

# Critical Analysis of School Leadership Literature: *Transformational Leadership and Its Impact on Schools in the Context of South Korean Democracy*

Reflection Piece

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**Keywords:** transformational leadership,; professional learning network (PLN); the Republic of Korea, ecological system

## Abstract

*This reflection piece provides an account of transformational leadership within education settings in the context of the current state of the democratic system in the Republic of Korea. It demonstrates the feasibility of constructivism applied to the notion of transformational school leadership. Considering diverse leadership patterns responding to contextual situations, the main objective of the article is 1) a critical analysis of the current leadership approaches focusing on transformational school leadership and 2) the prospect of ideal types of leadership patterns in relation to a democratic system. To redefine insights into improved transformational leadership in education settings, the premise that cognitive structure and behaviour are the results of the interaction between the self and the environment are applied in connection with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development. Overall, the paper sheds further light on the causal nexus between transformational school leadership and a democratic society.*



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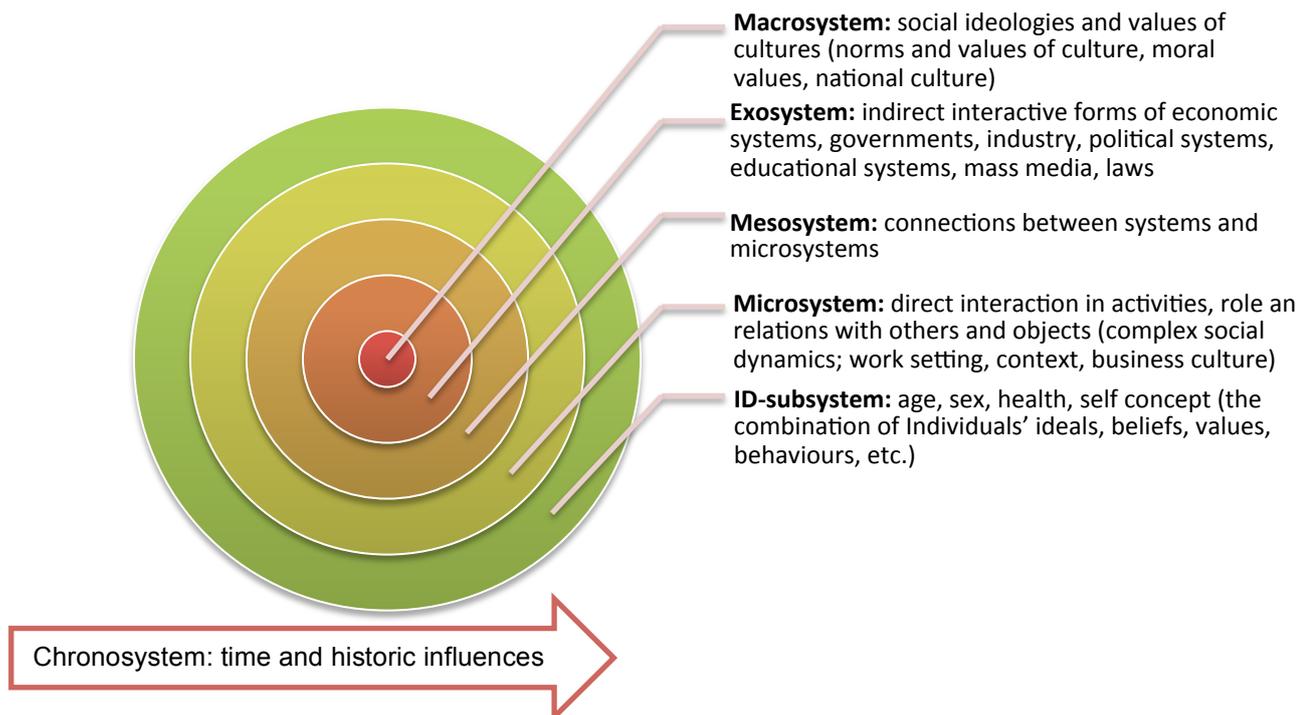
## Introduction

Leadership concepts and principles have drawn public attention to exemplary leaders after the Great Depression (1930s) and World War II (1929~1945). Leadership theories relating to multidisciplinary approaches began to flourish as well. The leadership model is still being transformed in various ways in accordance with the organisational values and practices in society (Cristina, 2012). Consequently, the leadership paradigm is a derivative of sociocultural, historical and political context. Based on the diverse influences regarding leadership approaches, theories have been transformed from traits, behaviour, use of power, and processes of influence (Cristina, 2012). The paper is organized as follows: initially an outline of the concept of leadership and the application of leadership theory to practice in accordance with a cognitive psychology approach is presented. This is followed by a discussion on the current state of democracy in the Republic of Korea and the history of a rising democracies network. The general explanation of transformational leadership and the transformational school leadership are presented in the subsequent sections. The next part provides a discussion of possible applications of transformational school leadership in a unique democratic context like the Republic of Korea. This is followed by an application of transformational leadership to the education field, using a professional learning network (PLN). Insights derived from the application of transformational leadership in a Korean context are included in the concluding section.

## Applying Theory to Leadership Practice

Leaders should be aware of 1) the specific period and context where the group of followers exist and 2) the process of acquiring knowledge within the followers' context and time, 3) the way of interpreting their surroundings by using preconceived notions, and 4) the concept of leadership which is regarded as relationships such as reciprocal, inspirational, interdependent, and interpersonal. According to a cognitive psychology approach [Figure 1], an individual constructs cognitive structures and defines their patterns of behaviours in accordance with the perceived interactions between the self and the environment (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Hodson & Hodson, 1998; Jaramillo, 1996; Lewin 1951). The pattern of thought and behaviour referred to as the Schema or cognitive representations of the world are preconceived notions to interpret their surroundings and control their behaviours. In other words, cognitive structures and behaviours are redefined through constant interaction with their specific situations (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Through their own empirical interpretation, individuals react differently to tensions depending on how they understand and perceive situational influences on their own terms. Simply, knowledge is constructed from experience, and this learning helps individuals construct internal representations through a constructive process.

The internal representations are indirectly and directly related to real life situations such as national culture and business culture and simultaneously produce certain patterns of behaviours. In short, this cognitive representation of their world called schema is a pattern of thought and behaviour based on preconceived notions for interpreting their surroundings and controlling their behaviours, which lead to a combined self-concept (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).



[Figure 1] Cognitive Science Approach adapted from Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development (Lichtenberger, 2012)

In this ecological system (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), an individual's internal psychological field is conceived in perceived environments, which means that external environments and internal awareness are mutually interdependent (Van Vugt, M., 2006). Furthermore, knowledge is reconstructed in accordance with the era in which they live (Niesche, 2011), which is referred to as Chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). In detail, Foucault claims that discourse within the domain of knowledge of philosophy, medical science and crime is not defined as an unchangeable proposition, but the discourse can be accepted as 'truths' in a certain era due to coincidental external conditions (Niesche, 2011). To infuse leadership performance and understand leadership competencies with high purpose, it is vitally important to focus on the behaviour of the individuals in accordance with their environments and their era.

In this context, leaders' specific actions that influence their followers' rational thinking and synchronization lead to better values, beliefs and ideals with an improved self-conception by understanding their environments and their era. Furthermore, followers can have a chance to gain a strong sense of trust, personal confidence, job satisfaction, self-identification and fairness. In addition, it is also an indicator of the success levels of transformational leaders. Overall, this paper focuses mainly on transformational leadership relating to environmental theory and cognitive leadership theory, regarded as implicit leadership theory (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).

## Modern Democracy in the Republic of Korea

The June Democratic Movement of 1987, followed by the Gwangju Democratic Movement transformed Korean political communities and led to democratization (Ch'oe, 2006; Ju, 2017). However, political circles have repeatedly dominated the process of enacting a political system without consideration for civil society; moreover, the institutionalized political process has caused protests and demonstrations to appear again and again (Ch'oe, 2006; Ju, 2017). From 1987 onwards, numerous fundamental changes to the socio-political environment have been made through the processes of reform, creating a vastly different system. Non-governmental organizations have played a key role in the democratization of Korea. Moreover, a civil society as a leading influencer also played a significant role in the development of the political community (Ju, 2017). The public fought for their fundamental human rights during the era of democratization, including the democratization of education, the expansion of fundamental labour rights, and autonomous rights for women aimed at reforming a male-dominated culture and discriminatory system (Kim, 2008). As mentioned above, procedural democracy recovered due to the June Democratic Movement of 1987, however, the authoritarian government could not be stopped. The June Movement of 1987 was twisted into a modified passive democratic movement.

In ChoiGate in 2017, former president Park Guen Hye and her associate Choi Soon-Sil privatized the democratic society by using the system for their own purposes (Gang, 2017). However, a candlelight civil revolution of approximately 17 million pushed through the bottleneck phenomenon of systemic political circles to cause the impeachment of Park (Gang, 2017). The impeachment of the previous president and her regime by the power of the citizens could be interpreted as the candlelight civil revolution of 2017 which was politically constructed and completed the June Movement of 1987. Through the candlelight civil revolution of 2017, public sentiment was not content with only being the power of the revolution itself; it wanted more than regime change and it was also beyond the institutionalisation of South Korea's democracy. Namely, the movement became the starting point to create the ideal democratisation beyond the institutionalisation of electoral system. After the candlelight civil revolution of 2017, diverse social activities became the major channel or method of social participation by consistently increasing the direct actions, including new forms of the assembly and demonstration until recently (Ju, 2017). In addition, the involvement of participatory citizens' spur on a dramatic and distinct growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in comparison to the period of 1980-1990 (Ju, 2017). This phenomenon became a catalyst for the change of knowledge paradigms in the information age in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In terms of a theoretical approach in an internal mechanism of collective intelligence in Korean society, experts generally produce knowledge in the past; however, it is important to pay attention to the fact that ordinary citizens collectively generate and share knowledge. It is clear that the types of collective intelligence, the mechanism for the analysis of the current affairs, and the knowledge paradigms have the biggest impact on quantitative and qualitative change. Ultimately, all the elements of an individual are subject to their ideals and beliefs, and these stem from the system in which they live.

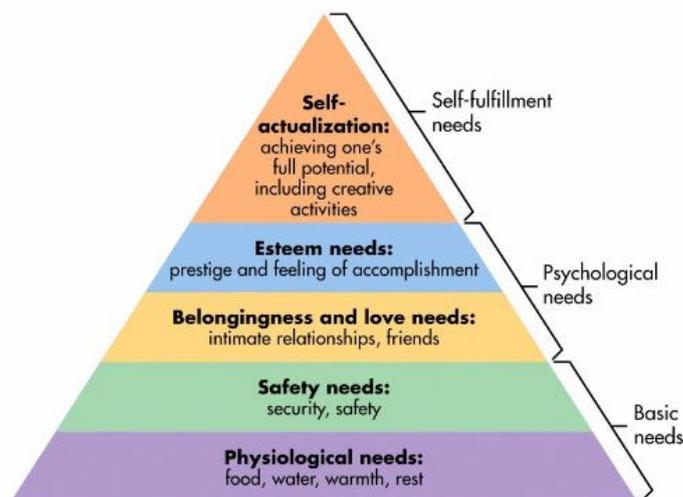
Democracy in the Republic of Korea in 2017 still faces a divide between democratic ideals and realisations. The environments and factors that individuals belong to are subject to their ideals and beliefs, and these stem from the system in which they live. Based on individual ideals and beliefs, there are two major conceptions of democracy: one is representative democracy and another is direct democracy (Kim, 2008). The former is defined

as individuals making efforts to improve democracy systems by emphasizing democratic idealization and its realization. The latter is regarded as a form of passive democracy called direct democracy, where citizens are satisfied with bureaucratic democracy by considering the system as democratic institutions and procedures under the rule of law. Thus, the Republic of Korea has two forms and if there is a severe gap between their ideals as well as reality, and the system of the place where they belong collapses. In other words, both the principles and values that bind the community eventually affect our beliefs consciously and/or unconsciously, no matter which group they belong to.

Principles and values will be interpreted according to their beliefs. Individuals as a part of their community would try to exercise their rights and realise their dignity through these rights. All of these processes must be realised through freedom as well as equality of opportunity, and the leader of a democratic society must help each individual to have a worthwhile life so that they can achieve their common cause within a complete democratic society. School seems to be a complex system in which parents, staff, teachers, students, government, community and other relevant stakeholders are intertwined with each other; however, their ideals and beliefs eventually become part of the system of society which is based on democracy in the end.

### Transformational Leadership

Toward the attainment of a collective goal, the roles of both leaders and managers are critical. Leadership is highly related to the emotional content (Zaleznik, 1997; Hoerr, 2005) because leaders have a strong influence on followers and motivate them in order for them to produce beyond expected outcomes (Zaleznik, 1997); however, managerial leadership is not concerned with promoting emotional factors such as creativity, imagination and even ethical behaviour as long as they maintain activities effectively (Zaleznik, 1997). Although the activities of leading and managing are explicitly distinct, both dimensions of organisational activity should coexist (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). According to ‘a polarisation of leadership approach’ (Le Tellier, 2006), a leader can make the most of an opportunity to demonstrate leadership based on a highly effective level of management, rather than ‘an androgynous approach’ (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). The synthesisation between management and leadership implies the effective management by considering higher level of human needs (Figure 2) (Figure 3) Leadership (Allix, 2000; Cristina, 2012; McLeod, 2007; Schneider & Schröder, 2012).



[Figure 2] Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2007)



[Figure 3] Psychological Perspectives on Leadership (Allix, 2000; Cristina, 2012; Schneider & Schröder, 2012) adapted from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2007)

In addition, Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) contend that transformational leadership is a more efficient model than transactional leadership. A transactional leader clarifies the outcome's achievement by stimulating followers' motivation (Lynch, 2012; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Oterkiil, & Ertesvåg, 2014). For better results, followers are rewarded for recognition and compensation for their hard work (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Simola, Barling, & Turner, 2012). On the other hand, transformational leadership is regarded as having both aspects: micro- and macro-level perspectives (Schneider & Schröder, 2012). The former perspective refers to 'small-scale interaction' among groups. The leaders understand ways to stimulate followers' motivation and at the same time can mediate the conflicts of group dynamics; the latter perspective is associated with 'large-scale social processes'. Leaders use power with external (funding, societal resources) and internal (manpower) resources to reorganise the organisational structures. Accordingly, both leadership approaches cannot be replaced by one another; however, they have positive effects on mutual supplementation (Lynch, 2012; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty 2005).

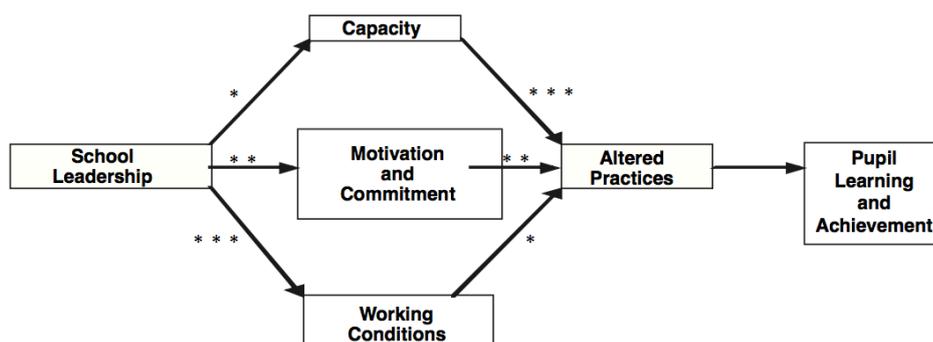
The follower performance outcomes are in conjunction with an indicator of success in transformational leadership: 1) faith, 2) self-confidence, 3) job satisfaction, 4) self-definition, 5) sense of belonging, 6) fairness. These strategic interactions in terms of leader-follower relationships which affect followers' behaviours are commonly emphasised in research (Lynch, 2012; Van Vugt, M., 2006). In the end, these processes of leadership activities have an influence on the followers' social activities within workplaces where individuals coordinate their tasks to attain mutual goals (Van Vugt, M., 2006).

According to empirical research on a process of transformational and instructional leadership (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016), successful principals generate favourable cultures that encourage both teachers and students to engage in active participation, which end up raising the level of teachers' effectiveness and students' learning achievement. Moreover, they highlight the effectiveness of the combination of transformational and instructional leadership model (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016; Nedelcu, 2013; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Both are associated with 'trust' in demonstrating leadership (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016), which enhance organisational effectiveness (Yu & Lee, 2012).

## Transformational School Leadership

In school environments, leadership performance correlates with teachers, staff, students, their parents and other stakeholders (Lynch, 2012; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). In terms of principals' leadership, they generally recognise themselves as leaders and play a major role as educationalists, school culture creators, mediators and managers (Jeon, 2011; Ju & Kim, 2015). In practice, they have experienced leadership dilemmas: 1) 'discordance between overall school structure and personal beliefs and values', 2) 'conflicts between old formalities and new challenges', 3) 'expansion of school autonomy versus increases in accountability for work overload outcomes', 4) 'contradiction between administrative methods and democratic decision-making processes' (Ju & Kim, 2015).

The ideal transformational school leadership is that school stakeholders value their leaders' inputs, and the interest groups end up having a sense of responsibility to successfully lead their school using their own capabilities (Lynch, 2012; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). According to a qualitative case study on the characteristics of successful principal leadership (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2008), the principals accepted as successful leaders have a sense of patience, morality and consideration for others, and carry forward a schema with a firm and steady view, corresponding to the specific characteristics of their school (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). The most successful school leaders generate positive effects for teachers' work performance, students' learning performance and school climate (Figure 4). In accordance with the level of principal leadership competencies, there is the close correlation with educational outcomes (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2008; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Park, 2012; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). In addition, there is a substantial positive organisational value (Park & Kwon, 2011; Park & Lee, 2006; Yu & Lee, 2012) linking organisational commitment and teachers' followership (Ahn & Lee, 2002; Hong, 2015; Sung, 2008), teachers' sense of efficacy and job satisfaction (Kim & Jung, 2002; Jun, 2011; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008) as well as student performance (Sun & Leithwood, 2012; Quin, Deris, Bischoff & Johnson, 2015).



[Figure 4] The effects of school leadership (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008)

\*= weak influence; \*\*=moderate influence; \*\*\*= strong influence

Transformational leaders believe in producing successful results beyond expectations (Bass, 1985) through the formation of mutual relationships by providing empowerment to followers (Burns, 1978). In detail, the leadership model is comprised of the four elements, called 4Is (Bass, 1985): 1) 'individual consideration', 2) 'intellectual stimulation', 3) 'inspirational motivation', and 4) 'idealised influence'. Leithwood (2008) extended Bass's theory into the

transformational school leadership model. First, leaders should pay attention to all school personnel individually, which leads to lowering teachers' intention to quit and increases their individual performance and satisfaction. Second, Leaders encourage teachers to address old problems in a new way. However, constructing a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for sharing ideas among teachers is a more effective way of stimulating intellect by supporting reflective discourse through empowerment and collective responsibility (Sung, 2008; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Third, leaders need to effectively communicate with teachers and students about expectations and collective goals on a regular basis. Lastly, leaders can be followers' role models in order to demonstrate an example of ideal traits.

### **Transformational School Leadership in a Democratic Society**

In this piece, an argument being made is that the principles of transformational leadership could inform the challenges faced by the education sector in the unique democratic society of the Republic of Korea. This argument is developed initially through an explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of transformational leadership.

Historically, various political systems have appeared from Ancient tribal traditions; furthermore, the perspectives of traditional leadership originated from a historical and conventional correspondence to power and authority (Allix, 2000). Today, most citizens exert sovereignty power under the system of democracy and take it for granted. The concept of democracy is knowing individual's rights and obligations, as well as exercising his/her rights and duties. Namely, it is the system in which each citizen as a sovereign establishes and maintains the national system. On the premise of participants living in a democratic society, they can wield strong influence over the transformational leadership within the organization as well. In the same vein, Winston Churchill (1874-1965) mentioned that "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others", because of the dispersion and limitation of power in accordance with divided principles into the legislative, the judiciary, and the administrative branches. In order to adapt in transformational leadership, the leaders' charisma would have serious consequences of microscopic fascism, which is the transformational leadership dilemma. Individuals in democratic societies feel uncomfortable under others' control even if they are within the organisation (Hoerr, 2005).

In addition, Michel Paul Foucault (1995) mentions in his book "Discipline and Punish" that exercising coercive power would cause individuals to put up a resistance. From a vantage point of the transformational leadership dilemma, even if the charisma gained from followers is a vital factor, it requires maintaining a balance. Specifically, excessive charisma leads to overvaluation of leaders' own ability/skill, as well as some followers relying highly on their leaders to satisfy dependency need (Clements & Washbush, 1999; Northouse, 2012). Therefore, Procrustean bed, which is a uniformed scheme with arbitrary rules, should be avoided. Specifically, the leaders need to be aware of growing diversity in the workplace because the leadership styles could be naturally accepted in the context of autocracy reflecting the specific sociocultural of the age, which implies a close nexus between social causation and leadership like Foucault/s (1995) ideas. It is also vitally important that followers of transformational leadership recognise that leadership cannot be successful with participants who do not voluntarily participate in their work. Thus, transformational leaders in the context of a democratic society are expected to value followers and regard them as ends rather than means. Also, subordinate group members who live in democratic societies expect guaranteed personal freedoms, human dignity and equality, in addition they are aware of respecting others' rights. Within this organisational context, it is true that there is an insufficient understanding in research in terms of how the process and the outcome of the leader behaviours affect the formation of the follower's perception and behaviours (Currie &

Lockett, 2007). Therefore, the conceptual weaknesses need to be addressed in accordance with dynamic social context, given the nature of charismatic and transformational leadership. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes who published *Leviathan* (2006) believes that the world can be in a chaotic state without a government, which implies the need for leaders. Evidently, leaders are essential for the community in light of his notion. As mentioned above, democracy grants liberty and equality of citizens, which is closely associated with the protection of fundamental human rights and justice. In a democratic community, the definition of justice is providing equal opportunities, procedures and distribution. In addition, John Rawls (1975) states in his book "Justice as Fairness" that justice can be established only when socially disadvantaged individuals benefit more in comparison with others. In order to adapt this principle for transformational leadership, reciprocal communication is essential with followers; moreover, leaders should ask themselves whether they are right and made a right decision. Without any unpleasantness, leaders can ask for follower's help to address problem solving and come up with new ideas. Consequently, followers recognise that their efforts are acknowledged leading to lower intention to quit as well. Nonetheless, such an effective democratic procedure can be conflicted which are conditions *sine qua non* of democracy (Schattschneider, 1975). This reflection piece contends that there is merit in viewing core features of transformational leadership and see its applicability in Korean education system, notwithstanding its unique history of democracy.

### **Applying transformational leadership to the Education Field**

Traditionally the dominant role of past leaders was that of a controlling role. Specifically, it was generally thought that the leader was in charge of all aspects of the school, including overall school activities, teacher management, and curriculum analysis (Lynch, 2012). In this past context, followers were strictly under leaders' instructions and regulations, which resulted in followers not being free to expand their expertise by regulation. This is particularly true in regions of East Asia typically known for its adherence to hierarchical structures borne out of its affinity with Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC).

However, transformational leadership focuses on encouraging staff to freely expand their expertise based on proper authorization through listening and monitoring. To take an example of this, the principal focuses on addressing education policy and strategic issues by engaging with the educational community rather than by pursuing a short-term goal. Therefore, the community places shared principles, beliefs, and values in the community (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).

According to Bass and Riggio (2006), six factors were proposed to achieve effective transformational leadership (Lynch, 2012): 1) Make clear why change is necessary; 2) Establish a firm vision and be dedicated to it; 3) Focus on long-term goals; 4) Encourage members to overcome their concerns for the organization's high-level goals; 5) Take responsibility for your life with an enterprising attitude; and 6) Re-state the vision of the organization to facilitate acceptance. To realize these factors, it is more important to create a culture of trust that will enable the objectives of the organization to be achieved. The consciousness of having the right to make decisions in their work contributes greatly to motivation. Given all these factors, applying a professional learning network (PLN) is necessary in order to connect teachers to other individuals within their schools and/or even worldwide by providing support, advice, and feedback as well as sharing ideas, resources collaboration and learning online (Fullan, 2003; Trust, 2012; Trust, Krutka, & Carpenter, 2016). PLN is one of the greatest ways for both leaders and followers to structure and execute ideas in order to perform better. To support this idea, if the leader's authority is based on the leader's trust in his / her followers rather than the leader's own directive ability, the followers

can perform activities more freely. Research has shown that servant leadership, which emphasizes the interests of employees rather than the interests of the leaders themselves and emphasizes the action of service, has a high degree of cooperation for the common goals of followers. Having a firm opinion that one's work is respectful and self-determining is associated with the recognition of empowerment (Bono & Judge, 2003).

As a result, the social identity in the group is searched, self-efficacy is promoted, and eventually the organizational value is connected with the value of the follower. Based on the principles, beliefs, and values of the community, if leaders respect the interests of their followers, and motivate them by granting their vision, values, and empowerment, they will naturally devote themselves to organizational purposes, which is also expected from the PLN activities. Through PLN activities, with a sense of unity, followers can accomplish a given task by continually connecting their own goals with their shared goals. The followers draw many results through PLN, encouraging each other with various techniques. Such autonomy must be allowed for personal growth and work efficiency. Through these activities, followers can improve their sense of responsibility and performance. A leader can be an analytical tool that helps monitor the performance of an organization as a whole and then determine what needs to be corrected (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Through PLN, moreover, there is a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and follower engagement (Henriques, 2010; Trust, 2012; Trust, Krutka, & Carpenter, 2016). This reflection piece further argues that implementing PLNs, particularly in the context of the Republic of Korea could yield promising results.

In terms of the way of forming knowledge, learning is based on existing experience and knowledge and actively constructs new knowledge. This concept is still the most widely used theory of learning and knowledge construction. Constructivism is a theory that shows how we perceive and understand the world around us. Knowledge formation is a result of the process of establishing new perceptions by matching the newly received information with the existing beliefs, concepts, and notions (Duke, Harper, & Johnston, 2013). Furthermore, we are living in the information age, and information sharing in a constantly changing society is becoming important. Stated simply, connectivism is a social learning network. Stephen Downes stated it as (Duke, Harper, & Johnston, 2013):

*“ ... the thesis that knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore that learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse those networks” (Downes, 2007). Connectivism is characterized as a reflection of our society that is changing rapidly. Society is more complex, connected socially, global, and mediated by increasing advancements in technology. It is the orchestration of a complex disarray of ideas, networked to form specific information sets. Ways of knowing are derived from a diversity of opinions. The individual does not have control; rather it is a collaboration of current ideas as seen from a present reality.”*

## **Conclusion**

Korean society is in a state of chaos, and has faced challenges of realising democracy and re-establishing the definition of justice (Moon, 2015). In a young democratic society, school personnel fight for justice against leaders. In light of the concept of democracy (Hill Jr, 2016), the transformational leadership model is appropriate as it respects personal integrity rights by guaranteeing empowerment and shared visions. Sharing collective aims and challenging the process together exert a positive impact on students' learning achievements (Quin, Deris, Bischoff & Johnson, 2015). On the premise of living in democratic society a well-effective combination and balance between autonomy and regulation can contribute to the common

good. It is vitally essential to establish equitable growth of both leaders and followers. The role of the principal mainly is an affirmer, re-enforcer and supporter rather than just a planner, supervisor and controller (Lynch, 2012). These features, this paper argues, will lead to a well and closely united community. Just as there is no meaningful teaching and learning without the consideration of cultural identity, ethics, self-confidence, freedom and authority, caring for each individual and commitment, so too is there no leadership practice (Freire, 1998).

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