

# THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE **research**

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**TITLE** Transformational Leadership Behavior of Frontline Sales Professionals:  
An Investigation of the Impact of Resilience and Key Demographics

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**OBJECTIVE** The primary purpose of this study is to explore the impact of resilience and key demographics on the transformational leadership behaviors demonstrated by sales professionals operating on the frontlines of their respective organizations.

**METHODOLOGY** The sample consisted of 197 participants from a previously recruited, computer-randomized group of approximately 2250 full- or part-time sales professionals who are employed and live in the United States and represent a panel of research participants obtained from MarketTools. Respondents completed the Leadership Practices Inventory, the Personal Resilience Questionnaire (Conner, 1993), and provided demographic information. The typical respondent was male (55%), Caucasian (85%), with nearly 13 years of work experience and almost seven years in their current position. A little more than one-third were high school graduates and a little less than one-third were college graduates; most made under \$40,000 annually (64%). Approximately 26 different industries with sales professionals were represented in this study. Internal reliability for the LPI in this study were strong: Modeling (.77), Inspiring (.87), Challenging (.83), Enabling (.76), Encouraging (.86), and overall (.96; labeled Transformational Leadership).

**KEY FINDINGS**

The most frequently reported leadership practice was Enabling, followed by Modeling and Encouraging, and followed by Challenging and Inspiring. No significant differences on Transformational Leadership were found on the basis of respondent gender, age, education, tenure (years of experience) or income. As the researcher notes:

Consequently, this research study on frontline sales professionals concurs with the already published literature on the impact assessed by regression analysis of key demographics on the transformational leadership behaviors of various research respondents/participants. Therefore, the standard demographic characteristics of the frontline sales professionals in this study do not explain the frequency with which transformational leaders invoke the five transformational leadership behaviors: modeling the way, challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart” (pp. 143-44).

There was a statistically significant correlation between the seven Personal Resilience dimensions (Positive-The World, Positive-Yourself, Focused, Flexible-Thoughts, Flexible-Social, Organized and Proactive) and the overall score on the LPI (transformational leadership). Regression analysis showed that three of the dimensions of resilience (Focused, Organized, and Proactive) significantly and positively predicted the total transformational leadership behaviors demonstrated by frontline sales professionals, accounting for nearly 23 percent of the variance.

The author concludes: “It appears fair to say that in the current business environment, sales professionals operating on the frontlines of organizations are being confronted with change that is frequently disruptive. Therefore, it is important for organizations to develop leaders at this level (p. 200).... The data obtained in this study confirms that the level of resilience of frontline sales professionals can be used to predict a portion of the level of transformational leadership behaviors demonstrated throughout organizations of varying size. The results of this independent research study can have a potential impact on performance management systems of organizations by further including an assessment of transformational leadership skills possessed by not only individuals in traditional hierarchical leadership positions such as upper- and mid-level management but throughout the entire organization. Additionally, this investigation provides further evidence to suggest there might be some benefit in training individuals to build transformational leadership behaviors and skills as well as in learning to possess a resilient capacity to change. Therefore, these findings have several implications for organizations and individuals alike” (p. 202).