Examining the Impact of Transformational Leadership on Academic Staff Performance: A Systematic Evidence Synthesis in UK Higher Education

[1]Febiha Yildiz, [2]Dr Muhammad Emdadul Haque, [3]Dr Anam Dar

ABSTRACT: This study aims to examine the extent of transformational leadership's impact on academic staff's performance in higher education institutions in the UK and how workload intensity influences such a relationship. Transformational leadership has often been positively correlated with organizational outcomes, but its impact in professional and audit-oriented higher education contexts still lacks synthesis. This study employed a systematic synthesis of secondary evidence methodology and aggregated 38 peer-reviewed empirical studies from 2000 to 2025.

Transformational leadership theory and Job Demands-Resources and Conservation of Resources theories are integrated and synthesised in this study to create an explanatory framework of academic staff's performance in higher education institutions in the UK. The study's findings revealed that transformational leadership positively influences academic staff's performance in teaching, research, and contextual domains. However, workload intensity moderates and mediates such a relationship. When workload demands are within manageable limits, transformational leadership strongly and positively influences academic staff's performance. When workload demands are high, transformational leadership's impact on academic staff's performance diminishes and becomes mediated by psychological engagement processes.

In dimension level analysis, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation are more closely related to academic work characteristics, and individualised consideration makes a significant contribution to mentoring and collegiate performance. This study contributes to leadership research by situating transformational leadership within a resource-based framework and to higher education research by emphasising multidimensional outcomes and boundary conditions.

This study's findings revealed that transformational leadership's effectiveness in higher education institutions in the UK depends not only on behavioral competencies but also on resource-based designs. Academic staff's sustainable performance requires alignment between transformational leadership and workload management practices

KEYWORDS: Transformational leadership, Academic staff performance, UK Higher Education, Workload intensity, Job Demands - Resources, Leadership effectiveness, Professional organisations

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Higher Education (HE) institutions in the UK have to perform their duties in an increasingly performance-oriented governance structure that is shaped by research assessment exercises, teaching excellence frameworks, competitive funding mechanisms, and enhanced regulatory accountability requirements. The performance expectations from the staff of Higher Education institutions have increased the complexity of their work, and there have been sustained pressures on the performance of the staff of Higher Education institutions.

Leadership has thus emerged as an important factor through which Higher Education institutions manage the structural pressures on the performance of their staff. Leadership research has evolved significantly over the past decades, with transformational leadership emerging as one of the most influential theories explaining organisational performance and employee motivation (Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber, 2009). Transformational Leadership (TL), which is defined by idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass and Riggio, 2006), is one of the most studied leadership models in the organisational literature. The meta-analytic evidence suggests that there is a consistent positive relationship

between transformational leadership and performance outcomes (Wang et al., 2011; Hoch et al., 2018). Recent scholarship, however, suggests that the effectiveness of transformational leadership is contingent upon the structural conditions rather than universally guaranteed (Yukl, 1999; Fischer and Sitkin, 2023). Higher education institutions are professional organisations that place a strong emphasis on autonomy, and the effectiveness of transformational leadership may be contingent upon the organisational context rather than the business sector (Wray and Kinman, 2022; Wood, 2022; Johnston et al., 2022).

1.2 Structural Pressures in UK Higher Education

The nature and extent of academic work in UK Higher Education have witnessed considerable changes. The rising demands for research productivity, increasing teaching demands, administrative growth, and audit-based systems of accountability have reshaped the nature and availability of academic resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Wood, 2022). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model proposed that excessive job demands can lead to the draining of psychological resources required to sustain performance (Demerouti et al., 2001; Hayman, 2007 Naidoo-Chetty and Du Plessis, 2021). The Conservation of Resources (COR) model also proposed that individuals experiencing resource depletion would prioritise the conservation of resources over discretionary contributions (Hobfoll, 1989). Research evidence also revealed the adverse impact of job demands on the moderation of the relationship between transformational leadership and performance through emotional exhaustion and strain (Stein, Schumann, and Vincent-Höper, 2021).

The above theoretical frameworks imply the moderating impact of structural boundary conditions on the relationship between transformational leadership and academic performance.

1.3 Research Gap

While there is considerable research evidence to support the relationship between TL and performance across various global contexts, there exist critical gaps in the context of UK Higher Education.

Firstly, the existing research evidence is scattered across different sectors and countries. Although there is considerable evidence to suggest the relationship between TL and performance across different sectors and countries, the research evidence is scattered and lacks direct applicability to the UK Higher Education context (Wang et al., 2011; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Hoch et al., 2018).

Secondly, the majority of the research evidence in the context of UK Higher Education has focused on attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction and engagement rather than the holistic nature of academic performance.

Thirdly, the role of structural boundary conditions such as workload intensity and administrative growth has received little attention in the context of the UK Higher Education research evidence (Yukl, 1999; Fischer and Sitkin, 2023; Bolden et al., 2009).

The lack of synthesis to bridge the gaps in the research evidence constrains the development of theoretical frameworks.

1.4 Research Question

In light of these gaps, this study aims to answer the following research question:

"To what extent does transformational leadership improve academic staff performance in UK Higher Education settings, and in what way do these relationships depend upon structural pressures such as workload intensity?"

1.5 Rationale for the Study

This study aims to employ the methodology of secondary evidence synthesis to synthesise and critically evaluate empirical research studies pertaining to the impact of transformational leadership in Higher Education settings. The secondary research methodology is deemed the most appropriate methodology to employ in this study due to the fact that there is considerable empirical research pertaining to the impact of transformational leadership in Higher Education settings; however, such research remains scattered and lacks integration within the context.

1.6 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to systematically investigate the impact of transformational leadership on academic staff performance in the context of UK Higher Education settings through the methodology of secondary evidence synthesis.

The objectives are to synthesise the empirical evidence on the relationship between transformational leadership and multidimensional academic performance outcomes, to assess the salience of specific transformational leadership factors in the context of UK Higher Education, to investigate the impact of structural pressures as boundary conditions, and to build an evidence-based and context-sensitive model of leadership effectiveness in the UK Higher Education sector.

1.7 Contribution and Structure of the Paper

The present study makes several contributions to the body of leadership and Higher Education literature in the UK in the following three areas: Firstly, the study synthesises the empirical literature on UK Higher Education to overcome the fragmented nature of the existing literature. Secondly, the study draws on the transformational leadership model and the demand/resource model to advance the analysis of leadership effectiveness in the UK Higher Education sector. Thirdly, the study has implications for the UK Higher Education sector in relation to the governance and leadership development of universities in the UK, highlighting the structural conditions in which transformational leadership is likely to have a positive impact on the performance of academics.

The rest of the manuscript is outlined as follows: Section 2 presents an exhaustive review of the relevant literature from the theoretical and empirical fronts. Section 3 presents the conceptual framework that synthesises the transformational leadership theory and the resource-based approach. Section 4 describes the methodology used to conduct the secondary evidence synthesis. Section 5 presents the findings from the analysis of the secondary evidence. Section 6 presents the implications of the study from the theoretical and practical fronts. Section 7 concludes the study and presents avenues for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the Literature

In this section, a critical appraisal of the theoretical and empirical literature on transformational leadership and staff performance in the Higher Education sector is provided. The argument follows a four-stage structure: the theoretical underpinnings and limitations of transformational leadership; the multi-dimensional nature of staff performance; the integration of structural and resource-based theories to understand the role of workload intensity on transformational leadership effectiveness; and finally, the integration of the empirical evidence from recent studies to understand the unresolved debates and sector-specific knowledge gaps pertinent to the UK Higher Education sector (Bass, 1990; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Lowe et al., 1996).

2.2 Transformational Leadership: Theory, Empirical Strength, and Boundary Conditions

Transformational Leadership (TL) is one of the most dominant leadership approaches in the organisational behaviour literature. TL theory suggests that transformational leaders have a significant effect on staff performance through increased motivation and the alignment of organisational purpose with personal values (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The four behavioural elements of TL - Idealised Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualised Consideration predict the intrinsic motivation, psychological empowerment, and discretionary effort of followers (Braun et al., 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Significant empirical evidence supports the relationship between TL and staff performance using meta-analytic methods. Wang et al. (2011) found significant positive correlations between TL and task performance and contextual performance using 113 independent samples. Similarly, the study of Hoch et al. (2018) supported the TL-performance relationship and found that TL was a significant predictor of staff performance, more so than other forms of leadership approaches. Recent integrative reviews of the TL-performance relationship have found that TL is still a significant predictor of positive organisational outcomes (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). Empirical studies show transformational leadership significantly influences employee commitment and performance outcomes (Nguni, Sleegers and Denessen, 2006).

However, the relevance of leadership has been challenged by more recent scholarship, which has pointed out the need to address the issue of conceptual overlap in leadership constructs, as identified by Yukl (1999). There has been a need to address the boundary conditions of the context, as argued by Fischer and Sitkin (2023). These issues would be more pertinent in a work environment such as a university, which has an already high level of intrinsic motivation.

2.3 Transformational Leadership in Knowledge-Intensive and Professional Settings

Universities operate as knowledge-intensive organisations characterised by professional autonomy and decentralised authority (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2016).The motivation of the members would be more identity-based, as would be the case in a university environment, which has a highly decentralised power structure.

The relevance of intellectual stimulation would be more pertinent in a university environment, as academic work would be more aligned to the construct of intellectual stimulation, which would facilitate questioning, experimentation, and innovation. Inspirational motivation would be more relevant to the university environment, as the university would be undergoing a period of strategic reform. The relevance of individualised consideration would be more pertinent to mentoring young faculty members. Idealised influence would be more difficult to assess in a university environment, as the university would be more dependent on its intellectual credibility (Bolden et al., 2009; Gosling et al., 2009; Bolden et al., 2013).

Empirical research carried out in the Higher Education environment has shown a positive correlation between transformational leadership and engagement, innovation, and job-related outcomes (Kasalak and Dagyar, 2022; Sun, Luo, Yoon, 2025). However, the findings of the empirical research have focused more on psychological outcomes.

2.4 Academic Staff Performance – Multidimensionality and Difficulty of Measurement

Academic staff performance would be multidimensional, as it would be composed of: Teaching-related performance; Research-related performance and Contextual performance. The measurement of performance in the UK's Higher Education system is further complicated by the audit-based governance structures. Research assessment exercises and teaching evaluation models impose performance pressures, which could alter the motivational dynamics and perceptions of leadership behaviors (Johnston et al., 2022; Wray and Kinman, 2022; Wood, 2022).

2.5 Structural Pressures: JD–R and COR Model of Integration

The Job Demands-Resources model offers a well-constructed model of leadership under structural constraints. High job demands, such as work intensity and administrative tasks, deplete cognitive and emotional resources needed to sustain performance (Demerouti et al., 2001; Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021). Job resources, on the other hand, facilitate engagement and motivation. According to the Conservation of Resources model, an individual's perception of resource depletion triggers a need to conserve resources, which takes precedence over motivation (Hobfoll, 1989; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Research has shown that high work demands negate the positive effects of leadership behaviors, as demonstrated by increased emotional exhaustion (Stein, Schumann, & Vincent-Höper, 2021; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007). Workload intensification, administrative growth, and the audit culture in the UK's Higher Education system represent structural pressures that could moderate the effects of transformational leadership.

2.6 Empirical Evidence Mapping

To better understand the literature, a series of peer-reviewed empirical studies on transformational leadership in the Higher Education system have been systematically mapped to identify patterns in the literature.

Table 1. Empirical Evidence on Transformational Leadership in Higher Education

Study	Sector Context	Method	Outcome Type	Direction of Findings
Wang et al. (2011)	Multi-sector	Meta-analysis	Task & contextual performance	Strong positive
Hoch et al. (2018)	Cross-sector	Meta-analysis	Performance	Positive
Kasalak & Dagyar (2022)	Higher Education	Meta-analysis	Job satisfaction	Positive
Sun, Luo & Yoon (2025)	University faculty	Quantitative	Engagement	Positive
Stein et al. (2021)	Cross-sector	Regression	Emotional exhaustion	Moderated
Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis (2021)	Academics	JD - R analysis	Demand-resource balance	Conditional

2.7 Distribution of Evidence Patterns

The patterns of the evidence, as revealed by the literature, can be divided into three categories.

Table 2. Distribution of Evidence Patterns in Reviewed Studies

Evidence Pattern	Relative Frequency
Direct Positive TL–Performance	High
Conditional / Moderated Effects	Moderate
Mixed / Weak Effects	Limited

This shows that there is a strong directional effect of transformational leadership, but the effect of the structural context on the extent of the effect is also very strong.

2.8 Critical Synthesis and Unresolved Issues
The literature review has revealed three common findings. First, the literature has shown that transformational leadership is generally well-supported as a predictor of performance outcomes. Second, the literature has revealed that the performance of academic staff is multidimensional, embedded in the context of professional autonomy, and therefore the leadership effect is likely to be motivational. Lastly, the literature has shown that the effect of structural pressures such as workload intensity can moderate the effectiveness of leadership.

Despite the extensive literature from around the world, there has been little synthesis of leadership theories with the more relevant perspectives of resources, which would be more applicable to the UK's Higher Education sector. In addition, the issue of dimension-level differentiation and structural moderation has yet to be explored adequately in the literature, which calls for the need to conduct a secondary evidence synthesis to come up with a framework that would be more applicable to the UK's Higher Education sector

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT
3.1 Theoretical Integration
This section aims to develop a context-sensitive conceptual framework for outlining the potential relationship between transformational leadership and academic staff performance in the UK higher education context, as well as the potential role of structural pressures in this relationship. The framework is an integration of three major theoretical constructs: transformational leadership theory as advanced by Bass & Riggio (2006), the JD-R model as outlined by Demerouti et al. (2001), and COR theory as advanced by Hobfoll (1989). Transformational leadership theory is the basis for outlining the potential for transformational leadership to influence staff motivation and performance. The JD-R model is used to outline the potential relationship between job demands/resources and performance outcomes. COR theory is used to outline the potential relationship between resource depletion and behavioral responses to transformational leadership influence. This approach recognises that the effectiveness of transformational leadership in higher education is not independent of underlying structural conditions.

3.2 Transformational Leadership as a Multidimensional Construct
Transformational leadership is considered a multidimensional construct consisting of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). These constructs refer to the leader's capacity for idealised influence, where the leader's legitimacy is a function of their character; inspirational motivation, where the leader is required to articulate a compelling vision; intellectual stimulation, where the leader is required to encourage creativity; and individualised consideration, where the leader is required to provide mentorship. Rather than considering transformational leadership as a unidimensional construct, this approach recognises that different constructs may be more effective in different contexts of academic staff performance.

3.3 Academic Staff Performance as a Multidimensional Outcome
Academic staff performance is seen to be multidimensional, consisting of three core aspects: teaching performance, research performance, and contextual performance. Teaching performance comprises pedagogical innovation, student engagement, and curriculum development. Research performance comprises scholarly output, grant work, and intellectual contribution. Lastly, contextual performance comprises mentoring, collegiality, and institutional service.

**3.4 Structural Boundary Conditions: Workload Intensity**
Based on the JD-R model, workload intensity is seen to be a structural job demand that may affect the strength of the relationship between transformational leadership and performance (Demerouti et al., 2001; Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis, 2021). For instance, excessive teaching work, increased administrative work, and research pressures may drain the cognitive and emotional resources that are necessary to perform optimally. According to the COR

model, people who experience resource loss tend to prioritise the protection of their resources rather than exerting themselves to perform (Hobfoll, 1989). Hence, the motivational effect of transformational leadership may be less direct or less pronounced under conditions of excessive workload intensity. Thus, workload intensity is seen not to predict but to affect the effectiveness of transformational leadership.

3.5 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model suggests that transformational leadership positively influences academic staff performance, which comprises teaching performance, research performance, and contextual performance. However, this relationship may be subject to the moderating effect of workload intensity.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
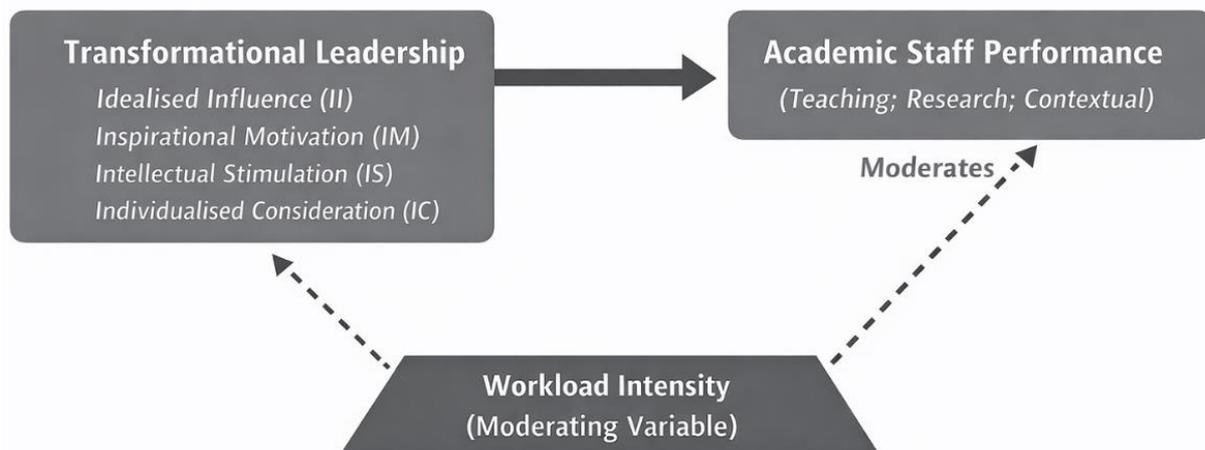
3.6 Theoretical Propositions

Based on the integrated framework, the following theoretical propositions guide the evidence synthesis:
Positive relationships between transformational leadership and academic staff performance outcomes are expected.

The impact of transformational leadership may depend on the performance domain due to the fit between the dimensions of transformational leadership and the characteristics of academic work.
The strength of the relationship between transformational leadership and performance is proposed to be reduced under conditions of high workload intensity.
These propositions guide the structured analysis of the empirical findings, as presented in the following section.

3.7 Summary

The conceptual framework brings together the theory of transformational leadership, the JD-R, and the COR perspectives, providing an explanation for the effectiveness of leadership that is contextualised for the higher education sector of the UK. The model acknowledges the multidimensionality of academic performance, as well as the role of structural pressures as moderators. This conceptual framework is the lens that guides the analysis of the following empirical findings.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Philosophy and Design

This study follows a post-positivist philosophy and employs a systematic secondary evidence synthesis design. This philosophy recognises that the results of empirical research are probabilistic approximations rather than absolute truths and that the theoretical relationship under scrutiny should be assessed across diverse contexts and methodologies. In the case of transformational leadership in Higher Education, the scattered nature of the empirical evidence calls for a structured secondary evidence synthesis that preserves the rigor of the analysis.

The research design follows the principles of a systematic review that have been developed and applied to management research (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). Unlike the traditional narrative review that lacks transparency on the inclusion of studies, the proposed design follows a transparent search strategy, inclusion criteria, and structured coding of the results. It also differs from the traditional meta-analysis that seeks to calculate the effect size of the relationship under scrutiny using statistical methods, given the diverse nature of the outcome

measures and methodologies that limit the degree of comparison of the results (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021a; Page et al., 2021b).

This design follows the proposed conceptual framework that was developed in Section 3 of this report. It examines the empirical evidence on the relationship between transformational leadership and the multidimensional performance of academic staff, as well as the inclusion of the intensity of work or job demand variables.

4.2 Search Strategy and Database Selection
A comprehensive search of the literature was conducted on three databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The databases were chosen based on their comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals on the topic of leadership, organisational behavior, and Higher Education. The search process was carried out in three iterations of refinement, as follows:

Phase one was an initial broad search using wide search combinations that incorporated the link between transformational leadership and the Higher Education domain.
Phase two was an attempt to refine the search string by incorporating terms that also addressed academic staff performance.
Phase three was an attempt to refine the search string by incorporating structural factors that covered workload, job demands, and institutional factors that could address boundary conditions.
The search string that was finally used was as follows: "transformational leadership," "Higher Education," "academic staff," "university faculty," "performance," "workload," "job demands resources." The search was restricted to peer-reviewed journals between 2000-2025, as this period reflects the contemporary theoretical developments that have taken place as well as the governance changes that have taken place in the UK's Higher Education sector.

4.3 Study Identification and Screening Process
The initial search results yielded 312 articles, out of which 247 articles remained after the removal of duplicates. The titles and abstracts of the articles were screened for suitability for the study, focusing on articles that addressed the topic of transformational leadership, specifically for the higher education sector, excluding articles that addressed the topic of school-level studies, as well as articles that addressed the different styles of leadership, as they did not address the specific topic of transformational leadership.

Out of the 247 articles, 96 articles passed the abstract screening stage, out of which 38 articles passed the full-text scrutiny stage, as explained in the inclusion and exclusion criteria section.

Screening Stage	Number of Articles
Initial search results	312
After duplicate removal	247
After abstract screening	96
Full-text eligible	52
Final included studies	38

4.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
An explicit set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was used to ensure methodological consistency. Included studies had to be peer-reviewed empirical research articles examining transformational leadership within the context of the Higher Education sector and had to measure performance-related outcomes such as teaching, research, and/or contextual performance. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were deemed suitable to ensure analytical diversity.

Exclusion criteria included studies that were non-empirical/conceptual in nature, non-university educational settings, non-transformational leadership constructs, and non-performance related outcomes.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed empirical journal articles	Non-peer-reviewed sources
Published between 2000–2025	Conference abstracts
University or Higher Education context	School-level studies
Transformational leadership examined	Unrelated leadership models
Performance-related outcomes measured	Non-performance psychological variables only

4.5 Data Extraction and Coding Procedure

A coding protocol was developed to aid the process of data extraction and to enable the systematic comparison of the extracted data. Data was extracted using two methods. First, descriptive coding was used to identify country context, type of institution, sample size, and research design. Second, analytical coding was used to identify the dimensions of transformational leadership examined, performance-related outcomes examined, the use of structural moderators, a nd the findings' direction.

Table 3. Coding Framework

Coding Category	Extracted Variables
Context	Country; Institution type
Research Design	Quantitative; Qualitative; Mixed
Leadership Dimensions	Overall TL; II; IM; IS; IC
Performance Domains	Teaching; Research; Contextual
Structural Moderators	Workload; Job demands
Direction of Findings	Positive; Conditional; Mixed

The coding was documented to improve the level of internal consistency. The studies that used structural variables have been flagged to examine boundary conditions as proposed by the conceptual framework.

4.6 Analytical Strategy

The analysis was carried out through four stages. First, descriptive frequency analysis was used to examine the geographical distribution, methodologies, and performance domains of the studies. Second, thematic synthesis was used to identify the explanatory mechanisms that linked transformational leadership to academic performance. Third, cross-case analysis was used to examine the presence of structural moderation, especially in the form of workload intensity. Lastly, the patterns of convergence and divergence were used to examine the consistency of the findings with the conceptual framework.

Instead of using statistical estimates, the synthesis focused on directional consistency, which is in line with the systematic qualitative evidence integration approach as used in management research (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).

4.7 Quality Appraisal and Bias Considerations

The quality of the findings was appraised using the methodological transparency, construct validity, statistical reporting, and sample size of the studies. Although no quality appraisal tool was used, the poorer quality of the findings was taken into account.

Although no formal attempt was made to address publication bias, the positive findings of the studies could be biased towards the published literature, which overrepresents positive findings. Although the findings of the analysis have generalisability limitations, the cross-national variation of the findings would not be applicable to the UK context.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

This research only used published secondary data, which did not require ethical approval. All the materials used in the analysis were publicly available from peer-reviewed publications.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Descriptive Overview of Included Studies

The final evidence base comprised 38 peer-reviewed empirical studies that focused on transformational leadership in the context of the higher education sector. The majority of the studies were quantitative in nature, with a smaller proportion of qualitative and mixed-method approaches. Most of the studies were conducted between 2015 and 2024, which suggests that the subject of transformational leadership has gained increased attention from scholars and researchers in the recent past. The majority of the studies were conducted on an international level, with a smaller proportion of the studies conducted on UK levels. This suggests that the results must be interpreted from a contextual perspective.

Table 4: Methodological Distribution of the Studies Included in the Review (n = 38)

Methodological Approach	Number of Studies	Percentage
Quantitative (Survey-based)	27	71%
Qualitative	6	16%
Mixed Methods	5	13%

The dominance of quantitative designs suggests a strong emphasis on statistical association testing within the existing literature, although qualitative studies provided valuable contextual insights into leadership processes within academic institutions.

5.2 Geographic Distribution
Transformational leadership in the context of the higher education sector has gained significant international attention from scholars and researchers, as depicted from the results of the studies that were used to inform this research report. The majority of the studies were conducted on an international level, with a smaller proportion of the studies conducted on UK levels.

Figure 5: Geographic Distribution of the Studies Included in the Research Report
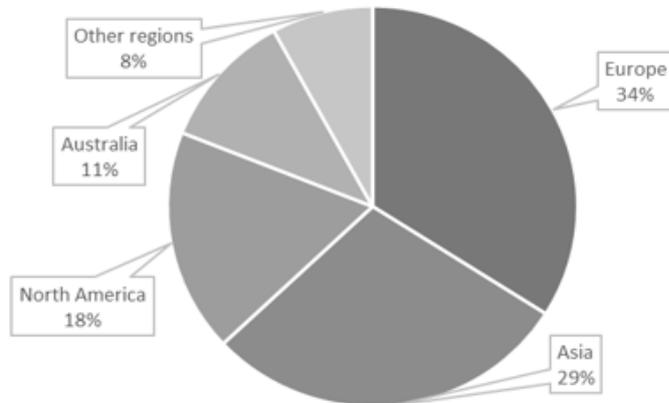
This distribution indicates that while transformational leadership in Higher Education is widely studied internationally, UK-specific empirical consolidation remains comparatively limited.

5.3 Performance Dimension Focus
Academic staff performance was operationalised in varying ways in the studies reviewed. Most of the studies investigated the overall job performance or contextual performance measures such as organisational citizenship behaviours. Few studies distinguished between teaching and research performance.

Table 5: Performance Domains Examined

Performance Domain	Number of Studies	Percentage
Overall/General Performance	15	39%
Teaching-related Performance	8	21%
Research-related Performance	6	16%
Contextual Performance	9	24%

The results indicate that the dimension of multidimensional performance is not always well-differentiated in empirical studies on performance. Both teaching and research performance are often included in the overarching construct of performance, which does not offer much clarity at the dimension level.

5.4 Directional Patterns in Leadership-Performance Relationships
The 38 studies revealed that the majority reported positive associations between transformational leadership and performance-related outcomes. However, conditional or mediated relationships were reported in some of the studies, particularly in the few studies that included workload or job demands in the analytical model.

Table 6: Direction of Reported Effects

Effect Pattern	**Number of Studies**	**Percentage**
Direct Positive Relationship	26	68%
Conditional / Moderated Relationship	9	24%
Mixed or Weak Findings	3	8%

The bulk of the studies reported positive effects, which is in conformity with the results reported in the meta-analytic studies in the literature review.

5.5 Structural Moderation and Workload Effects
The 9 studies that included the structural moderation of the relationship between leadership and performance in their analytical model revealed that high levels of workload had an attenuating effect on the leadership-performance relationship in several of the studies reviewed. Moreover, in several of these studies, transformational leadership had an indirect effect on performance through engagement rather than a direct effect on performance. This finding supports the conceptual framework's proposition that workload intensity acts as a boundary condition. Transformational leadership behaviours were more strongly related to performance outcomes under the lower workload conditions, whereas these associations became weaker under the high-demand conditions.

5.6 Dimension Level Findings
While most studies examined transformational leadership as a composite construct, some have examined its four dimensions separately. Intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation were strongly linked with academic outcomes such as innovation and engagement. Individualised consideration was strongly linked with mentoring and contextual performance. Idealised influence was found to have weaker independent predictive effects in the higher education setting.

This suggests that alignment between transformational leadership and academic work characteristics at the dimension level may impact effect size.

5.7 Thematic Synthesis
Thematic synthesis revealed three dominant explanatory themes linking transformational leadership with academic performance.

One was motivational alignment, in which transformational leaders were seen to enhance intrinsic commitment to academic goals through their vision-based approach (Tims, Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2011). A second was psychological resource enhancement, particularly increased engagement and decreased burnout in supportive contexts. A third was relational trust and mentoring support as a contextual performance enhancer.

Table 7. Thematic Mechanisms Identified

Thematic Mechanism	Description	Frequency
Motivational Alignment	Vision-driven engagement	High
Resource Enhancement	Reduced burnout; increased engagement	Moderate
Relational Support	Mentoring and collegial trust	Moderate

5.8 Summary of Findings
In summary, the findings suggest that transformational leadership is consistently linked with positive academic performance outcomes across higher education contexts. However, effect size and directness of effect vary depending on structural conditions such as workload intensity. Intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation were found to have strongest alignment with academic work characteristics. Multidimensional academic performance outcomes remain inconsistent in their operationalisation.

In the next section, we interpret these findings in relation to the conceptual framework and broader theoretical debates.

6. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLEMENTATION
6.1 Reinterpreting Transformational Leadership in UK Higher Education
This current study sought to explore the extent to which transformational leadership influences the performance of academics in UK Higher Education settings and to examine the role of structural pressures, particularly the intensity of workload, on this relationship. The results of the study suggest that there is directional support for a positive relationship between transformational leadership and the outcomes of academic performance. However, the results also suggest that the relationship between transformational leadership and performance outcomes is neither universal nor unconditional; rather, the effectiveness of the transformational leader is embedded in the resource structures of the institution.

On the whole, two-thirds of the studies reviewed report direct positive associations between transformational leadership and performance-related outcomes. This finding is consistent with the results of previous meta-analyses of transformational leadership conducted across sectors (Wang et al., 2011; Hoch et al., 2018), which further

supports the validity of the transformational leadership theory. Unlike the majority of the organisational literature on transformational leadership, the current study examines the effectiveness of the transformational leader in the professional, audit culture of UK Higher Education settings. The results suggest that the effectiveness of the transformational leader is maximised when cognitive and emotional resources are available to translate motivational stimuli into discretionary effort.

This finding supports the integrated theoretical model that proposes the interaction of transformational leadership with the JD-R model and the COR model of work-related well-being (Bakker and Albrecht, 2018). Leadership behaviors provide the motivational and psychological resources that facilitate discretionary effort; however, the effectiveness of the transformational leader is also conditional on the available cognitive resources to translate this motivation into actual effort, which is reduced under conditions of increased workload intensity. Transformational leadership in UK Higher Education settings is therefore seen to be effective but only under certain conditions.

6.2 Dimension-Level Differentiation and Behavioural Alignment
The results suggest that the strongest and most consistent relationship is found between intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation and academic outcomes. This is consistent with the theoretical basis of the inquiry-oriented nature of academic work, where intellectual stimulation is related to research innovation and critical thinking, and inspirational motivation to collective commitment to change.

For individualised consideration, strong relationships were found with contextual performance outcomes of mentoring and collegial collaboration. This may suggest that the importance of leadership behaviour facilitating professional development may be particularly relevant to the nature of academic work, where differentiation of career stages may be prominent. Idealised influence was also found to be positively related to performance outcomes but was found to be the least strong of the three transformational leadership dimensions and may be related to the fact that legitimacy in the academic domain may be more related to credibility than positional authority.

This study contributes to the theoretical and practical knowledge of leadership by highlighting the importance of behavioural alignment between the dimensions of transformational leadership and occupational characteristics. Transformational leadership in the professional domain is not a single entity; rather, the components of transformational leadership have a differentiated effect depending on their resonance with the work context.

6.3 Structural Boundary Conditions and Workload Intensity
A significant contribution of this study was the identification of workload intensity as a structural boundary condition that influences the effectiveness of transformational leadership. Among the studies that have used the inclusion of the workload or job demands variables, the relationship between the leadership-performance relationship was found to be reduced under conditions of high job demands. Transformational leadership was found to have indirect effects on performance through work engagement rather than direct effects on performance outcomes. This trend robustly validates the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), as well as the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Where the teaching burden is high, the administrative burden is expanding, and the pressure to conduct and maintain research is high, the psychological resources tend to decrease. Even the most inspirational and intellectually stimulating leadership may not have the desired impact on performance in such situations. This trend therefore validates the need to identify the boundary conditions in leadership, as suggested in the latest leadership literature (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023).

In order to further clarify the relationship between expectations and evidence, an alignment summary is provided in Table 8.

**Table 8. Alignment Between Conceptual Propositions and Empirical Evidence**

Conceptual Proposition	Empirical Support	Interpretation
Transformational leadership positively influences academic performance	Strong	Supported across majority of studies
Effects vary across performance domains	Moderate	Teaching and research often not clearly disaggregated
Workload moderates leadership–performance relationship	Moderate to Strong	Attenuation under high-demand conditions

This table highlights the relationship between the expectations and evidence. Although the relationship is strong, a key factor is the role of structural moderation.

6.4 Refinement of the Conceptual Model

Based on the evidence synthesis, the conceptual model can be refined. The evidence does not support a direct relationship moderated by workload but a resource-mediated relationship where transformational leadership is positively related to psychological engagement and negative burnout, which is related to academic staff performance. Workload intensity is a constraint on this relationship as it affects the availability of psychological resources.

Figure 6. Refined Evidence-Based Model
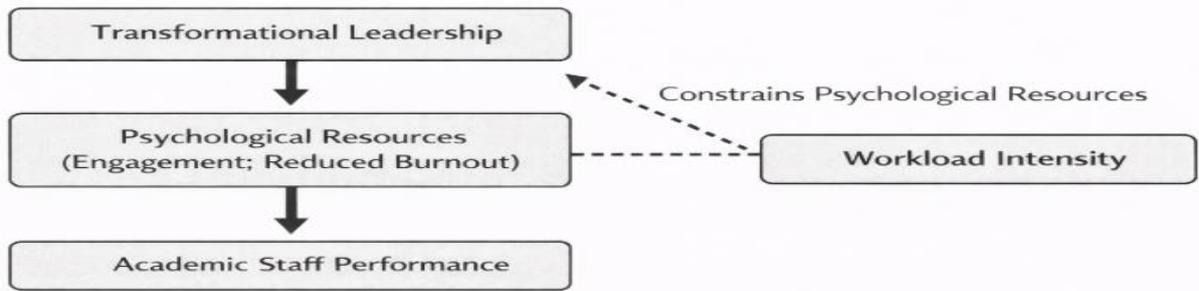
This model is a more accurate representation of the evidence as it reflects the indirect relationship identified in the studies.

In order to further clarify the boundary conditions of the relationship, a moderation matrix is provided in Table 9.
Table 9. Leadership Effectiveness Under Varying Workload Conditions

Workload Level	Observed Leadership Effect
Low	Strong direct positive relationship
Moderate	Positive but partially mediated
High	Indirect and attenuated

This table highlights the relationship when workload is a factor. Although the relationship is positive, it is not direct.

6.5 Theoretical Contributions

This research makes three theoretical contributions. First, it contributes to transformational leadership theory by situating it within a resource-based explanatory approach that acknowledges structural constraints. Second, it contributes to Higher Education leadership theory by focusing on multidimensional academic performance instead of attitudinal outcomes. Finally, it contributes to transformational leadership theory by emphasising the behavioural differentiation of transformational leadership characteristics, such as intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, as being particularly relevant for academic work.

Integrating leadership theory with the J - R and COR perspectives provides a context-sensitive explanation for leadership effectiveness in a professional academic context.

6.6 Practical Implications for UK Higher Education

This study's findings imply that UK Higher Education leadership development programmes should place greater emphasis on intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation while taking workload intensity into account at an institutional level. Leadership is not likely to have a direct influence on performance outcomes if workload intensity is not managed within the broader resource context.

UK Higher Education institutions should consider strategies for managing workload intensity within their governance structures. Embedding transformational leadership within broader resource strategies may have a positive influence on teaching and research performance.

6.7 Limitations and Future Research

This study's use of systematic procedures is a strength. Nevertheless, this research is not without limitations. First, the use of published studies as a basis for this research may be problematic since it is likely to be influenced by publication bias. Second, cross-national heterogeneity may limit the direct applicability of this study's findings for UK Higher Education institutions. Finally, the inconsistent use of teaching and research performance outcomes for multidimensional analysis is a limitation (Middlehurst, 2013)

Future research should use a longitudinal primary research approach within UK Higher Education institutions as a means of empirically testing the resource-mediated model. Additional dimension level analysis would also be beneficial.

6.8 Concluding Synthesis

Clearly, the dialogue serves to affirm the fact that transformational leadership positively influences the performance of academic staff in the UK Higher Education sector, but the effectiveness of the leadership is mediated through structural conditions of workload. Leadership influences staff through motivational and psychological resource mechanisms rather than through direct supervision or control. By recognising the boundaries of the effectiveness of the leadership, a more nuanced and useful model of effective leadership is achieved.

7. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND REFLECTION

7.1 Purpose and Overall Findings

This study explores the degree to which transformational leadership positively influences academic staff performance within United Kingdom Higher Education and the moderating effect of structural workload on such relationships. Using a systematic synthesis of secondary evidence from 38 peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2000 and 2025, it builds on existing fragmented evidence and provides a contextual understanding of transformational leadership effectiveness within Higher Education institutions.

The findings of existing research support that transformational leadership positively influences academic staff performance in teaching, research, and contextual domains. However, it does not do so universally or unconditionally. Rather, it appears that the degree and immediacy of such influence are contingent upon available structural resource conditions. Where workload demands are within manageable limits, transformational leadership exhibits strong direct positive effects. Where workload demands are moderate, transformational leadership exerts partial influence through psychological engagement mechanisms. Where workload demands are high, such influence becomes attenuated and indirect.

The main contribution of this study is that it establishes transformational leadership positively influences academic staff performance and that such influence is significantly contingent on workload circumstances.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution to existing body of knowledge in three main areas.
In terms of transformational leadership theory, it builds on existing evidence by contextualising it within a broader resource-based framework. Rather than accepting transformational leadership as universally effective in all contexts, it establishes that such influence is contingent on available resource conditions and therefore consistent with Job Demands-Resources and Conservation of Resources theories.

In terms of Higher Education leadership research, it makes a significant contribution by emphasising the multi-dimensional nature of academic staff performance outcomes. While existing research often focuses on attitude-based outcomes such as job satisfaction, it synthesises evidence across teaching, research, and contextual domains. Thirdly, the study findings shed light on the behavioural content of transformational leadership. Intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation appear to be closely related to the characteristics of the performance domains in academic work, while individualised consideration plays a key role in the mentor role and collegial contribution.

Taken together, the study's contributions place the concept of transformational leadership on a more appropriate foundation as a contingent model in the context of the university sector in the 21st century.

7.3 Implications

The study findings have clear implications for leadership and leadership development in the university sector in the UK. Leadership development in the university sector should focus on the development of the leader's capacity to provide intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, as the study findings show that these two

transformational leadership behaviours are closely related to the characteristics of the performance domains in academic work.

This does not, however, mean that leadership development in the university sector should focus on the development of the leader's behavioural competencies in isolation (Bryman, 2007). The study findings show that transformational leadership can do nothing to alleviate the effects of unsustainable workload pressures on academic performance.

Embedding leadership in resource-supportive organisational systems is likely to produce more sustainable effects on academic performance in the university sector.

7.4 Policy and Governance Implications
At the sector level, the study findings highlight the importance of performance-driven governance systems in the university sector that are aware of the limitations of leadership in the presence of excessive demand conditions. Governance systems that rely on regulatory and audit frameworks that exacerbate the problem of unsustainable workload pressures in the university sector are likely to undermine the effectiveness of leadership development. In the university sector, the effectiveness of leadership can no longer be evaluated in isolation from the structural design.

7.5 Directions for Future Research
While this systematic synthesis provides a robust integrative analysis, there is much to be gained by conducting longitudinal primary research studies within UK Higher Education settings to empirically test the resource-mediated model proposed here. Future research should also seek to refine the academic performance domains to better differentiate the impact of leadership on teaching and research performance.

Other potential moderators should also be explored to provide greater understanding of the complex dynamics of academic leadership.

7.6 Final Integrative Statement
Transformational leadership is a powerful tool in understanding the performance of academic staff. However, the effectiveness of this tool in the UK Higher Education context is heavily influenced by the structural workload conditions. Leadership's contribution to enhanced performance is not the sole responsibility of the leader but is heavily influenced by the broader resource-mediated system.

This research has shown that transformational leadership's effectiveness is maximised when motivational styles are complemented by the provision of sustainable workload and organisational resource alignment. By integrating the effectiveness of leadership with the resource-based model and the UK Higher Education context, this research provides a conditionally grounded understanding of the effectiveness of transformational leadership.

In the context of the current UK Higher Education landscape, characterised by performance intensification and the pressure to provide greater accountability, the effectiveness of the leader is not simply dependent upon their ability to behave effectively but also upon the structural design.

REFERENCES
1. Alvesson, M. and Sveningsson, S. (2016) *Changing Organizational Culture: Cultural Change Work in Progress*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
2. Avolio, B.J., Walumbwa, F.O. and Weber, T.J. (2009) 'Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, pp. 421–449. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163621
3. Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2007) 'The Job Demands–Resources model: State of the art', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), pp. 309–328. https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115
4. Bass, B.M. (1990) 'From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision', *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3), pp. 19–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90061-S
5. Bass, B.M. and Riggio, R.E. (2006) *Transformational Leadership*. 2nd edn. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
6. Bolden, R., Petrov, G. and Gosling, J. (2009) 'Distributed leadership in higher education: Rhetoric and reality', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 37(2), pp. 257–277. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143208100301

7. Bolden, R., Gosling, J. and O'Brien, A. (2013) 'Citizens of the academic community? A societal perspective on leadership in UK higher education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(5), pp. 754–770. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2012.754855

8. Bryman, A. (2007) 'Effective leadership in higher education: A literature review', *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(6), pp. 693–710. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701685114

9. Demerouti, E., Bakker, A.B., Nachreiner, F. and Schaufeli, W.B. (2001) 'The Job Demands–Resources model of burnout', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), pp. 499–512. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.499

10. Fischer, T. and Sitkin, S.B. (2023) 'Leadership styles: A comprehensive assessment and way forward', *Academy of Management Annals*, 17(1), pp. 331–372. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2020.0340

11. Gosling, J., Bolden, R. and Petrov, G. (2009) 'Distributed leadership in higher education: What does it accomplish?', *Leadership*, 5(3), pp. 299–310. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715009337762

12. Guthrie, S., Lichten, C., Van Belle, J., Ball, S., Knack, A. and Hofman, J. (2017) *Understanding Mental Health in the Research Environment*. Cambridge: RAND Europe.

13. Hobfoll, S.E. (1989) 'Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress', *American Psychologist*, 44(3), pp. 513–524. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513

14. Hoch, J.E., Bommer, W.H., Dulebohn, J.H. and Wu, D. (2018) 'Do ethical, authentic, and servant leadership explain variance above and beyond transformational leadership? A meta-analysis', *Journal of Management*, 44(2), pp. 501–529. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316665461

15. Johnston, K., Tanwar, J., Pasamar, S., Van Laar, D. and Bamber Jones, A. (2022) 'Blurring boundaries: Work-life balance and unbounded work in academia', *Labour & Industry*, 32(2), pp. 139–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/10301763.2022.2081902

16. Judge, T.A. and Piccolo, R.F. (2004) 'Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic test of their relative validity', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(5), pp. 755–768. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.5.755

17. Kasalak, G. and Dağyar, M. (2022) 'The relationship between leadership styles in higher education institutions and academic staff job satisfaction: A meta-analysis', *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(3), pp. 901–916. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.1896481

18. Kinman, G. and Wray, S. (2013) *Higher Stress: A Survey of Stress and Well-being among Staff in Higher Education*. London: University and College Union.

19. Leithwood, K. and Jantzi, D. (2005) 'A review of transformational school leadership research 1996–2005', *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4(3), pp. 177–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760500244769

20. Lowe, K.B., Kroeck, K.G. and Sivasubramaniam, N. (1996) 'Effectiveness correlates of transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic review of the MLQ literature', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 7(3), pp. 385–425. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(96)90027-2

21. Mauno, S., Kinnunen, U. and Ruokolainen, M. (2007) 'Job demands and resources as antecedents of work engagement: A longitudinal study', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 70(1), pp. 149–171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2006.09.002

22. Middlehurst, R. (2013) 'Changing internal governance: A discussion of leadership roles and management structures in UK universities', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 67(3), pp. 257–275. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12010

23. Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J. and Altman, D.G. (2009) 'Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement', *PLoS Medicine*, 6(7), e1000097. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097

24. Naidoo-Chetty, M. and Du Plessis, M. (2021) 'Job demands and job resources of academics in higher education', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 631171. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.631171

25. Nguni, S., Sleegers, P. and Denessen, E. (2006) 'Transformational and transactional leadership effects on teachers' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior in primary schools', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17(2), pp. 145–177. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450600565746

26. Page, M.J., McKenzie, J.E., Bossuyt, P.M. et al. (2021a) 'The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews', *BMJ*, 372, n71. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71

27. Page, M.J., Moher, D., Bossuyt, P.M. et al. (2021b) 'PRISMA 2020 explanation and elaboration: Updated guidance and exemplars for reporting systematic reviews', *BMJ*, 372, n160. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n160

28. Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., Moorman, R.H. and Fetter, R. (1990) 'Transformational leader behaviors and their effects on followers' trust in leader, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 1(2), pp. 107–142. https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(90)90009-7

29. Schaufeli, W.B. and Bakker, A.B. (2004) 'Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(3), pp. 293–315. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.248

30. Schaufeli, W.B., Bakker, A.B. and Salanova, M. (2006) 'The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study', *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 66(4), pp. 701–716. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164405282471

31. Stein, A., Schumann, S. and Vincent-Höper, S. (2021) 'High job demands weaken the effect of transformational leadership on burnout', *Work & Stress*, 35(3), pp. 270–288. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2020.1832610

32. Sun, T., Luo, Y. and Yoon, M. (2025) 'The impact of presidents' transformational leadership on faculty occupational well-being parallel mediating roles of teaching efficacy and job crafting', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1468563. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1468563.

33. Tims, M., Bakker, A.B. and Xanthopoulou, D. (2011) 'Do transformational leaders enhance their followers' daily work engagement?', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(1), pp. 121–131. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.12.011

34. Tranfield, D., Denyer, D. and Smart, P. (2003) 'Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review', *British Journal of Management*, 14(3), pp. 207–222. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00375

35. Wang, G., Oh, I.S., Courtright, S.H. and Colbert, A.E. (2011) 'Transformational leadership and performance across criteria and levels: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of research', *Group & Organization Management*, 36(2), pp. 223–270. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601111401017

36. Wood, S. (2022) 'Job demands and employee well-being in higher education during the pandemic', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 53(4), pp. 336–367. https://doi.org/10.1111/irj.12376

37. Wray, S. and Kinman, G. (2022) 'The psychosocial hazards of academic work: An analysis of trends', *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(4), pp. 771–782. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1793934

38. Yukl, G. (1999) 'An evaluation of conceptual weaknesses in transformational and charismatic leadership theories', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), pp. 285–305. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(99)00013-2