



Pergamon

The Leadership Quarterly 14 (2003) 41–65

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The  
Leadership  
Quarterly

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## Back to basics: applying a parenting perspective to transformational leadership

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Accepted 31 October 2002

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### Abstract

Developmental processes lie at the heart of the relationship between transformational leaders and followers. First, three major domains in which developmental outcomes have been mostly discussed, namely motivation, empowerment, and morality, are highlighted, expanded, and discussed. Next the analogy between transformational leaders and “good parents” is employed to explore the underlying developmental processes. Specifically, conceptualizations, notions, and findings are borrowed from the vast literature on parenting to help us understand these processes. Several major arguments and propositions, which can be tested empirically, are formulated by means of this analogy. These propositions and their conceptualization can broaden our perspective about the processes that underlie many of the outcome variables so frequently investigated and discussed in the leadership literature, and offer a major opportunity to probe the currently less explored developmental and dynamic aspects of leadership.

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Transformational leadership theory places great importance on developmental processes, such as empowering followers and helping them become autonomous and competent individuals who reach self-actualization and high levels of morality; it regards these processes as critical for distinguishing transformational leadership from other forms of leadership (Burns, 1978). Indeed, these developmental processes were described as being “at the heart

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of transformational leadership theory” (see Bass, 1997, p. 131). Yet, surprisingly, only few attempts have been made to unravel their nature and practice (e.g., Burns, 1978, p. 59; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993) though quite a number of researchers recently have addressed issues of process in leadership research (e.g., Howell & Costley, 2001; Jacobson & House, 2001; Ropo & Hunt, 1999; Ropo, Eriksson, & Hunt, 1997; Yukl, 1999).

For example, Jacobson and House (2001) presented a process model describing six stages in the interactions between followers and charismatic leaders. They start with identification and move through arousal and commitment to disenchantment, depersonalization, and alienation. Similarly, Ropo et al. (1997) discussed theoretical and methodological issues relating to dynamic processes in human organizations, and Ropo and Hunt (1999) examined such processes by highlighting linkages between leadership, organizational change, and managerial work.

Pertinent to the developmental processes between leaders and followers, Shamir et al. (1993) suggested a self-concept motivational theory to explain the process by which charismatic leader behaviors cause transformational effects on followers. They argued that charismatic leaders motivate followers by implicating the followers’ self-concepts, for example, by increasing the intrinsic valence of effort and goal accomplishment, and by creating personal commitment. This article seeks to extend these efforts beyond the question of harnessing followers’ motivation by means of symbolic interaction (e.g., Stryker, 1980) as suggested by Shamir et al. (1993). We aim at providing a conceptual framework for studying and understanding developmental psychological processes involved in transformational leadership by means of the analogy of the leader as a parent.

Leader–led relationships are analogous to parent–children dynamics in many respects. Leaders, like parents, are figures whose role includes guiding, directing, taking charge, and taking care of others less powerful than they and whose fate is highly dependent on them. The extent of the dependence of children on parents, or of followers on leaders, renders the influence of the latter highly important. Although the metaphor of the leader as a father was earlier introduced by Freud in the 1930s (Freud, 1939, pp. 109–111), it has never been further developed and elaborated. This analogy is the point of departure of this article.

We assume that leaders with whom followers form emotional relationships function in many respects like parents. Just as parents protect, guide, and teach children, helping them to grow into functioning and autonomous adults, so do transformational leaders in their relationships with their followers. We can benefit from this analogy by studying the dynamics involved in good parenting and by applying the insight gained from such consideration to understand the developmental aspects of good leaders (i.e., transformational leaders), namely to understand how leaders help their followers grow and develop as people.

The main objectives of this article are: (1) to highlight and specify the main domains in which developmental processes in the leader–led relationships are expected; (2) to elaborate on the analogy between leaders and parents, and to illustrate its pertinence and validity; (3) to employ this analogy to gain insights from parenthood in order to highlight the developmental aspects of good leadership, specifically transformational leadership; and (4) to suggest conceptualizations and possible research avenues derived from the analogy between transformational leaders and good parents.

## **1. Transformational leadership and the developmental aspects**

Bass (1985) and Burns (1978) described the transformational leader as one who empowers the followers and motivates them to work on transcendental goals instead of focusing solely on immediate interests. Transformational leadership elevates the followers' level of maturity and ideals, and also promotes the importance they attribute to achievement, their investment in self-actualization, and their concern for the well being of others, the organization, and society. In sum, the impact of transformational leadership is reflected in motivation, empowerment, and morality.

### *1.1. Motivation*

Burns (1978) addressed the motivational aspect by employing Maslow's (1970) theory of the hierarchy of needs. Maslow suggested a hierarchy of human needs: physiological, security, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs. Self-actualization, the realization of one's own potential, or the need to become what one has the capacity to become, is at the highest level of the hierarchy. According to Maslow, only upon satisfaction of the needs at the lower level does the motivation to satisfy a need at a higher level arise, while self-actualization needs are deemed infinite. Burns suggested that transformational leaders motivate followers to achieve the highest possible level of need satisfaction, namely self-actualization.

### *1.2. Empowerment*

Unlike some destructive charismatic leaders (e.g., Mumford, Gessner, Connelly, & O'Connor, 1993; Popper, 2001), transformational leaders do not derive their strength from the weakness or dependence of the followers. Rather, they (1) increase the followers' autonomy and encourage them to think independently and critically; (2) raise their level of self-efficacy, self-confidence, competence, self-worth, and self-management; and (3) augment their creativity and risk-taking. These outcomes frequently emerge in studies of transformational leadership (e.g., Avolio & Gibbons, 1988; Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer, Janasz, & Quinn, 1999).

### *1.3. Morality*

Aspects of moral development were included in the theory of transformational leadership by Burns (1978) using Kohlberg's theory. Kohlberg (1963) identified six phases of moral development grouped into three meta-phases. In the pre-conventional meta-phase, decisions are based on an orientation to punishment and obedience, as well as on satisfaction of personal needs. In the conventional meta-phase, the appropriate behavior is influenced by the desire to conform and gain social approval, and by an orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and maintaining the social order. In the post-conventional meta-phase, proper behavior is based on individually selected ethical principles that are logical, comprehensive, universal,

and consistent, such as justice, reciprocity, equality of human rights, and respect for people as individual entities.

Transformational leaders, according to Burns, motivate their followers toward and through end values such as justice and equality, and are therefore highly prosocial, whereas other types of leaders either do not deal with these aspects or are more concerned with modal values such as loyalty, which are considered more “instrumental.” Burns (1978, p. 20) summarized that “transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both.”

As mentioned, despite some articulation of these aspects, and their central role in the depiction of transformational leadership, little is known about *how and by which psychological processes* transformational leaders help followers achieve higher levels of motivation, empowerment, and moral conduct. In the present article, we elaborate on these three major developmental aspects, building on the analogy between transformational leaders and good parents.

## 2. Transformational leaders as good parents

To highlight the viability and pertinence of the analogy between transformational leaders and good parents, in Table 1, we have summarized side-by-side findings regarding good parenting from the developmental psychology literature and findings related to transformational leaders.

As may be seen in these examples, what good parents do and how they behave with their children closely corresponds with what transformational leaders do and how they behave with their followers. This similarity is apparent in several quite diverse domains. (a) Both are sensitive and responsive, showing individual consideration for their “protégées”; (b) both reinforce the protégés’ autonomy in a supportive, nonjudgmental way and by actively providing opportunities, promoting relevant experiences, giving explanations, and the like; (c) both set limitations and rules which are flexible; and finally (d) both are positive examples to identify with and look up to.

Further, there also is close correspondence between “good” parents and transformational leaders in the outcomes for their protégés. Specifically, both promote (a) trust in others; (b) self-confidence and self-esteem; (c) self-realization; (d) achievement orientation; and (e) a tendency to become similar to them. From these examples, it becomes quite clear that the two phenomena, leadership and parenthood, bear a strong resemblance.

This similarity opens up conceptual and empirical opportunities to investigate the dynamics underlying transformational leadership by borrowing from the extensive literature on parenthood. Specifically, the conceptual frameworks formulated in the domain of parenthood and the vast research conducted in developmental and clinical psychology provide a relevant theoretical basis and a rich bedrock of research findings, which can contribute substantially to understanding the nature of the developmental impact of transformational leaders. To indicate how parenting notions can be applied to leadership, we introduce several propositions

Table 1

## Transformational leadership and good parenthood

The transformational leader	The “good” parent
Gives individual attention: listens, is sensitive and accessible for personal needs and for development and growth (Bass, 1985; Howell, 1988)	Is sensitive, available, and responsive to the child’s needs, understands the child’s needs, and adapts his/her responses to those needs (Ainsworth et al., 1978; De-Wolff & Van IJzendoorn, 1997)
Communicates using emotional messages (Bass, 1985; Zaleznik, 1992)	Is emotionally open and expressive. Engages in warm, loving, and accepting emotional communication (Cassidy, 1994)
Sets realistic challenges and inspires faith in one’s ability to achieve them (Bass, 1985; Shamir et al., 1993)	Sets challenging goals for the child according to the child’s maturity level; trusts the child to be able to cope in these situations (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Baumrind, 1978; Stoppard, 1991)
Develops autonomy, motivation and initiative in followers. Creates a sense of identity, worth and competence, at the level of the individual and the group (Bass, 1985; Shamir et al., 1993)	Accepts and reinforces the child’s developing needs for autonomy. Reinforces the child’s sense of worth, identity, and competence (George & Solomon, 1989; Maccoby & Martin, 1983)
Sets goals and standards for performance, but is not critical, judgmental or aggressive (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; House & Howell, 1992)	Sets limitations, establishes rules and discipline, but does not criticize, domineer, pressure, or forbid without a reason (Baumrind, 1967, 1978; Barber & Harmon, 2002)
Provides opportunities for experience and reinforces success (Bass, 1985; Shamir et al., 1993). Provides intellectual stimulation; stimulates imagination and thinking and develops creativity (Bass, 1985; Howell, 1988)	Provides the child with opportunities for new and challenging experiences. Stimulates the child’s interest and promotes the child’s skills and abilities (Bornstein, 1989) in a cooperative and supportive manner (Baumrind, 1978; Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1978)
Builds feelings of self-worth, self-generation, competence, independence, inner-directed motivation, willingness to invest further efforts and strive for success. Enables people to make use of their individual and organizational potential (Bass, 1985; Shamir et al., 1993)	Generates a sense of self-worth, emotional maturity, competence, independence, explorative capacity, and achievement orientation. Enables the child to make use of the social, emotional, and cognitive potential (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Baumrind, 1978; Sroufe, 1983)
Wins complete trust and respect, and creates feelings of admiration and pride in being near him/her. Sets personal example (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Howell, 1988). Serves as a model for imitation and identification (Bass, 1985; Shamir et al., 1993)	Generates a sense of trust in him/herself. Serves as an example and positive model for the child (Mussen et al., 1984; Stoppard, 1991). Serves as a model for identification and imitation (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Main, 1983)
Develops transformational leaders that can replace him/her (Bass, 1985; Howell, 1988)	Promotes secure attachment in child which then translates into “good,” secure (autonomous) parenting as the child matures (Ricks, 1985; Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1997; Waters et al., 2000)

that we see as representing the essence of the analogy between transformational leaders and good parents with regard to developmental aspects of these relationships.

### 3. The functions of safe haven and secure base

**Proposition 1:** *The transformational leader provides his/her followers with a sense of security. This is a prerequisite for the development of other positive attributes, such as self-efficacy and self-esteem, and is the basis for the capacity of followers to experience and fulfill needs at higher levels in Maslow's hierarchy.*

On the face of it, the proposition that leaders provide followers with protection and a sense of security seems trivial and has appeared quite frequently in the literature (e.g., Heifetz, 1994). However, although this function of the leader is perceived as fundamental, most of the discussion in this respect has dealt with times of ambiguity and crisis (e.g., Shamir & Howell, 1999). The assumption is that in times of crisis a longing arises for a strong (usually charismatic) leader. This applies not only in the most extreme crises at the national or political level, but also is relevant to other situations characterized by a high degree of personal uncertainty, ranging from high job insecurity to rapid and unexplained changes (Shamir & Howell, 1999). This general claim was empirically supported (Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Hertzber, 1940; Pillai, 1996; Pillai & Meindl, 1998). Many writers (e.g., Lindholm, 1990; Popper, 2001; Shamir, 1991) agree that in times of crisis the so-called “regressive” tendencies of the led, namely the tendency to relate to the leader through processes of transference and projection, are intensified. Consequently, the tendency to merge with the leader and lose self-autonomy is more likely.

However, based on the analogy between leadership and parenthood, we argue that the need of followers for a sense of security in their relationships is not restricted to crisis situations. Moreover, dependency on leaders for protection and guidance does not automatically entail self-loss and regressive dependency. Rather, this “dependency” might be a key for the capacity of followers becoming able to reach needs at higher levels, such as self-actualization. This claim is based on insights and findings from the theory of attachment, which in recent years has become a central theory in emotional and social development (Ainsworth, 1992; Rutter, 1995). A brief overview of the theory follows.

The theory of attachment was introduced and developed by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1977, 1988) (see a review by Cassidy, 1999) as a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to form strong affectional bonds with particular others (Bowlby, 1977, p. 201). Based on concepts of ethological, evolutionary, and control systems, attachment theory postulates an innate, biosocial behavioral system in the infant whose purpose is to ensure proximity between the infant and his or her primary caregiver. The evolutionary purpose of this behavioral system is to promote one's survival by receiving protection from a “stronger and wiser” figure given that the newborn infant cannot survive on its own. So in the course of evolution only those infants who were equipped, motivationally and behaviorally, to obtain proximity and protection from a stronger and wiser figure survived.

The infant is assumed to be motivated to maintain proximity to a caregiver and has numerous alternative ways (termed attachment behaviors), some inborn and some learned (e.g., following, talking), to obtain the desired proximity and protection. According to the tenets of attachment theory, adults have a complementary behavioral system whose main function is the protection of the infant (or the person whose well being is sought).

The infant and the caregiver sustain a certain desired range of proximity, which may change depending on circumstances. If there is no perceived danger or threat, the infant may be content and feel secure even at a large distance from the caregiver. But when a danger or a threat is perceived (e.g., hunger, loud noise), the infant will actively seek proximity and protection and will only terminate attachment behaviors once the desired protection has been achieved and felt security has been restored. Thus, attachment behaviors may only be witnessed when the infant perceives some threat, and their intensity reflects the intensity of the threat.

During the first year of life babies form a bond with at least one specific caregiver, an attachment figure. The formation of this bond entails a preference to obtain protection from this specific figure and a strong propensity to keep that person available. The term attachment has mostly been used to refer to the individual's ongoing emotional ties with this figure, on whom s/he has learned to rely for protection and care.

Two major phenomena, the *safe haven* and the *secure base*, characterize the attachment relationships of the infant or child with the caregiver, and are most relevant here to the dynamics between transformational leaders and their followers. In safe circumstances, the level of activation of the attachment behavioral system can remain low for long periods, while other behavioral systems, such as exploration, may come into play. The child uses the caregiver as a "secure base" from which to explore. Only when a threat looms is the attachment system activated, and the child will seek protection from the caregiver, who then serves as a haven of safety.

The intensity of attachment behavior is much reduced as the infant grows up (Ainsworth, 1989; Weiss, 1993). Because adults are more self-sufficient and able to care for themselves than infants, attachment behaviors are displayed less often and may mostly be apparent in cases of emergencies. Though in adulthood attachment behaviors are less frequently seen, the attachment behavioral system is active and operating. Other figures besides parents may come to play an attachment-figure role (e.g., best friends, coach, romantic partner; Ainsworth, 1989), and the different protective functions may become dispersed among several figures (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997).

Interestingly, while for an infant an adult caregiver is indeed a stronger and wiser person, capable of giving protection effectively, this is not always the case for adults turning to other adults for help and protection (Ainsworth, 1982; Weiss, 1982). In the latter case, the adult does not have the same feelings of security that an infant has since he or she is aware of the fragility of the other person (the attachment figure) and in general knows that this person cannot be trusted in every problem or crisis. Consequently, we have argued (see a detailed discussion in Mayselless & Popper, 2001) that followers may form attachment relationships with leaders to fulfill the function of attachment, namely protection, a protection which they cannot fully obtain from their aging and de-idealized parents or from their equals (friends, romantic partners).

In the attachment relationships that followers form with a transformational leader, we expect both the *safe haven* and the *secure base* functions to be apparent. Specifically, in safe circumstances, those not involving high degree of uncertainty, we expect the level of activation of the attachment behavioral system to remain low, even for long periods of time. In such circumstances, the need for the leader as an attachment figure may not be so salient. Yet, the need to feel secure and protected is in effect, and its realization (feeling safe and secure) is *required* for daily functioning, especially at high levels. Specifically, the leader's provision of a sense of security makes possible the activation of other behavioral systems such as exploration (in Bowlby's terms), or allows the appearance of higher needs in Maslow's hierarchy (in Burns' terms). This might be manifested in the capacity of followers to take risks and be creative, leading to learning and personal growth (see Proposition 3). This is the sense in which followers use the transformational leader as a "secure base" from which to explore.

Should the leader be absent or be perceived as unavailable or unresponsive, the followers might feel insecure, the attachment behavioral system will be activated, and risk-taking, exploration, and learning will be interrupted. Similarly, when other threats arise (internal or external), the attachment system is activated and the follower will seek protection and help from the leader, who is then expected to serve as a safe haven. Should the leader give the desired assistance, a sense of security will be restored and the followers will be able to resume their risk-taking, exploration, and self-actualization efforts. This might be considered the safe-haven function.

An example of these principles in organizational leadership may be observed in the famous case of New United Motors Manufacturing (NUMMI), which was shut down in 1982 due to endless strikes and heavy losses, and re-opened a year later with the same (unionized) workers and the same technology and salaries. Almost as in an experimentally designed research study, the only difference in the re-opening was the new management. Under the new leadership, the plant, which had been one of the worst in the General Motors (GM) system, was turned around to become the best. That revolution was attributed to the trust and confidence built up between the workers and the management, which were based on understanding that laying off employees would be the last (and agreed) step to be taken (see O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000).

In other words, the management provided the workers with a feeling of secure base, which then enabled them to move from passive-aggressive modes of reactions derived from "security anxieties" to initiative and explorative behaviors. The high involvement and initiative of the workers was clearly reflected in the fact that over 86% of the plant's team-members made suggestions on improvements during that year (1998), with over 3.2 suggestions per person, of which 81% were adopted (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000).

In sum, in the leader-led relationship, the function of protection is relevant also in everyday situations even though it may not be actually seen, and the leader functions "only" as a secure base. Furthermore, the effects of protection in times of crisis (the safe-haven function) should not be regressive and harmful. Conversely, they may help the followers regain confidence and embark on a course to self-efficacy, autonomy, and self-actualization.

In line with these contentions, Hunt et al. (1999) found that even in times of crisis there are charismatic leaders who make a developmental impact on their followers. They distinguished

two types of leaders in critical circumstances: crisis-responsive and visionary. Using an experimental design with college students, they showed that once the crisis condition had abated, the effects of the crisis-responsive leadership deteriorated faster than those of the visionary (transformational) leadership. The effects of the crisis-responsive charismatic leadership significantly decayed over time as compared with those of the visionary leadership. This finding is consistent with our claim that transformational leadership is relevant not only in crisis situations, but also has positive long-term effects afterwards, which are not necessarily regressive in nature. They also can promote followers' competence, exactly like the interventions of good parents in time of threat.

#### 4. Providing corrective experiences

**Proposition 2:** *Serving as an attachment figure for the followers, a transformational leader can play an important role in providing corrective experiences for insecure followers.*

Though in general every child forms an attachment relationship with an attachment figure, individual differences exist. Differences in the ability to express the need and desire for closeness, and in particular differences in the caregiver's responsiveness, produce variations in babies' attachment styles. From infancy onward, children are assumed to form an internal working model, which contains internalizations and representations of major aspects of their attachment relationships with their caregivers (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1977, 1988; Bretherton, 1985). These aspects include perception of the self as (un)worthy of love and of attention, and of the attachment figure as (un)willing and (un)able to attend to the attachment needs once they arise. The internal working model guides the interpretation and planning of interpersonal transactions with the caregiver and later with other important figures. At first, it includes a representation of the specific relationship with a specific caregiver. However, following repeated experiences, the model is expected increasingly to become a part of the child's developing personality and turn into a more abstract, generalized representation of self and others (Bretherton, 1985; Collins & Read, 1994).

On the basis of Bowlby's theory, Ainsworth, Blehar, Wates, and Wall (1978) identified three styles of infant attachment, one secure, and two insecure: ambivalent and avoidant. These styles were later also identified in childhood and adulthood (see reviews by Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Solomon & George, 1999). As summarized in a review chapter by Cassidy (1994), the internal working model of secure individuals includes a basic trust in their caregiver and confidence that their caregiver will be available, responsive, and helpful when needed. With this assurance, they are bold in their explorations of the world and able both to rely on themselves and to turn to others when in need. This pattern is promoted by a caregiver, usually a parent, who is readily available, sensitive to the child's signals, and lovingly responsive when the child seeks protection and/or comfort.

In contrast, the internal working models of the insecure patterns are characterized by low levels of trust, which in one case lead to the adoption of a stance of emotional self-sufficiency

(avoidant attachment) and in the other case lead to clinging and separation anxiety (ambivalent attachment). The first is seen as a manifestation of a strategy of minimizing attachment behaviors and feelings (Cassidy, 1994; Main, 1990), which is the result of the child's caregiver constantly rebuffing the child when he/she approaches for comfort or protection (Cassidy, 1994), whereas the latter is seen as an attempt to force an otherwise unresponsive caregiver to pay attention, and is promoted by such conditions as parent being available and helpful on some occasions but not others (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994).

Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1988) believed that despite the tendency to continuity in attachment patterns, certain changes might occur in the course of life. At any point in time the individual may be vulnerable to negative experiences, but may also derive benefits from positive ones (Bowlby, 1988). Insecure models of self and others may be revised or replaced when changes occur in parental caregiving (Egeland & Farber, 1984), or when the individual is able to utilize his or her ability for reflection to examine contradictions in internal models, as well as to initiate and experience new relationships (Ainsworth, 1989) or when the individual has a corrective experience such as a supportive and sensitive relationship with a significant other, a friend, or a psychotherapist (Bowlby, 1988; Lieberman, Weston, & Pawl, 1991; Van IJzendoorn, Juffer, & Duyvesteyn, 1995).

Transformational leaders may play a decisive role in maintaining such corrective experiences, or even in initiating a corrective process. These effects are due to the role that transformational leaders play as attachment figures for their followers. When leaders act as attachment figures for their followers, the followers turn to them for the secure-base and the safe-haven functions. If the followers are insecure in their generalized internal working model, they will expect the leader to be rejecting (in the avoidant case) or unavailable (in the ambivalent case). However, transformational leaders tend to have a secure internal working model, which also involves secure caregiving (Popper, Maysseless, & Castelnovo, 2000). Such caregiving includes responsiveness, sensitivity, and individual consideration. The insecure follower, who expects insensitivity and unavailability, gets instead caring and accepting responsiveness. This presents the followers with an alternative worldview, which they may eventually come to adopt.

Our argument here is that transformational leaders who act as attachment figures for their followers may in many cases, as Hill (1984) suggested, have corrective effects either in initiating such a change and/or by maintaining and strengthening a process of change that has been triggered in another context. Indications of such processes were reported quite extensively in studies that examined teachers acting as typical transformational leaders (e.g., Prophy & Good, 1974; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

## 5. How is empowerment achieved?

**Proposition 3:** *The transformational leader is for his/her followers a major source of empowerment, which includes the development of self-confidence, autonomy, competence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. The ways by which transformational leaders promote such developmental outcomes are through their providing a secure base, being demanding and*

*structuring the environment, identifying zones of proximal development, and using scaffolding and positive reinforcement.*

Empowerment of followers is an issue quite frequently discussed in the literature on leadership (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer et al., 1999). For example, Conger and Kanungo argued that in empowering followers, transformational leaders enhance feelings of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 474). Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with people's beliefs in their ability to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over specific events (Ozer & Bandura, 1990). Enhancing self-efficacy increases the level of motivation to participate and persist in relevant tasks (Bandura, 1986).

In a review of psychological empowerment consequences, Spreitzer (1995) reports that empowerment was positively related to innovative behaviors. More specifically, because empowered individuals believe they are autonomous, and have an impact, they are likely to be creative and they feel less constrained than others by technical or rule-bound aspects. Empowerment was also positively related to self-determination, resulting in learning, interest in activity, and resilience in the face of adversity (Deci & Ryan, 1989).

Shamir et al. (1993) expanded the notion of empowerment beyond the sense of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy. They claimed that transformational leaders empower followers not only by raising their specific self-efficacy perceptions, but also by raising their generalized sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Self-esteem refers to the person's general evaluation of himself or herself as worthy, competent, and powerful, whereas self-worth is a sense of virtue or worth based on possessing attributes that have been culturally invested with a positive value (Gecas, 1982).

Despite the centrality that is given to notions such as empowerment and the promotion of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-worth, research has dealt mostly with either symbolic processes occurring between leader and followers (e.g., Shamir et al., 1993; Shamir, Zakay, Breinin, & Popper, 1998) or dynamics of expectations such as Pygmalion effects (Eden, 1990). The intrapsychological processes underlying these aspects, defined by Light (1979) as "the deep structure of social behavior," have not been the focus of the psychologically oriented literature on leadership. Such processes, however, are at the heart of research on the parent–child relationship. The vast literature on parenting can serve to identify several such psychological processes.

First, as indicated in the first proposition, in terms of motivation, by fulfilling the need for security, good parents open the way for other behavioral systems such as exploration and affiliation (Cassidy, 1999). When the child feels secure and safe and has trust in his or her "secure base" he or she wants to explore or affiliate, and feels bold in these endeavors.

Indeed, studies dealing with leadership and trust clearly point in the above direction. For example, a study that examined soldiers' perceptions of their commanders showed that closeness and support were by far the most salient variables in the trust-building process (Lapidot & Shamir, 2000); the closeness and support shown by commanders promoted trust. Trust in itself, as an independent variable, was found to be central in the willingness to take

risks, to make special efforts, to cooperate, and to be transparent (Gambetta, 1988), an effect that we attribute to the secure-base function (see above).

Second, as described above, besides being available, responsive, and supportive, good parents are also *demanding* (Baumrind, 1967). Specifically, though parents may be satisfied with the current level of functioning of their child, they nevertheless present the child with new challenges. This setting of high expectations draws the child to experiment and attempt new challenges, which he/she may have not approached by him/herself. Yet, these challenges are sensitively presented such that the probability of success is high (Elicker, Englund, & Sroufe, 1992; Elliot & Church, 1997). These depictions are in congruence with the claims and findings based on goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1994), a theory that has been widely used in research on management and leadership. The theory's core premise is that the best performance is generated by assignment or adoption of challenging but achievable goals.

Third, parents not only introduce demands and set up goals but also actively help the child achieve them. One of the major ways by which parents accomplish this goal has been termed *scaffolding* and is based on Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development (Wertsch, 1985). According to Vygotsky, social interactions form the primary arena for cognitive, personal, and social development. Children have *zones of proximal development*, which denote the more advanced behavior they are capable of exhibiting while in the presence and with the assistance of adults or more mature peers.

According to Vygotsky, children's development is driven by experiences in this zone. Scaffolding erected by the more mature peer or by the adult involves offering help, and instructions through building a "structure" around the child to achieve instrumental, social, or cognitive goals. This scaffolding extends the child's capacities, as against his/her doing the same thing by him/herself. This is a proactive approach in that the parent structures the environment and the interaction to allow for learning and growth. It also involves a sensitive identification of problems and instances in which the child really needs help, and the provision of assistance that helps him/her solve the problem while letting him/her take the lead. When the child grows more advanced and achieves the desired mature functioning, the scaffolding is dismantled. The parent does not remain there to monitor the child forever, but eventually the child is expected to achieve the desired level of mature accomplishment and maintain it on his/her own.

A recent study that relied on interview data and involved five organizations sought to understand the characteristics of an ideal mentor (Allen & Poteet, 1999). The results indicated a great resemblance between mentors and good parents. Specifically, the qualitative analysis (i.e., content coding) emphasized the importance of dimensions such as listening and communication skills, patience, honesty, and trustworthiness (Allen & Poteet, 1999).

Argyris (1995), in a series of studies, observations, and examples, showed the effect of establishing a learning climate that resembles the one described above for good parents. According to Argyris, when faced with threatening challenges people tend to engage in a type of irrational thinking, which he termed defensive reasoning (e.g., defensiveness, screening out criticism, scapegoating). This irrational thinking, he claimed, poses a significant obstacle to new learning. He suggested that the way in which leaders respond, especially to failures, is extremely instrumental in fostering a learning climate and maintaining coaching and

mentoring processes that can promote self-efficacy and self-esteem as well as provide valuable guidance for reflection. Just like parents, leaders who promote efficacy and self-esteem were expected to be able to foster a special learning climate. Our delineation highlights the specific aspects of such a positive learning climate.

In sum, transformational leaders, like good parents, develop self-efficacy and competence by being there for their protégés, by providing challenges, by conceiving high expectations, and by monitoring and providing the kind of scaffolding needed for success without being overbearing. They thereby provide successful experiences through tailoring the assignments given or accomplishments expected to the followers' level of potential (Bass, 1999; Kotter, 1990).

## 6. How are high levels of morality achieved?

**Proposition 4:** *Transformational leaders promote a higher level of moral functioning and prosocial (altruistic) values and conduct. This higher level might be achieved by introducing expectations and demands for a conduct that is morally appropriate and prosocial, by maintaining trustworthy and communicative relationships, by using inductive methods which involve reasoning and explanations, by directing attention to the consequences of various actions in terms of feelings, and by modeling empathy and prosocial behavior.*

Bass (1985), Burns (1978), and Howell and Avolio (1992), among others, have dealt with the issue of leaders' moral influence. For Burns, for example, to be transformational one has to have the capacity to transcend the claims of the multiplicity of everyday wants, needs, and expectations, and to respond to the higher levels of moral development. According to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), to win moral standing a leader must be moral in terms of (1) the end sought, (2) the means employed, and (3) the consequences. Despite the significance accorded to ethics and morals in the literature on transformational leadership, very few models deal directly with the psychological aspects related to the leaders' impact on processes of moral development. Even the conceptualization regarding the moral impact of transformational leaders is general and somewhat fuzzy.

In an attempt to elucidate what morality means in the context of transformational leadership, Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) suggested that the higher moral functioning of transformational leaders is manifested (1) in their general prosocial orientation, which is evident in the motivation to benefit others, the organization, and/or society; (2) in their vision, which is geared towards the same goals; and (3) in their conduct, which involves empathy and a strong accent on others (i.e., "passionate and sincere care and concern, as well as deep and abiding respect for others": p. 43). They employed the term "altruism" to contrast an egoistic orientation with this moral, other-oriented, prosocial stance of transformational leaders.

Similarly, we suggest that the moral influence of transformational leaders may be seen in their effects on followers' motivation, goals, and conduct, which become more prosocial and guided by concern for others and for the organization (and/or society) and by general higher-

order values such as justice and the well-being of others. This argument is in congruence with the general claim of developmental psychologists that empathy and especially prosocial orientations are the “building blocks” of moral conduct (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1997; Hoffman, 1970).

By accepting this orientation as a frame of reference for future studies on leadership and moral development, we are able to draw on the literature on socialization and parent/child relationships to understand this developmental process (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1997). The literature on the different ways in which parents affect the moral growth and behavior of their children has identified several key aspects that are relevant to the promotion of autonomous cognitive moral judgment and prosocial or altruistic behavior (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

First, a key aspect is related to parental *expectations* and *demands* for a conduct that is morally appropriate. The parent expects the child to behave in certain ways, and even if the child does not comply these expectations set a standard of behavior. Parents who do not set standards or who accept any kind of behavior as appropriate (permissive parents) usually do not raise children who are self-regulated and prosocial (Patterson, De Baryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). Second, a major aspect in the willingness of children to adopt parental expectations is related to the general context of the relationship. In a relationship where *warmth and trust* are the rule, children were found to adopt parental expectations much more than in a context of rejecting relationships (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Hoffman, 1970; Kochanska & Thompson, 1997).

The leadership literature reports similar findings. For example, a study by Clover (1990) reported that transformational leaders were higher than other types of leaders in measures such as nurturance, and lower in measures such as aggression and criticism. Ross and Offermann (1997) reported negative correlations between measures of critical parenting, aggression, and criticism and transformational leadership. Roush and Atwater (1992) reported that transformational leaders ranked higher as sensing and feeling types than as thinking types; that is, they ranked high as people who place more emphasis on human relations, on the importance of others' attitudes, on concern for their welfare, and on promoting an atmosphere of openness, compared with those who emphasize logical, analytical, and impersonal thinking. Judge and Bono (2000) reported that, among the Big Five traits, agreeableness was found as the strongest and the most consistent predictor of transformational leadership. Finally, trust was reported to be the single most important variable moderating the effects of transformational leadership on the performance, attitudes, and satisfaction of the followers (Podaskoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990).

A third general aspect, which is related to the tendency of children to adopt altruistic, prosocial values, and conduct, concerns the parents' *modeling* such behavior (Hoffman, 1975; Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1986). Similarly, modeling is perceived as a major variable in predicting and explaining influence of transformational leaders (Dukerich, Nichols, Elm, & Vollrath, 1990; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). In fact, modeling is part of the “idealized influence” factor used in the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) for measuring transformational leadership (Bass, 1999).

Certain more specific parenting practices were found to be associated with higher moral conduct, principally *inductive discipline* (Hoffman, 1994), which is largely related to the

utilization of *reasoning*. Reasoning involves an explanation of the nature of the (mis)deed, a rationale for why the behavior is desirable or unacceptable, a discussion of the consequences or the feelings of the people involved, and a recommendation for future behavior. It includes the giving of explanations as well as the use of appeals to the child's pride and desire to be mature and worthy. Franklin Roosevelt's "fireside chats" is an example of maintaining a direct reasoning process with followers (Burns, 1956). Solomon and Henson (1983) argued that giving reasons (namely backing up actions with explanations and justifications) and concern for others are key variables for being perceived as a moral leader.

Prosocial behavior in particular seems to be related to directing children's attention to the consequences of their actions in terms of the *feelings* of the people involved (*empathy*). The parents' feelings when shared with the child also are relevant, and they play an important role in shaping the child's prosocial behavior (Wispe, 1991). In addition, parental expressions of *empathy*, encouraging the child to feel and express his/her emotions, and meeting the child's needs all contribute to prosocial, empathic behavior (Barnett, 1986). The centrality of emotions in work settings has been highlighted recently from many angles.

Goleman, who introduced the notion of emotional intelligence (EQ) as a central and prominent aspect in the work place, found that excellence at work is twice as dependent on EQ as IQ and technical skills (Goleman, 1998). Hegelson (1990) reported that women leaders were found more effective than men. She explained this by attributing to women enhanced human-relations skills and better ability to reconcile the needs of efficiency and humanity. These enhanced skills were seen as reflecting women's psychological strength, particularly brought about through their family responsibility. In fact, the emotional capability of leaders and its impact has been recently more widely discussed in the literature on transformational leadership than before (e.g., Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996).

In sum, the process by which transformational leaders affect their followers' moral judgment and conduct may be quite similar to the way good parents affect their children's moral conduct and goals. First, transformational leaders may allude to expectations and goals that are moral in nature and that transcend the daily concerns of their followers; they set standards and expectations just like good parents. Second, the context of the relationship is a warm, accepting one where empathy and concern for others is exercised and modeled. Third, transformational leaders give explanations and reasons, and embed these in a broad context of values (Burns, 1978). Finally, the moral impact of transformational leaders is probably not derived from mere preaching or from insistence on social conformity. It emerges from their being sensitive and attentive to the fundamental wants, needs, and aspirations of the followers, as well as from employing feelings in their communications with others.

## 7. Summary and discussion

In this article, we attempted to understand how transformational leaders affect their followers in three domains: motivation, empowerment, and morality. To analyze these processes, we drew on a powerful analogy between good parents and transformational leaders. This analogy, first introduced by Freud, was expanded in this article to highlight

specific developmental processes inherent in the relationships between transformational leaders and their followers.

As both types of relationships are asymmetrical in principle, they form the basis for psychological dependence, which exists between children and parents as well as between followers and leaders. However, unlike some previous theorizing in the leadership literature (e.g., Lindholm, 1990), we argued that this dependence is not inherently negative. Instead, it may be seen in some occasions, as a key to helping children and followers to satisfy needs, attain aspirations, and actualize capacities at the highest level. It may also serve for people to improve themselves instrumentally (by being competent and self-assured), interpersonally (by being secure and trusting), and morally (by acquiring universal values and behaving prosocially). This can be achieved if certain psychological processes (as described above) are maintained and promoted. These processes may be conceptualized as mediators, which explicate how good parents or transformational leaders bring about the specific outcomes of motivation, empowerment, and morality (see Fig. 1 for a configural demonstration).

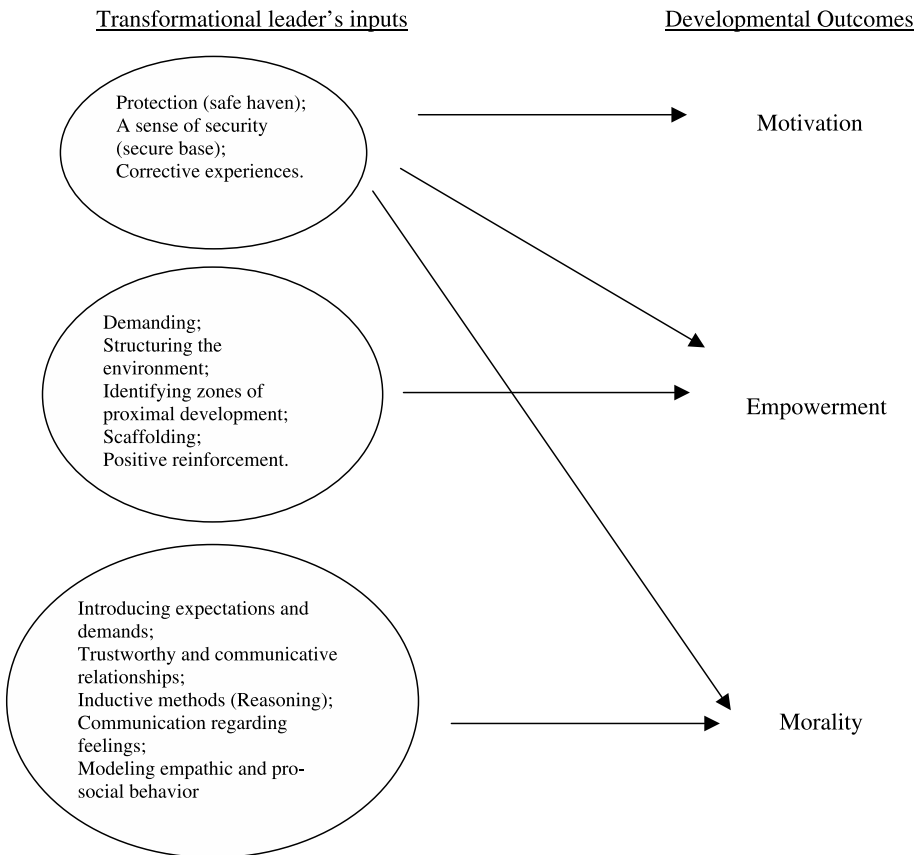


Fig. 1. Configural presentation of the association between transformational leader's inputs and developmental outcomes.

Throughout this article, we have described a large number of specific behaviors or strategies enacted by parents that promote developmental processes in their children. This specification may erroneously lead readers to regard the relationships as involving a series of unrelated actions or behaviors. This lack of association, however, is probably untrue. In many cases a specific parental behavior receives its meaning within the general context of the relationship, and a very similar act can have a totally different effect depending on this context (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Though specific “good” parenting strategies or behaviors can be identified, a more holistic attitude might be considered (Baumrind, 1996). A similar question may be raised regarding the effects of transformational leaders. Although in the leadership literature influences of transformational leaders have been measured, analyzed, and discussed with regard to separate domains and variables (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1990), the impact of transformational leaders (and parents) may be more holistic. The division into different domains is largely artificial.

Simpson (1976), for example, found congruence between Maslow’s developmental need sequence and Kohlberg’s scheme of the motivational aspects of moral development. Simpson saw a meaningful correspondence between the more opportunistic, reward-and-punishment, and conformist attitudes at the lower levels of Kohlberg’s scheme and the survival and belongingness needs at the bottom and middle levels of Maslow’s hierarchy. Similarly, Simpson observed a parallel between Maslow’s need for self-actualization and Kohlberg’s emphasis on higher and less self-involved values at the top of the hierarchy. Our delineation of the different domains in which developmental processes are expected raises an interesting question, namely how far development in each of these domains is independent, or are they related. Answering this question might be the task for future research.

The conceptual framework and the specific propositions suggested in this article can open new avenues for thought, consideration, and research in the psychological literature on leadership. By employing the analogy between good parents and transformational leaders, our article has presented such a conceptualization, as well as suggested several testable propositions. These may guide future studies that focus on the relationships between leaders and followers and the development of followers, and open up a whole new area of research.

The foregoing arguments, however, should not be discussed without reservations. The notion of leadership as well as parenthood may be culturally contingent (Dorfman, 1996; Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000). Gerstner and Day (1994), for example, reported that attributes deemed most characteristic of leaders varied across eight countries; no single trait was rated in the top five as being most prototypical. In line with this diversity, “power distance” (i.e., respect for authority), one of Hofstede’s (1980) known cultural dimensions, has been suggested as relevant to the cultural analysis of leadership. Hofstede reported that in cultures characterized by low power distance, subordinates expect their superiors (i.e., leaders) to consult with them and use their suggestions, whereas in cultures characterized by large power distances, subordinates expect supervisors to act autocratically.

Triandis (1993), on the basis of years of cross-cultural research, claimed that individualism/collectivism (another dimension highlighted by Hofstede, 1980) was one of the most important dimensions of cultural variation with regards to leadership. In collectivist cultures, a successful leader is expected to be supportive and paternalistic. In individualist cultures,

achievement-oriented and participative leadership would be key leader behaviors. In line with this suggestion, [Farmer and Richman \(1964\)](#), who rated a number of countries on paternalism, concluded that Japan (which is highly collectivist in Hofstede's terms) is most strongly paternalistic as evinced by policies of life employment. Similarly, using data on employees in Taiwan and Mexico (two collectivistic cultures) as well as in the United States (a more individualistic culture), [Dorfman and Howell \(1988\)](#) found more paternalism in the collectivistic cultures. When paternalism was strong, employees subscribed to expecting job security and being treated by their company and superiors as people and not only as workers. The analogy between leadership and parenthood might therefore be even more powerful in collectivistic cultures.

Similarly, there might be “cultural boundaries“ regarding some of the claims and predictions of attachment theory. For example, in attachment theory, having a secure base is linked to the need to adapt effectively to the outside world. However, the meaning of adaptation may differ in various cultures. In the United States (and most Western countries) the major link is with exploration, and adaptation primarily refers to individuation and autonomous mastery of the environment. In Japan, adaptation primarily refers to accommodation, avoidance of conflict, fitting in with others, and ultimately loyalty and interdependence ([Rothbaum et al., 2000](#)).

Similar arguments have been presented regarding “openness,” which is linked by attachment researchers to a sense of a secure base ([Bretherton, 1995, p. 316](#)). However, emotional openness is not a desirable quality in Japan, where children are encouraged to keep hostile feelings to themselves or to express them indirectly to preserve social harmony ([Lebra, 1994](#)). In sum, although the conceptual framework presented here has a limit in terms of its generalizability, it offers a framework for investigations taking into account cultural diversity (e.g., [Triandis, 1993](#)).

The main concepts and models discussed in our presentation of the analogy of good parents and transformational leaders can be operationalized and measured. In the area of leadership research, validated measures of transformational leadership exist across cultures and languages (e.g., [Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999](#); [Bass, 1999](#)). However, one of the conceptual and empirical gaps so far has been a way of operationalizing and measuring the developmental processes of the followers. Our article suggests that the developed and elaborate level of theorizing and measurement in the domain of parenthood can be applied to the study of leadership to advance empirical research in this domain.

For example, during the last decade, several attempts were made to measure the internal working models of adults with regard to attachment. The two foremost methods are the Adult Attachment Interview ([Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985](#)) and the attachment questionnaires modeled after [Hazan and Shaver \(1987, 1990\)](#). Both showed strong concurrent and predictive validity ([Crowell et al., 1999](#)) and can be used in research designed to examine attachment processes in leadership, such as the provision of a secure base and its effects. For example, a scale designed to assess the propensity to provide a secure base for one's children has been developed and validated ([Granot & Maysseless, 2001](#); [Kerns, Tomich, Aspelmeier, & Contreras, 2000](#)). The scale can be modified to assess this aspect in leader–follower relationships. Similarly, the leaders' or the followers' attachment styles can be assessed to examine some of

the processes of change conceptualized in this article. See, for example, two recent applications of attachment notions to leadership in studies that examined the attachment styles of leaders of different kinds (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995; Popper et al., 2000).

Similarly, the literature has identified various methods of measuring scaffolding and identifying positive and negative ways by which parents affect their children's motivation, self-efficacy, and performance (Mussen, Cooper, Sagan, & Hustor, 1984). For example, scaffolding was assessed in the parent–child relationships through observations of a common task in which the child required some assistance (Clarke-Stewart & Beck, 1999; Pratt, Kerig, Cowan, & Cowan, 1999). The principles employed to construct scaffolding interactions in educational settings (e.g., Herrenkohl, Palinscar, DeWater, & Kawasaki, 1999) as well as the identification of naturally occurring scaffolding within parent–child interactions can be consulted to design and assess scaffolding during instruction sessions or dyadic and group training which takes place at various levels in organizations.

Likewise, within the parenting literature too, researchers have developed validated measurement techniques to assess parents' inductive discipline, their employment of emotional messages, and other aspects relevant to how parents affect internalization of values and prosocial altruistic behavior in their children (Bar-Tal, 1976; Hoffman, 1994). For example, the utilization of emotional messages and the reference to the parents' as well as the child's feelings have been coded during various types of parent–child interactions (Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001; Saarni, 1999). These coding schemes can be adapted to analyze interactions between leaders and followers, the ways by which leaders conduct various meetings, or their speeches addressed to larger audiences. In addition, there are different questionnaires that may be used to assess some of the developmental outcome variables, for instance, self-efficacy (Jones, 1986), autonomy (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), or innovative behaviors (Quinn, 1988).

By and large, the rigorous literature and extensive research on parenting open a wider door and offer new possibilities for exploration in the study of developmental and dynamic psychological aspects of leadership. For instance, concepts such as “scaffolding,” “attachment behaviors,” and “explorative and initiative behaviors” can provide frameworks for direct observations employed during research, training, and consultancy. In addition, these and other concepts can be effectively used for cross–cultural research, for example, the extent to which different cultures view similar behaviors as developmental. Finally, qualitative research that does not necessarily focus on behaviors but on more abstract notions such as feelings and cognitive constructs can significantly benefit from the knowledge gained in research on parenting.

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