Mechanism of Transformational Leadership on Team Performance and Recommended Interventions on AI-Lab

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to synthesize the relationships between transformational leadership and the intermediate outcomes (e.g., team vision, team coordination, team cohesion, team project innovation) of team performance, then to propose relevant interventions to enhance the team performance of the case setting.

Study design: Orienting with the empirical literature review, this study employs the case study method to incorporate some exclusive transformational leadership techniques into the practical issues of the case.

Findings: This study revisits the literature to demonstrate the positive relationships between the 4I's of transformational leadership and the intermediate outcomes of team performance, and finds some distinctive transformational leadership techniques to cope with the managerial problems of the case company during its business transition.

Originality/value: This study contributes to formulating an original theoretical framework on transformational leadership and team performance, and employing a series of distinctive intervention measures to enhance the team performance of the case company. The practical contributions may be generalized into the wider education service sector.

Introduction

Transformational leadership (TL) has become an important research topic in the field of business and management and is demonstrated as an important variable affecting how organizational members interact and function (Engelen et al., 2015). Meanwhile, TL is demonstrated as an important antecedent of team performance (TP) (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). To enhance the TP of AI-Lab, this article uses TL as the theoretical foundation and conducts a synthesized literature review to sort out evidence showing how the TL components affect TP concerning specific team tasks. Subsequently, distinctive interventions are proposed for AI-Lab based on the empirical literature on the mechanisms of relevant components of TL and TP.

Research Background

Company Background

Doomin Education Group (DEG; pseudonym) is an international education organization providing services in innovative education, quality education and extra-curricular tutoring worldwide, and exploring new models of future education based on its cutting-edge open platform. Relying on the big data from the company, the project team in the AI-Lab department of DEG focuses on the application and innovation of advanced projects (e.g., computer vision, natural language processing, machine learning) to assist teachers in teaching and developing intelligent interactive online education.

Problem Statement

Some projects of the AI-Lab should be migrated from Silicon Valley, U.S. to mainland China to save human resources costs. Because of the cultural shock and management changes, the leadership style drastically influences the team cohesion, productivity, and team performance of the department. In specific, the team leaders of AI-Lab are incapable of tackling the cultural shock between them and their employees, resulting in a series of negative intermediate outcomes of TP: (1) vague team vision, (2) low work engagement, (3) ineffective team coordination, (4) low team cohesion, and (5) lagging project innovation. Consequently, AI-Lab suffers a high turnover rate of talent during the transition. Therefore, the transforming of TL behaviors for the leaders is of urgent need within the department.

Literature Review

Transformational Leadership Theory

There are many theoretical approaches to understanding leadership, among which TL has evolved as a prominent leadership theory in the field of management and is deemed important for TP (Chen et al., 2018). TL is a leadership theory where a leader works with committed team members to identify needed changes and build a vision to guide and execute the changes through inspiration (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Transformational leaders promote deeper connections and higher commitment, performance, and morality of both leaders and followers (Bass & Bass Bernard, 1985). Fox (2018) also posits that leaders demonstrating TL take advantage of the evolving change processes in an organization, resulting in successful accomplishments of performance goals. Moreover, Lowe et al. (1996) launched a meta-analysis in both the private and public sectors. Results showed a hierarchy of leadership styles and relevant sub-components. TL characteristics were identified as the most effective, followed by transactional leadership. Table 1 shows the order of the characteristics' effectiveness from top to bottom.

Table 1: Components of Leadership Styles and Correlated Effectiveness in Public and Private Sectors (Lowe et al., 1996)

	Sector	
Leadership	Public	Private
Transformational		
Charisma-inspiration	.74	.69
Intellectual stimulation	.65	.56
Individual consideration	.63	.62
Transactional		
Contingent reward	.41	.41
Managing-by-exception	.10	−.02

TL is comprised of four components: idealized influence, inspiration, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

The full range of leadership factors encompassed in the TL theory is called the 4I's: idealized influence (II), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individualized consideration (IC) (Reza, 2019). See Table 2. These transformation components are built on a transactional basis and influence followers to put in extra effort and performance of transformational leaders (Fox, 2018).

Table 2: Full range of leadership factors of TL Theory (Reza, 2019)

Type	Components	Definition
Transformational Leadership		
IA	Idealized Attributes	Instill pride in others for being associated with them
		Display a sense of power and confidence
IB	Idealized Behaviors	Talk about their most important values and beliefs
		Specify the importance of having a strong sense of purpose
IM	Inspirational Motivation	Talk optimistically about the future
		Talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished
IS	Intellectual Stimulation	Suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments
		Seek differing perspectives when solving problems
IC	Individual Consideration	Spend time teaching and coaching
		Help others to develop their strengths

Idealized influence/Charisma

Transformational leaders forging a united and satisfying organizational culture typically exhibit articulate visions and team goals to followers. Charismatic leaders align subordinates around the vision and empower them to take greater responsibility for achieving the vision. With high confidence and belief in their value, they are well-perceived as role models by their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 112).

Inspirational Motivation

Inspiration relates to leaders' ability to create and articulate the organizational vision in a way that inspires followers and builds up their loyalty and commitment. Inspirational behaviors are exhibited through motivating subordinates, provoking enthusiasm, setting high expectations, aligning the team and individual goals, and treating challenges as opportunities (Reza, 2019).

Individual consideration and intellectual stimulation

Individual consideration refers to genuine concerns about subordinates' needs, interests, development paths, and empowerment to maximize team productivity (Bono & Judge, 2004). In addition, intellectual stimulation relates to leaders' ability to arouse subordinates' creative ideas in problem-solving and group decision-making (Sánchez-Cardona et al., 2018).

Mechanism of TL components on TP

Martin et al. (2018) define TP as the extent to which a team accomplishes its targets or missions. A variety of team tasks or team processes related to TP may include performance and goal definition, team structure and planning establishment, feedback, team member development and supportive environment building during the transition and action phases (Martin et al., 2018). In the following section, it will be introduced about the mechanism of TL components

on TP. Due to the constraint of the article space, the relationship between TL and TP will mainly be limited to introducing the components that are closely relevant to the status quo of the case study AI-Lab.

Idealized influence on team vision and work engagement

To examine the relationship between TL and team-level commitment in a Korean state-owned organization, Chai et al. (2017) probed into their links, adding shared vision and team-goal commitment as the mediators. Questionnaires were disseminated with stratified random sampling. 1,716 questionnaires were grouped into 450 teams. A 5-point Likert scale was utilized for measurement. Structural equation modeling, M-plus and SPSS instruments were used for analysis. Sobel tests results attested to the indirect effects of TL on team-level commitment through a shared vision and team-goal commitment, statistically significant at .01 and .05 levels, respectively. It signifies that shared vision and team-goal commitment partially mediated the relationship between TL and team-level commitment. It is implied that transformational leaders can motivate employees by articulating a shared vision that enhances staff confidence and expectations. Employees motivated by such articulate vision could be more dedicated to accomplishing team goals.

Change et al. (2019) sought to examine the influence of idealized influence on team members' engagement in state-owned companies in the energy sector in Kenya. The research adopted a positivist approach and a descriptive correlational research design to analyze how idealized influence shapes employees' work engagement. A sample size of 176 middle-level managers among 10 parastatals was drawn using stratified random sampling. Structured self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data that were measured by the Likert scale and analyzed via inferential statistics. Findings show that employee engagement has a statistically significant relationship with idealized influence ($r(165)=0.59$, $p<0.01$). The study concludes that idealized influence positively enhances employees' engaged workforce.

Further to the instrument of assisting in improving the idealized influence of transformational leaders, Wiyono et al. (2020) used <u>self-evaluation</u> as the technique of principals' TL development and examined its indirect effect on improving teachers' work engagement and school performance. The researchers utilized quasi-experimental research with a non-equivalent control group. Participants were selected by cluster quota random sampling (i.e., 80 principals and 480 teachers), then divided into the experimental group and control group. Data were collected by self-evaluation questionnaires and analyzed through statistic descriptive, ANOVA and MANOVA analyses. The self-evaluation with feedback model was implemented in six steps: (1) materials and training preparations for principals, (2) self-evaluation implementation by filling the questionnaires, (3) feedback-evaluation from subordinates, (4) diagnosis of the outcomes of self-evaluation and the feedback, (5) motivation to principals, and (6) re-planning self-evaluation. The self-evaluation was implemented for three rounds, in three stages in total. Results on each stage were recorded to see how values developed. It concludes that the self-evaluation of transformational leaders can effectively improve their idealized influence, which further enhances teachers' work engagement and school performance.

Moreover, the model of self-evaluation with feedback from staff has a more significant effect than those without feedback.

Inspirational motivation on team coordination

In the study of Hayati et al. (2014), nurse participants (n=240, M_{age}=25) were employed from five public hospitals in Iran via stratified random sampling. They completed the multi-factor leadership questionnaires (MLQ), and the teamwork coordination and engagement scales in the 7-point Likert scale format. Multiple regression analyses supported the assumption that transformational leaders may easily infiltrate their inspiration to employees and lead to stronger teamwork coordination. The Cronbach alpha (i.e., overall reliability) was 0.73. This is in line with the research of McEachern (2006) that inspirational leadership can significantly boost team communication and coordination.

Zhang et al. (2011) collected data from three dimensions in a lagged design of 711 employees from 144 teams including 17 supervisors in a large Chinese organization to investigate the effects of TL on team coordination and TP through the conflict-management approaches adopted by employees. Employees rated team leaders' TL behavior. Team leaders, then, rated team coordination. Supervisors of the team leaders finally rated the TP. Results support the hypothesis that TL improves team coordination and TP by inspiring employees to adopt a cooperative rather than a competitive approach to conflict management. The results implicate that TL facilitates team members to envisage their mutual benefits, shared vision, and integrated roles so that they can embrace cooperative team goals and handle conflicts constructively. The cooperative conflict management approach is positively related to team coordination (r=0.36, p<0.01), which also positively mediates the relationship between TL and higher TP (r=0.32, p<0.01).

Individual consideration on team cohesion

To investigate the relationship between TL and the leader-inspired extra effort of performers, Gorgulu (2019) recruited 78 college basketball players (male=43, female=35; M_{age}=21.60). Moreover, Gorgulu utilized a coach-athlete relationship questionnaire to test the athletes' perceptions of the relationship with their coach, and used a leader-inspired extra effort scale to test their perceptions of their leader-inspired extra effort. Results did not reveal full mediation except for the significant and direct effects between individual consideration and leader-inspired extra effort (β=.492; SE=.141, p<0.01), as well as the individual consideration and coach-athlete closeness (β=.068; SE=.103, p<0.01). The results imply that coaches and managers need to employ individual consideration as it is closely related to performers' extra effort and team cohesion.

Employing individual consideration with a shared vision at the service delivery level is important for forging a more cohesive team (Miettinen et al., 2013). Therefore, to balance individual differences and the shared team vision, it is necessary to assign transition-service coordinators in service organizations. Moreover, to examine the relationship between care coordinators' performance and leadership factors among care physicians, a cross-sectional study was implemented with 84 care physicians from 40 state-owned Jakarta healthcare centers

(Werdhani et al., 2018). Pearson's correlation, independent t-test, and ANOVA were utilized to examine the relationship between clinical TL and care coordination. Multiple regressions helped identify the core factors influencing care coordinators' performance. Results show that care coordinators' performance scores are positively and significantly correlated to TL (r=0.53; P<0.001) and team cohesion (r=0.32; P=0.005) (Werdhani et al., 2018). It indicates that TL is an important antecedent influencing care coordinators' performance. Meanwhile, coordinators mediate the relationship between individual consideration and team cohesion. This is in parallel with the research outcome of Rearick (2007) that employing individual consideration will improve transition-service coordinators' ability and cohesion among team members.

Intellectual stimulation on project innovation

To examine the effects of CEO's TL on project innovation, Sattayaraksa and Boon-itt (2017) conducted quantitative research and applied a two-step structural equation modeling based on 269 manufacturing organizations in Thailand through an online survey. Data were measured by a 5-point Likert scale. Results reveal that CEO's TL indirectly influences project innovation through an innovative culture, organizational learning, and new product development (NPD) process, which significantly leads to the project innovation performance. Hence, it indicates that R&D executives should develop their TL skills to cultivate innovative culture and organizational learning, which will subsequently influence project innovation. However, the research did not cover all aspects associated with project innovation, such as NPD strategy, and different phases of NPD (e.g., concept appraisal, project development and implementation). These dimensions can be further examined to explore the effects of TL on project innovation.

Moreover, researchers have realized that TL may impact creativity at both individual and team levels. To address the challenges confronted by managers in cultivating both individual and team creativity (namely, dual-focused), Dong et al. (2017) developed and tested a multilevel model connecting the dual-focused TL and creativity. 171 individuals (i.e., 43 teams), team leaders, and supervisors were recruited from eight high-tech companies in Northeastern China. Results showed that individual-focused TL was significantly related to individual skill development (γ=.22, p<.05). Also, when individual-focused TL was included in the model, individual skill development and creativity were positively related (γ=.61, p<.001). It indicates that individual-focused TL impacts individual creativity via skill development. Furthermore, results also indicated that team-focused TL is positively related to team knowledge sharing (γ=.17, p<.05). Team knowledge sharing mediates the correlation between team-focused TL and team creativity. The research implies that team leaders may inspire team members to utilize their individual skills and shared team knowledge to generate innovative products and projects (Phillips et al., 2020). In general, an organization's degree of innovative climate mediates the relationship between TL and TP (Phillips et al., 2020).

Based on the above empirical studies on the mechanism of TL components on the intermediate outcomes of TP, a theoretical framework of TL and TP can be proposed as follow. See Figure 1.
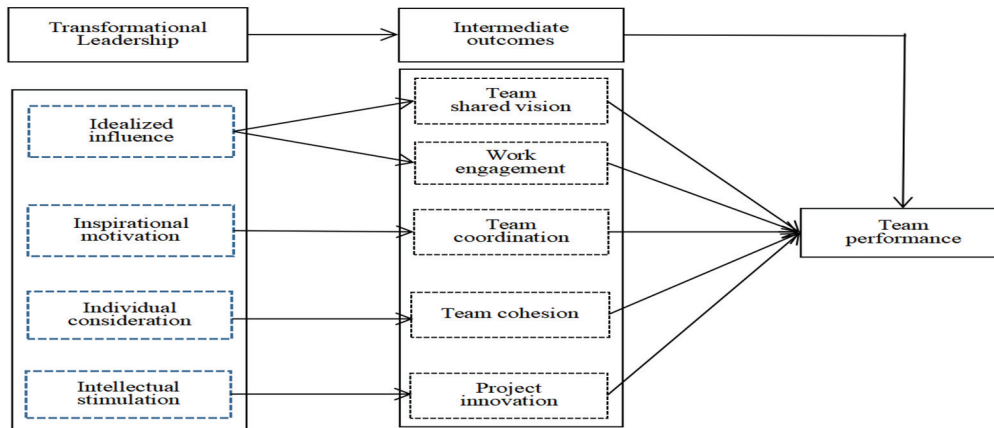
Figure 1: Theoretical framework of TL and TP

Research gap and rationale for further study

From the above literature review, it can be seen that there is scant research on the intervention of TL in the context of business migration. The author searched the literature websites including Google scholar, Mendeley, Scopus, Web of Science using the combinations of keyword 'TL, TP, business migration, transition, work outcome'. It can be found that, in recent ten years, there are scattered studies on TL and TP for migrant workers in industries like manufacturing (Phungsoonthorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2019), business and health administration (Selcer et al., 2012), construction (Vignoli et al., 2021), schooling (Sharma & Jain, 2022), SME service in emerging countries (Afriyie et al., 2019), planetary governance system (Caro, 2022). However, there are no studies on education service or education business migration. Given the prevailing problems stated in the research background, it is necessary to conduct studies to investigate how TL influences TP in the education service industry. And, this study may fill the research gap in practice and provide practical implications for the education service industry in the business migration context.

Research questions

The research questions of this study can be summarized as follow according to the TP problems of AI-Lab stated in the research background, as well as the research gap found in the literature review:

Question 1: what are the relationships between the TL components and the intermediate outcomes (e.g., team vision, work engagement) of TP for AI-Lab?

Question 2: what are the intervention measures based on the TL behaviors to cope with the TP problems of AI-Lab?

Intervention on the project team of AI-Lab

Accordingly, AI-Lab leaders should implement TL behaviors to enhance TP. The transformational behavioral approaches can be summarized in Table 3. Specific illustrations will be entailed following the table.

Table 3: Transformational behavioral approaches adopted by AI-Lab leaders

Idealized Influence/Charisma	Inspirational Motivation
- Build up shared vision and articulate planning in phases to enhance work engagement; - Self-evaluate TL behaviors with Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) to set a role model.	- Inspire subordinates to adopt a cooperative conflict management approach to strengthen team coordination.
Individual Consideration	**Intellectual Stimulation**
- Set coordinators to avoid conflict of individual differences and enhance team cohesion; - Respect individual differences and break top-down managerial hierarchy using suggestion-box, anonymous questionnaire, feedback channel, etc.	- Conduct individual skill development coaching and team knowledge sharing such as focus groups to encourage creativity and project innovation.

Idealized influence/Charisma

The managers should build up specific goals & vision, and articulate the planning in phases. DEG's development vision is *Making Education Better with Love and Technology* (https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Bp1zaXiOiS_-3CedSjFdsg. Retrieved Dec 23, 2022). The AI-Lab should follow DEG's existing strategy-transfer direction and its positioning of the target market in China. This will allow formulating a clear and controllable departmental development vision. Following this, the organizational structure of the department can be adapted to the shared development goals of the department and its employees. Meanwhile, the timeline for the goals' achievement needs to be formulated.

Therefore, the AI-Lab should implement DEG's development vision and educational philosophy, and its departmental vision is as follow:

> User-oriented, always think and solve problems from the user's perspective, continue to create value for users;

> Create an open, transparent, and tolerant atmosphere within the department so that every team member can achieve a better self;

> Let team members work with a sense of accomplishment and achieve continuous growth.

In addition, the AI-Lab leaders should seek to set a clear timeline for the achievement of the transformation goals. They need to establish specific developmental goals and articulate planning in phases to achieve higher TP.

Self-evaluate TL behaviors with MLQ-5X to set a role model

Supervisors need to carry out self-evaluations with the MLQ-5X and collect feedback from subordinates every two months to consistently reflect on their TL behaviors. This allows for scrutinizing whether they can improve their TL behaviors via daily management, such as team briefing, project planning, project execution, project monitoring, etc.. The self-evaluation will be conducted according to the six-step procedures illustrated by Wiyono et al. (2020) in the literature review. The results of each stage will be recorded and reviewed to check the development of values generated. With this constantly improved idealized influence, leaders can set a role model to employees, arouse their work motivation, strengthen teamwork effectiveness and further enhance the TP of the AI-Lab.

Inspirational motivation

During daily project migration, project operations and decision makings with regard to project innovation, AI-Lab leaders should inspire subordinates to adopt a cooperative conflict management approach based on agreement-seeking and competence-based trust. AI-Lab leaders ought to transmit their inspiration to employees and consequently lead to stronger teamwork coordination and work engagement. For example, as to what kind of projects should be migrated to China, and what is the priority of project migration (i.e., K-12 education, Internet+ education, STEM training, new media educational applications), there might be different opinions or expectations among the management team. AI-Lab leaders can inspire team members to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and potential threats (i.e., SWOT in abbreviations) of each phase of the project based on the department's shared vision. In this way, team coordination and work engagement can be effectively enhanced. On the occasion that the agreement has been reached, the AI-Lab leaders need to inspire all team members to follow their decision and motivate them to achieve the shared vision.

Individual consideration

AI-Lab leaders must assign several team leaders as <u>coordinators</u> when delivering complicated tasks across teams. Team leaders will make daily operational decisions in the process of project migration so that individuals' opinions and feedback can be paid attention to, and two-way communication can be encouraged. Coordinators can act as the moderator between management and employees, and recognize team members' individual needs and desires for growth, which will add to further enhancing team cohesion.

Meanwhile, AI-Lab coordinators and transformational leaders could purposely delegate some ad hoc tasks as a means of developing team members' competencies or additional support for team collaboration. With individual consideration, AI-Lab coordinators and transformational leaders spend time coaching and supporting individuals to grow and teams to collaborate, treating individuals as valuable parts of the team rather than just functional tools. The AI-Lab managers will assign several coordinators to mediate the conflicts during project migration and project execution.

For example, as for the new media platform's design style, AI-Lab coordinators and transformational leaders should consider the project design team members' profession, individual preferences, generation gaps, as well as individual suggestions from other teams (e.g., project consultation team as they are more familiar with stakeholders' interests).

In addition, individual differences need to be respected, and the top-down managerial hierarchy should be abolished by establishing suggestion boxes, anonymous questionnaires, feedback email boxes, compliant channels and so on. This will be particularly useful since there are no feedback channels for AI-Lab team members during the project migration. In this way, AI-Lab coordinators and transformational leaders can explore team members' individual traits and provide appropriate care, support and coaching to facilitate their career development and team cohesion.

Intellectual stimulation

The literature review indicates that CEO's TL mediates project innovation performance through an innovative culture, organizational learning, and the new product development process (Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt, 2017). This contributes significantly to project innovation performance. Hence, it indicates that the AI-Lab leaders responsible for project innovation should develop their TL skills to foster innovation culture and organizational learning which in turn affects the team's project innovation performance. On the one hand, AI-Lab leaders need to create opportunities for team members to develop their occupational skills through individual coaching and team training workshops held periodically (e.g., half a month) to stimulate individuals' creativity. On the other hand, AI-Lab leaders should organize focus groups for team members to share their skills, experience, and knowledge to expand their knowledge and stimulate creative ideas. In this way, some intellectual and innovative ideas on project innovation can be stimulated, and the innovation culture within the department can be promoted. These kinds of TL behaviors result in the team's project innovation and boost higher TP consequently.

Measures to change and enhance leaders' leadership styles

Set a time-frame for leadership style changes

Based on the pressing need to organizational change due to AI-Lab's operational problems, a 'blueprint for change' that aims to transform leaders' leadership style can be called upon. In this way, leaders' leadership attitude and implementation behaviors can be visualized in a time-frame format (Bhattacharyya, 2006). Accordingly, the dimensions of TP in AI-Lab can be measured using a timely progress report (e.g., dual-week report) to scrutinize the effect of leadership style change.

Create a capacity for change

By its nature, TL is on promoting a change among employees, which can then drive change in the organization (Oreg & Berson, 2019). Creating a capacity for change at the initial phase is intelligent (Oreg & Berson, 2019). For example, AI-Lab can consider appointing a new divisional president to deliver new agendas, timetables, vision and peer-learning program at the initial change phase by conducting onsite workshops, producing written material for display, providing employees with statements of the leadership values change, and repeating such paradigms in different occasions.

In this approach, leaders build an organizational atmosphere that supports curiosity, team coordination and share of original ideas to boost innovation (Park & Kim, 2018). Hence, the chance of successful implementation of leadership style change can be increased (Berraies & El Abidine, 2019).

Middle management to undertake leadership style changes

Despite the role in directing the development vision and organizational change strategy, top-management is remote from front-line employees and therefore, cannot interact directly with

them frequently. In view of this limitation, the communication of major decisions to front-line employees hinges to a large extent on middle managers, who are key in connecting front-line employees and top management, and bridging the hierarchical perception gap (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Therefore, apart from assigning coordinators between employees and management to reconcile the business transition challenges, the middle management (i.e., supervisors) needs to take charge of transforming the leadership style.

Bottom-up feedback and anonymous social media to initiate the change

Top-down communication is generally privileged in most organizations, whilst bottom-up communication is important to collect employee feedback and give an opportunity to them to influence the change process - particularly in the initiation stage, during which such feedback helps break the resistance to change (Appelbaum et al., 2015; Kim & Scott, 2019).

Moreover, to cope with organizational changes, it is recommended to use anonymous social media for communicating information and seeking support, since a workplace freedom of speech is perceived trustworthiness and linked to employee work engagement (Kim & Scott, 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reviewed the theory of TL, then conducted a synthesized literature review on how the 4I's (e.g., idealized influence) of TL influence the different aspects of an education project team. Furthermore, it proposed exclusive intervention measures to the team according to the empirical evidence regarding the relationships between the components of TL and TP. The strength of this study is that it proposed an original theoretical framework based on the TL theory and relevant literature to direct the study and link the practical issues with a theoretical foundation. It is implicated that through the intervention of TL behaviors, the overall TP of AI-Lab can be promoted during the drastic migration of its education business.

There are limitations to this study. For example, the proposed intervention for AI-Lab is at the hypothetical level. Therefore, the case study on implemented intervention will be conducted in future; and the intervention outcomes will be evaluated and published. In addition, future research might focus on refined interventions in different project phases of the department to accommodate the variations of the team, and follow the intervention effects longitudinally. In this way, the study outcome could pass the 'test of time' and implicate a wider generalizability to the education service industry in today's changing business environment.

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