Chapter 2
What Is Pseudo-Transformational Leadership?
A Theoretical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The notion of pseudo transformational leadership first appeared back in 1999. The lack of a clear definition of the term has led to confusion because of certain similarities with transformational leadership. Few publications on the subject and the developing theory have been presented. However, numerous studies have included the concept as a reference for unethical leadership, and as an opposing term to genuine or authentic transformational leadership, which is common in times of change and visible in corporate scandals. Transformational leadership is described to provide a baseline to compare it with what this leadership style is not. The chapter focuses on a managerial problem that needs to be studied because of its implications in organizational performance. The objective of this study is to present the main characteristics of the pseudo transformational leadership style by analyzing leaders' behaviors and their impact on followers and the organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

Times are changing in unprecedented ways, previous social structures are no longer valid, and there is a saturation of information (Bauman, 2013). Times seem to have become more fragile and less trustworthy, appearing as a continuous succession of new beginnings and transformations (Garrison, Neubert & Reich, 2012). We are dealing with what has been defined as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times (Mizhra & Joshi, 2006); turbulent times, prone to seismic change, influenced by technology; an era conceptualized as that of Trumpian uncertainty (Stiglitz, 2017). The new reality is destructive, impulsive, and unpredictable, with constant chaotic disturbances in which ubiquitous, continuous, and dynamic changes are all-pervasive in organizations (Küpers & Weibler, 2006). An example of these unprecedented times is the COVID 19 pandemic crisis.

In this new context, failure in leadership has become evident, and still, leaders who can be considered by some as unethical, unreliable, or just plain bad leaders are able to maintain an entourage of followers and to hold powerful positions. These leaders appear to be transformational and show some of the traits associated with transformational leadership, but they are moved primarily by personal gain.

The transformational leadership paradigm has been predominant in literature for more than 25 years and has become one of the most researched topics, attracting attention due to its apparent importance to organizational productivity (Ng, 2017). However, most of the published works deal with the positive traits, characteristics, and behaviors, leaving almost no room for the negative aspects, which is the other side of transformational leadership (Eisenbeß & Borner, 2013).

This chapter integrates existing theories to explain the negative side or pseudo transformational leadership, providing its general characteristics, and state of the art in the field. It focusses on managerial problems that arise when pseudo transformational leaders take charge and its implications on organizational performance.

BACKGROUND

Transformational leadership has received increasing attention from researchers. It has been considered as a positive leadership style centered on the assumption that leaders can change followers beliefs and behaviors by appealing to their higher-order needs, and can be described as being vertical, in the sense that leaders sustain top-down influence on the followers (Bass, 1996). Transformational leaders provide intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, individual consideration, appreciation, and also a role model. They also influence followers' self-concept by enhancing self-efficacy, confidence, and self- esteem (Shamir et al., 1993).

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