

# Transformational Leadership and Team Performance of Cheerleading in Hunan, China: Towards A Proposed Improvement Program

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the transformational leadership of coaches on cheerleading teams and the performance of student teams, and to examine the effects of factors such as gender, age, education, and years of teaching on this relationship. The study used a questionnaire to collect data from six randomly selected secondary schools with a total of 32 coaches and 165 student respondents. The results showed that female coaches and students dominated the cheerleading teams, coaches had higher educational backgrounds, and students were mainly concentrated in the final year of high school. In terms of specific team performance assessments, student ratings of coaches focused on moral character, visionary motivation, personalized attention, and leadership charisma, with overall ratings at the "Good" level. The study also found that teamwork and cohesion had a significant impact on team performance. There was a significant positive correlation between coaches' transformational leadership and student cheerleading team performance. Synthesizing the results of the study, it is recommended that coaches leadership training and teamwork be enhanced to improve team performance and development. By implementing these recommendations, cheerleading team performance can be improved, team cohesion and cooperation can be enhanced, and sustainable team development can be promoted.

## Keywords

Cheerleaders Team Performance, Transformational Leadership, Hunan.

## 1. Introduction

Cheerleading is a group sport activity that focuses on teamwork, coordination and mental strength and has become an important activity in many schools, clubs and competitions. In cheerleading teams, leaders play a critical role and have a particularly significant impact on team performance. This study will focus on the role of transformational leadership in cheerleading teams and explore the relationship between it and team performance.

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that centers on inspiring members' potential, motivating innovation, and encouraging development. Transformational leaders have the qualities of positive emotional expression, motivational stimulation, personal attention and intellectual stimulation to inspire team members to strive for excellence and go above and beyond. The performance of a cheerleading team directly impacts the performance and achievement of the team. Good team performance is not only reflected in performance in competition, but also in teamwork, solidarity, and improvement of skill level. Therefore, exploring the factors that influence cheerleading team performance is crucial to optimize team operation.

Li, M. & Lin, Y. X. (2018) showed that transformational leadership can have a positive impact in a team environment. In cheerleading teams, transformational leaders can inspire team members' potential, encourage them to strive for excellence, and enhance team cohesion and cooperation.

By providing guidance, motivation, and support, transformational leaders can drive team members to improve and achieve higher team performance. In cheerleading teams, the traits and behaviors of transformational leaders have a significant impact on team performance. For example, they are able to set motivational goals that encourage team members to go beyond themselves and pursue excellence in performance (Lu,J, & Zhang,H.Q., 2018). They motivate and engage their team members by building good relationships and communication with them. Transformational leaders are also able to drive learning and development among team members and encourage them to continuously improve their skill level and expertise, thus improving the overall performance of the team.

There is relatively little research on cheerleading leadership, especially on the relationship between transformational leadership and cheerleading team performance. Although leadership plays a critical role in team functioning, research on cheerleading leadership is still relatively limited. In particular, there is a relative lack of research on the application and impact of transformational leadership in cheerleading teams. While transformational leadership has received extensive attention in other areas of research, there is a relative lack of research in the specific area of cheerleading teams. There has not been sufficient empirical research to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and cheerleading team performance and the mechanisms of its impact. Although we know that transformational leadership can motivate and innovate team members, how transformational leadership affects team collaboration, team spirit, and skill level in cheerleading teams still needs to be explored in depth.

The purpose of this study is to examine in depth the relationship between transformational leadership and team performance of cheerleading teams. By investigating and analyzing data on transformational leadership traits, behaviors, and team performance, we expect to reveal the significant impact transformational leaders have on cheerleading teams and provide guidance and recommendations for team success and growth. Through the results of this study, we hope to deepen our understanding of leadership and team performance and provide useful practice recommendations for leaders, coaches, and team members. Ultimately, we believe this study will have a positive impact on the development of practice and scholarship in the field of cheerleading, promoting team collaboration and performance and improving team performance.

## 2. Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and team performance of cheerleading teams.

Descriptive research aims to characterize or reveal the features and attributes of a particular phenomenon by collecting, analyzing and presenting data. This type of research usually does not involve the analysis of cause and effect relationships, but rather focuses on understanding the characteristics of the phenomenon. In this study, descriptive research may be used to analyze the basic characteristics of the respondents, such as gender, age, and education. For example, the gender ratio, age distribution, and educational level of the students and coaches participating in the study may be described. Comparative research aims to compare differences or similarities between different groups or conditions. In research, this can involve comparing the scores or performances of different groups (e.g., different age groups, different gender groups, different education levels) on certain variables. For example, a study could compare whether there are significant differences in how students in different age groups assess coaching leadership. Correlation studies are designed to determine whether there is an association or correlation between two or more variables, but do not involve the determination of causation. In research, correlation analysis can be used to explore the degree of relationship between different variables. For example, in this study, the researcher may use a correlation

analysis to determine if there is a correlation between a coach's transformational leadership and student cheerleading team performance.

This study used a survey research method combined with quantitative data analysis. This study uses a randomized survey research to analyze the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This study starts from the concept, characteristics and influencing factors of change leadership and team performance. The progress of research on change leadership and team performance summarizes the previous research results as the theoretical background of the study. Secondly, this study uses questionnaires and random sampling to select 32 coaches and 165 students in Hunan Province as the research subjects. The coaches filled in the Transformational Leadership Scale and the students filled in the Team Performance Scale. Based on the questionnaire survey, this study integrates previous theoretical research results to investigate transformational leadership and team performance, and forms a status quo based analysis report on the survey results. Based on the status quo analysis report, a series of training programs are developed to address the problems and weaknesses of transformational leadership and team performance in order to solve problems and eliminate barriers.

### 2.1. Respondent and Sampling

The researcher studied cheerleading coaches and students from six high schools in Hunan Province, China. From such a population, the researcher used a random sample.

The table below shows the population and target respondents randomly selected using the Qualtrics sample, with a margin of error of 5% of the proportion used.

**Table 1:** Sampling Table for Middle Schools in Changsha City

School name	coaches	sample	students	sample
Changsha No.1 Middle School	14	7	112	36
Yali Middle School	13	6	98	31
Changxian High School	9	4	74	22
Mingde Middle School	8	4	73	21
Zhounan Middle School	11	6	92	29
Jinhai Middle School	9	5	84	26
total	64	32	533	165

### 2.2. Questionnaire construction

This study used a researcher-developed questionnaire as the primary data collection tool.

The researcher used a self-administered questionnaire to collect data and information about the transformational leadership and team performance under study. The first questionnaire is about transformational leadership for coaches and it is divided into two parts; the first part deals with the gender, age, education and years of work of the respondents. The second part focuses on transformational leadership, including exemplary virtues, personalized care, visionary motivation, and leadership charisma.

The second questionnaire is about student cheerleading team performance, it is also divided into two parts, the first part deals with the gender, age, and grade level of the respondents. The second part focuses on team performance, including team goal achievement, quality of task completion, team collaboration and team cohesion.

Based on the consultant's advice and comments, a draft were prepared for panel members to validate the questionnaire. After being reviewed and approved by the expert group, the questionnaire were further evaluated and validated by the Cronbach Alpha reliability index to

further test and analyze its consistency and reliability. Provide a copy of the draft to at least 15 teachers who are asked to provide responses to determine if the content of the questionnaire is clear, concise, accurate, reliable, and understandable for content verification purposes. Expert advice was incorporated to improve the instrument. The researchers then made the final copy; after that, the instrument was approved for replication.

Questionnaires were tested for reliability between distributions, using Cronbach's alpha coefficients generated by SPSS. It is generally believed that the reliability of the scale is between 0.7 and 0.9.

### 3. Analysis And Interpretation Of Data

#### 3.1. The assessment of student-respondents on their coaches' transformational leadership

**Table 2:** Summary Table on the Assessment of student-respondents as regards their coaches's transformational leadership

<b>transformational leadership</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Qualitative Description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
exemplary virtue	3.12	Good	Agree
Visionary motivation	3.16	Good	Agree
Personalized care	3.19	Good	Agree
Leadership Charisma	3.17	Good	Agree
<b>Over-all Mean</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Agree</b>

Legend: 3.51-4.00 Very Good/Strongly agree; 2.51-3.50 Good/Agree; 1.51-2.50 Fair/Disagree; 1.00-1.50 Poor/Strongly disagree

Table 1 shows the respondents' students' assessment in terms of their coaches' transformational leadership, where the mean of exemplary virtue is 3.12 or good; visionary motivation is 3.16 or good; and personalized care is 3.19 or good; leadership charisma had a mean of 3.17 or good; and the overall composite mean of 3.16 was interpreted as good. This indicated that students overall had a positive opinion of their coaches' transformational leadership. Students were satisfied with the coaches' leadership performance and felt that the coaches did a reasonably good job of focusing on individual needs, motivating students, demonstrating leadership charisma, and setting an example.

Ethical behavior and integrity had a significant impact on leadership effectiveness and student satisfaction. Ethical leaders are more likely to earn the respect and trust of students, which in turn motivates team members to perform and cooperate more effectively (Zhang, J. & Wang, G.H., 2020). Visionary motivation helps students recognize the long-term goals and vision of the organization and inspires them to be more actively engaged in learning and pursuing excellence in performance. Personalized care involves paying attention to students' individual needs and interests and providing support and assistance to students, and this care and support helps to enhance students' sense of belonging and loyalty (Yu, Q.H., 2020). Leadership charisma has been proved to be one of the effective leadership behaviors in the past studies, which involves the leader's personal charisma, attractiveness and influence. Leadership charisma helps leaders to play an important role in motivating team members, building good learning relationships and driving organizational change (Qin, X.F., 2017).

### 3.2. The assessment of student-respondents on their coaches's transformational leadership

**Table 3:** Summary Table on the Assessment of coaches-respondents as regards team performance

<b>transformational leadership</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Qualitative Description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Team Goal Achievement	3.20	Good	Agree
Quality of task completion	3.08	Good	Agree
Team Collaboration	3.18	Good	Agree
Team cohesion	3.20	Good	Agree
<b>Over-all Mean</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Agree</b>

Legend: 3.51-4.00 Very Good/Strongly agree; 2.51-3.50 Good/Agree; 1.51-2.50 Fair/Disagree; 1.00-1.50 Poor/Strongly disagree

Table 2 shows the respondents' assessment of the student cheerleading team's performance in terms of team goal achievement with a mean of 3.20 or good; quality of task completion with a mean of 3.08 or good; team collaboration with a mean of 3.18 or good; team cohesion had a mean of 3.20 or good; and the overall composite mean of 3.16 was interpreted as good. This indicated that the student cheerleading team performed well in the areas of team goal achievement, quality of task completion, and team cooperation and cohesion. The performance of the student cheerleading team was assessed overall positively and favorably by the respondents.

Team performance and achievement are typically better when team members have a clear understanding of team goals and work together to pursue them. Also, collaboration and support among team members facilitates the achievement of team goals. The skill level and expertise of team members determine whether they are able to demonstrate high-quality performance during a performance (Liang, L.P. & Jia, B., 2020). In addition, communication and collaboration within the team also have an impact on the quality of task completion, and effective team communication can help team members better coordinate and cooperate to achieve better performance (Wang, L., Huang, F. & Feng, X.Y., 2023). Mutual support, effective communication and collaboration among team members can help improve team performance and efficiency. Teamwork also promotes team cohesion and gives team members a greater sense of belonging and a sense of common purpose. Yu, M., Chen, J., & Ma, C.L. (2018) showed that team cohesion is closely related to team performance and achievement. The relationship of trust, cooperation and friendship among team members can enhance team cohesion and make the team more combatant and adaptable.

### 3.3. The relationship between transformational leadership and team performance of cheerleading teams

**Table 4:** Relationship between transformational leadership and team performance of cheerleading teams

		Team goal achievement	Task completion quality	Team collaboration	Team cohesion	Team performance
Exemplary virtue	r	0.285	0.249	0.073	0.053	0.103
	sig	0.114	0.169	0.692	0.773	0.447
Visionary motivation	r	0.549	0.560	0.573	0.639	0.321
	sig	0.00	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.015
Personalized care	r	0.516	0.732	0.743	0.628	0.297
	sig	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.025
Leadership Charisma	r	0.403	0.678	0.713	0.622	0.329
	sig	0.022	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>Transformational leadership</b>	r	0.600	0.754	0.707	0.653	0.288
	sig	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.030

As shown in table 3, the calculated r-value of the coaches's transformational leadership and student cheerleading team performance is 0.288 with a significance value of 0.030, and the original hypothesis is rejected because the significance value is less than the set significance level of 0.05. This indicates that transformational leadership of coaches is significantly correlated and positively correlated with student cheerleading team performance . This means that the overall performance of the cheerleading team is better when the coaches exhibits transformational leadership behavior.

Transformational leadership refers to a style of leadership that positively influences team members by emphasizing on stimulating team members' creativity, self-motivation, and teamwork in order to improve team performance and achievement.the positive correlation between coaches' transformational leadership and team performance was also supported by the Gao, Y.H., Wang, B. & Shi, H.T. (2022) study.Li ,m &Lin,Y.X. (2018) found that transformational leadership is strongly associated with team wins and game performance, and that more positive and effective leadership behaviors drive team members' performance, which in turn improves overall performance. Similarly, Tang, W.X. (2019) found that there was a positive correlation between this leadership style and team cohesion and athletic performance, and that motivation and support from the leader could contribute to team success.

In addition, transformational leadership by coaches is widely recognized in all types of team sports. For example, Yan ,S.,Yang, M.Q.,Li ,S.B. & Li, D. (2018) found that transformational leadership is one of the key elements of success, which promotes team cohesion and efficient cooperation, which affects game outcomes and team performance. In addition, transformational leadership has been shown to be related to team performance in other team activities, such as basketball and volleyball teams.Zhang, L. & Sun, B.H. (2020) found a positive correlation between transformational leadership and team performance, which suggests that transformational leadership promotes team innovation and overall performance.Dou, H.B. & Guo, Y.B. (2018 ) found that in sports teams, transformational leadership can stimulate the motivation and drive of athletes and help the team to reach common goals, thus improving team performance.Yu, Q.H. (2020) found that there is a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and student team performance, and that transformational leadership can motivate the active participation and cooperation of student team members to improve the performance level of the team. Zhao, D.F. (2022) in his study found that transformational leadership has a significant effect on team cohesion and team performance.

Transformational leadership enhances cooperation and teamwork among team members and promotes overall team performance.

#### 4. Conclusions

1. The cheerleading team is dominated by female coaches and students, with the coaches usually having higher educational backgrounds and the students concentrated in the graduating high school grades.
2. Students were positive about coaches in terms of transformational leadership, and they believed that coaches had a high level of transformational leadership, which had a positive impact on team development and performance.
4. Student cheerleading teams perform well in the areas of team goal attainment, quality of task completion, teamwork, and cohesion, which are critical to team success and performance.
6. Transformational leadership traits demonstrated by coaches were positively correlated with student cheerleading team performance. The transformational leadership of the coaches plays a crucial role in the success and performance of the team. Moreover, coaches play a significant influential role in enhancing team performance and performance.
7. There is still room for team improvement in terms of teamwork, problem solving and conflict management. Enhancing communication, cooperation and consensus formation among team members can help improve overall team performance.

#### 5. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions derived in this study, the following are the recommendations:

1. recommend that schools support highly educated coaches: Research shows that most coaches have at least a bachelor's or master's degree. In order to maintain the professionalism and leadership of the team, it is recommended that schools support the professional development and academic research of highly-educated coaches, and provide them with opportunities for further study and training to improve the team's teaching level and operation management.
2. Cheerleading teams advised to focus on age diversity: Although age does not make a significant difference in the assessment of team performance, team members covering different age groups have an important impact on the development and culture of the team. It is recommended that teams pay attention to age diversity, fully utilize the strengths and potential of members of different age groups, and promote the common growth and progress of the team.
3. Coaches are advised to intensify personalized care: Personalized care is crucial to student development and team cohesion. It is recommended that coaches pay more attention to personalized care in the training process, understand students' learning, life and family situations, and provide timely support and care to enhance students' sense of identity and commitment to the team.
4. Recommend that schools provide training in problem solving and conflict management: According to the research, the indicator "The cheerleading team can work together to solve problems and overcome difficulties in training" scored low in students' evaluation of the team. Therefore, it is recommended that problem solving and conflict management training be provided to students to develop their cooperation and problem solving skills when facing team problems and challenges.
5. advises the cheerleading team to evaluate the achievement of team goals: The achievement of team goals is closely related to team performance. It is recommended that teams set clear goals and regularly evaluate their performance in terms of goal achievement. Through

continuous goal management and evaluation, the team can continuously optimize training programs and team operations to achieve higher levels of performance.

6. It is recommended that cheerleading teams strengthen teamwork and cohesion: It is recommended that the team conducts team building activities and training to enhance communication and collaboration among team members and establish good team cohesion, thereby improving overall team performance.

7. recommend that schools provide leadership training and development opportunities for coaches: Given the positive correlation between a coaches's transformational leadership and student cheerleading team performance, it is recommended that coaches be provided with leadership training and development opportunities. This includes providing training sessions on how to encourage team members, promote cooperation, set goals, and motivate the team in order to improve the coaches's leadership skills, which in turn will drive team performance.

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