (Bass, 1994; Garvin 2000).

Starting from the assumption that transformational leadership style is considered to be most effective in conditions of change and crisis (Bass, 1994), the question arises is how that efficiency was achieved, and whether it can be applied in pandemic conditions.

Transformational leadership most effective in pandemic conditions

From the viewpoint of many authors, transformational leadership could respond to the demands of global change and rapid transformations in all spheres and organizational systems in times of crisis (Fuullan, 1991; Lethwood, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1990). The authors attempt to explain the power of this leadership style for effectively managing organizations in crisis situations. Transformational leadership is considered to be most effective in a pandemic for reasons that generate acceptance and collaboration among followers to meet organizational goals in changing and challenging conditions (McKinsey, 2020).

Other authors explain the power of the transformational leadership style through its aspects or sub-styles (Bass and Avolio, 1993; Ruiu, Ragnedda and Ruiu, 2020). Namely, the transformational leadership style is a higher-order construct that consists of four interconnected and conceptually different forms of leadership. These subtypes can lead to additional insights into how leaders develop transformational relationships with their followers that can be applied to tackle pandemic challenges.

The first sub-style is the inspirational motivation, with which the leaders offer an attractive vision and offer solutions to the challenges facing the organization, thus

fostering feelings of optimism and enthusiasm in their followers and energizing and inspiring them for effective change, (Yukl and Van Fleet, 1992).

The second sub-style, idealized influence, is practiced by leaders who are charismatic and exert idealized influence causing a sense of admiration in their followers and serving as role models for them (Kotter, 1990). These two leadership approaches are essential to change management, including the organizational change introduced by Covid-19 (Ruiiu, Ragnedda and Ruiiu, 2020).

Intellectual stimulation is the third sub-style in which transformational leaders stimulate their followers to be creative and innovative by awakening their imagination, challenging old practices, and re-articulating problems (Bass, 1994). This can be an advantage during the coronavirus challenges by fostering innovative ways of doing things. Such business leaders help foster intellectual participation, transformational leadership, and the engagement of subordinates (Yammarino and Bass, 1990).

The individualized approach is the fourth sub-style of transformational leadership aimed at building and developing the trust and commitment of followers (Avolio & Bass, 1991). In this light, the importance of achieving organizational vision, values, and goals in the current pandemic business climate is further emphasized (Ruiiu et al., 2020).

The challenges of the coronavirus pandemic have accelerated the pace of change, demands and expectations of organizations, and implied leadership that can help deal effectively with complex crisis problems, namely leadership by heart in extra-transformational leadership (McKinsey, 2020). Transformational leaders are agents of inspiration, motivation, commitment, and vision, leading to the transformation of subordinates' values and behaviors (Kotter, 1990). Leaders with these characteristics play a major role in shifting their organizations from the dangers of business challenges with Covid-19 by inspiring subordinates to rise above self-interest (McKinsey, 2020).

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a relatively new term with great applicability in many organizational areas. The concept of emotional intelligence was first defined by Meyer and Salovey in 1990 as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions and feelings and to use that information in thinking and behaving" (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). In the mid-nineties, Daniel Goleman popularized the concept of emotional intelligence, emphasized the importance of abilities such as self-awareness, self-control, empathy, and social skills in everyday life, and defined emotional intelligence as: "the ability of a person to successfully overcome the challenges of everyday life" (Goleman, 1995). This author set a model for the role of EI in leadership that he empirically confirmed (Goleman, 2007). Goleman set a framework that addresses the potential of each individual to use emotional competencies in leadership. This model is based on research by hundreds of organizations that have confirmed the effects of emotional competencies in the leadership process. Goleman's model of emotional intelligence is designed specifically for the workplace and addresses four emotional competencies: self-awareness and self-esteem; self-government; social awareness and

social skills.

Self-awareness is the ability of the individual to possess an awareness of what he thinks and feels.

The ability for self-control or self-management refers to the skill of managing one's own emotions and moods as well as the ability to persevere despite facing the failures that follow every path of life.

Social awareness or empathy is the ability to recognize and empathize with the emotions that other people feel.

Social skills include the ability to shape other people's emotions and communication skills (Goleman, 2007).

All of these competencies define the leader's ability to recognize and understand emotions and abilities, to use that awareness to manage their behavior and relationships with the people they manage (Goleman, 2007). The results of many studies have supported the concept of emotional intelligence represented through the emotional and social competencies of managers as components of successful leadership (Gardner, Stough, 2001; George, Bettenhausen, 1990; Palmer, Walls, Burgess, Stough, 2001). The authors conclude that there is evidence for a link between managers' emotional competence and effective leadership in crisis situations (Palmer, Walls, Burgess, Stough, 2001).

The link between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in pandemic conditions

Contemporary literature on the relationship between emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and successful business pandemic challenges addresses the need for organizational leaders to be aware of the risks posed by the pandemic and to take steps to mitigate them in the context of effective leadership including emotional and transformational leadership (Moroña et al., 2021; Babalola et al., 2020). According to the WHO, in a pandemic, the business world is changing the way organizations operate, but also the way business leaders lead (WHO, 2020).

There is a consensus in the literature that emotional intelligence is the framework for fostering effective leadership, especially transformational leadership competence (Bradberry and Greaves, 2009; McKinsey, 2020). The pandemic has changed the commitment, motivation, and satisfaction of employees, due to the danger that they will lose their health and professional well-being (Moroña et al., 2021). Transformational leadership that includes EI can transform a sense of commitment, inspiration, and motivation that could be effective in tackling the challenges of the pandemic by addressing individual needs and issues. In this context, leading with emotional intelligence for a change signals empathy and the leader's ability to effectively manage relationships to achieve a common goal (Kotter, 1990). Thus, leaders who are emotionally intelligent and competent in effectively managing relationships and empathy are more likely to manifest transformational leadership with individualized attention.

In a recent study (Babalola et al. 2020) was found that in organizations and companies where they are managed, instead of applying leadership, a negative organizational

climate is created that causes stress and poor performance among employees (Babalola, Ren and Ogbonnaya, 2020).

According to (Sivanathan and Fekken, 2020), followers perceive leaders with high emotional intelligence capacity as more effective, persuasive, and transformational leaders, needed in an era of the coronavirus pandemic when organizational leaders are required more than ever to lead to permanent change (Babalola, 2021; Morón et al., 2021). In addition, they found that superiors and leaders through their style of competitive climate ultimately intensify the advancement of employees at work (Morón et al., 2021).

Methodology

Subject, problem and goals of the research

The research on the connection between the emotional intelligence of the leaders and the leadership styles preferred by the leaders of the companies in the Republic of North Macedonia represents the subject of the empirical part of this paper. The problem of the research is whether the emotional intelligence of leaders can contribute to the practice of transformational leadership among leaders in North Macedonia as the most effective in pandemic conditions.

The following research questions were asked in the context of the research subject:

1. Is there a connection between the emotional intelligence of leaders and the transformational leadership styles in companies in North Macedonia in pandemic conditions?
2. Which of the emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-control, and social awareness are the best predictors for preferring transformational leadership style?

The main goal of the research is to build an institutional strategy for improving the quality of leadership in the organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia, based on the diagnosed condition regarding the preference of leadership styles and the level of emotional intelligence of leaders in North Macedonia. This goal is achieved by determining the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership styles in companies, ie. whether the degree of development of emotional intelligence can predict effective leadership styles. The ultimate goal is to emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence in the leadership process in pandemic conditions.

Hypothetical framework

The research is based on the assumption that there is a relationship between the degree of development of emotional intelligence and leadership style in pandemic conditions. The following is the hypothetical framework that consists of a general hypothesis and specific hypotheses. The general hypothesis is formulated with the assumption: - There is a significant positive relationship between the degree of development of emotional intelligence and leadership style of leaders in companies in North Macedonia in pandemic conditions.

Specific hypotheses:

-Each of the emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-control, and social awareness have a different influence on the preference of the transformational style of lead-

ership.

-Leaders with a higher level of development of all three competencies self-awareness, self-governance and social awareness have the ability to practice a transformational leadership style.

The basic variables of this paper are emotional intelligence and leadership style. The Independent variable is emotional intelligence which is represented through three emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-control, and social awareness. The dependent variable is the leadership style, represented by a transformational leadership style.

The course of the research process went through several phases over a period of 3 months: planning the research process, preparation of measuring instruments and questionnaires, sampling, and data collection for which the online method was used as the safest and fastest method for collecting the necessary data in pandemic conditions. The last phase was the processing and analysis of the obtained results.

Measuring instruments, population and sample

When it comes to measuring instruments, the following validated and standardized psychological instruments were used to determine the degree of representation of the variables:

1. To determine the degree of representation of the leadership style, ie leadership that the manager prefers, a Multifactor questionnaire was applied to measure the degree of representation of the transformational, transactional and liberal leadership style, ie leadership - MLQform 5X (Avolio et al., 1995).
2. To determine the degree of development of emotional competencies self-awareness, self-control, and self-motivation, a questionnaire was applied to measure the level of representation of emotional competencies - Questionnaire of emotional competence PEC-45 (Taksic, 2002).

The sample was selected from the population of managers in 4 manufacturing and 3 service companies in North Macedonia. A sample of 115 respondents in managerial positions served as the subject of this paper. Analysis of the sample by sex showed that 59% of the sample are male and 41% female. Regarding the age of the sample, no dominance is observed at any age level. Namely, 16% of the sample are aged up to 30 years, 28% are aged 31 to 40 years, 27% are aged 41-50 years and 22% are aged over 50 years.

Presentation and interpretation of the results

In order to test the general hypothesis, it is necessary to answer the research questions by examining the following relations:

- Determining the degree of representation of the transformational leadership style of the leaders in companies in North Macedonia
- Determining the degree of representation of emotional intelligence among leaders in companies in North Macedonia
- Determining the correlation between the results obtained in measuring the emotional intelligence of leaders and the results obtained in measuring the degree of repre-

sensation of the transformational leadership style in companies in North Macedonia. The examination of the relationship between the two variables: the emotional intelligence-independent variable, which is represented by the three emotional competencies (self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-control) and the transformational leadership style was performed with the statistical method of determining multiple correlation. The results are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Multiple correlation of emotional intelligence with the three competencies (self-awareness, self-control and social awareness) with transformational leadership

Change statistics				
R	R Square	Adj. R ₂	R Square Change	F Change
0.691	0.477	8.319	0.489	25.981

The results showed a statistically significant correlation, the multiple correlation coefficient is 0.691 and is statistically significant at the level of 0.001 ($R = 0.691$; $p < 0.001$). Having in mind the data and the results of the statistical analysis, obtained through the coefficient of determination, which is ($R \text{ Square} = 0.477$) it can be said that the EI of the leader participates in determining the transformational style of leadership with 47%. These results provide a basis to confirm the hypothesis: There is a significant positive correlation between the degree of development of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership style in leaders in companies in North Macedonia in pandemic conditions. Such results have been compared with similar studies in pandemics. Thus the results of research by Sivanathan, N. & Fekken, C. (2020) on the association of emotional intelligence with transformational leadership showed that there is a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.717$) between EI and TL which was significant at the level of 0.01 and about 51% of transformational leadership variations are explained by emotional intelligence.

How to explain this high impact of EI on leaders with transformational leadership? Many authors consider the development and strengthening of emotional intelligence as a way to increase the inner motivation, self-confidence, and stress resistance of followers to face challenges (Goleman, 1995; Mumford et al., 2002). Leaders' EI is central to developing the competence to understand and be able to manage the emotions of their employees, which is essential for successful organizational leadership in pandemic challenges (Moroña & Biolik-Moroñ, 2021).

To test the specific hypothesis it is necessary to answer the question: to what extent does each of the emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-control, and social awareness correlate with the transformational leadership style? The following table presents the correlations between each of the EI competencies individually: self-awareness, self-confidence, self-governance, and transformational leadership.

Table 2: Pearson correlation of emotional intelligence with the three competencies: self-awareness, self-control and social skills and transformational leadership

	Self-awareness	Само владенење	Social skills	Transformational leadership
Self-awareness	1	0,516	0, 532	0.491
Self-control	0,516	1	0,544	0,573
Social skills	0, 532	0.54	1	
Transformational leadership	0.491	0. 573	0. 594	1

Emotional awareness, as the first competence of EI, has a significant correlation with TL ($r = 0.491$; $p < 0.001$) and participates with 24%. This competence allows the leader to be able to influence and change their own behavior and the behavior of others (George, 2000). Self-control as a leader's competence to control their emotions, feelings, and behaviors is a good indicator of transformational behavior when alone ($r = 0.573$; $p < 0.001$) (Table 2), and when self-esteem is added, the correlation increases to 0.601. , and the coefficient of determination increases from 0.25 to 0.36 ($R = 0.601$; $p < 0.001$).

Self-control is a competence that allows you to control and regulate emotions and encourage positive emotional states such as enthusiasm and optimism (Goleman, 1995). Leaders with developed self-control competencies can positively influence employees' emotional states and neutralize them by negatively affecting the pandemic on workers' sense of commitment and motivation (Baba, 2021).

Social awareness correlates most highly with transformational leadership ($r = 0.594$; $p < 0.001$). When social awareness is added to the previous competencies, all three competencies together the correlation increases to 0.691 ($R = 0.691$; $p < 0.001$). The leader's ability to be aware of the emotional state of others and to build empathetic relationships with employees, which is a prerequisite for an effective relationship, provides a positive impact on behavior and social effectiveness even in the context of challenges with Covid-19.

Transformational leadership significantly correlates with all the competencies of emotional intelligence individually. This confirms the specific hypothesis: each of the emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-control, and social awareness has a different influence on the preference of transformational leadership style. Emotional intelligence with all competencies significantly affects the ability of leaders to practice transformational leadership styles as most effective in pandemic conditions. The analysis of the obtained findings confirms the hypothesis: leaders with a higher level of development of all three competencies self-awareness, self-control, and social awareness have the ability to practice a transformational leadership style.

Because EI is a construct that has the potential to develop throughout life, it is neces-

sary to pay attention to its development as well as to make efforts for additional education and training in order to develop these competencies in managers and leaders at all levels.

Conclusion and recommendations

The current business environment and the changes caused by the pandemic have changed leadership practices and led to a paradigm shift in business operationalization. This paper emphasizes the central role of transformational leadership that takes as its focal point emotional intelligence, as a leading tool in the organizational functioning of companies in North Macedonia during the pandemic.

The paper emphasized the importance of effective leadership in companies in North Macedonia that is mediated by transformational and emotionally intelligent leadership. The main focus of this paper was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, transformational leadership and successfully tackling the challenges of the business in pandemic conditions. The empirical procedure confirmed the significant correlation of emotional competence of leaders with transformational leadership in times of pandemic crisis. These findings confirm that transformational leadership is essentially an emotional process, with leaders recognizing followers' emotional states and trying to foster and manage positive and productive emotional states for organizational success. The findings are in line with modern theories which point out that the transformational leadership style offers great opportunities for overcoming crises. Leaders who use emotions to get the best out of others create an emotional resonance effect that allows people to cope with stress in a crisis situation and achieve the best performance (Goleman, Boiatzis, McKee, 2002). This approach expands the scope through which we can observe leadership in pandemic conditions by extracting it from rational thinking because effective management of human resources and the high emotional intelligence of managers are key to the effective response to a crisis.

A positive benefit from this research is that it recommends the companies in North Macedonia to develop a modern and scientific view of the need to develop and encourage a certain style of leadership and development of emotional competencies, to better deal with the challenges of the pandemic. The next recommendation is for leaders who are willing to change their behavior and make a positive impact on overcoming pandemic challenges. This research will be motivating for investing in programs for education and development of emotional intelligence of company leaders. It is necessary to create training aimed at further development of emotional intelligence and helping to improve emotional competencies to cope with responsibilities. This kind of research on the relationship between transformational leadership and the emotional competence of leaders in pandemic conditions has been neglected in the domestic literature therefore this paper aims to encourage further research in this area, which will be able to supplement the findings, compare results and offer a new opportunity for innovative organizational development in pandemic conditions.

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