

# Leadership Development of Female Managers in Universities Through the Lens of Transformational Leadership Theory

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## Abstract

Within the unique context of higher education, with its complex governance, entrenched hierarchies, and persistent gendered expectations, this study examines the leadership development of female managers through the lens of Transformational Leadership Theory. Drawing on conceptual analysis of existing research on gender and academic leadership, it explores how women in academia mobilize collective vision and drive innovation while navigating traditional organizational structures. The analysis argues that cultivating transformational leadership among female academics is fundamentally shaped by two interrelated factors: organizational culture, which enables or constrains leadership behaviors, and access to strategic platforms for influence, which determines whether women can exercise leadership beyond formal positional authority. Consequently, leadership development programs grounded in this theory, such as vision-building workshops and mentoring for strategic influence, are essential to enhance women's capacity to lead institutional change. Ultimately, intentionally fostering transformational leadership among female managers constitutes a strategic imperative for universities seeking to enhance organizational adaptability and achieve sustainable transformation.

**Keywords:** Female leadership; Leadership development; Higher education management; Transformational leadership theory

## Introduction

While women's participation in higher education as students and academics has grown significantly, their representation in senior leadership roles remains disproportionately low, constituting a persistent "glass ceiling." This underrepresentation undermines equity and institutional effectiveness, as diverse leadership fosters innovation and better governance (Ayenalem & Taye, 2025; Sairam & Madhavi, 2025). Concurrently, universities face intensified pressures requiring leadership capable of inspiring stakeholders and navigating change, making traditional top-down models inadequate. Transformational leadership theory, with its focus on vision, inspiration, and engagement, has thus emerged as a critical framework for the contemporary academic environment.

This paper argues that transformational leadership theory provides a powerful lens not only for understanding effective university leadership but also for specifically examining and facilitating the development of female managers. It addresses how the attributes of transformational leadership align with the strengths and challenges of female leaders, how development programs can be designed through this lens, and what organizational conditions are necessary for their growth. Through a synthesis of literature, the paper

contends that a deliberate focus on transformational leadership development offers a strategic pathway to dismantle barriers, harness women's potential, and strengthen institutional leadership capacity.

This review synthesizes existing scholarly work across three interconnected domains: the status of women in academic leadership, the core tenets of Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), and the convergence of gender and leadership styles within higher education. It establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation for examining female leadership development through the lens of TLT.

A substantial body of literature documents the persistent underrepresentation of women in senior university management globally, despite their increased presence in student and junior academic ranks (O'Connor, 2015). This disparity is often conceptualized through metaphors like the "leaky pipeline," where women exit the academic career path at higher rates before reaching senior levels, and the "glass ceiling," an invisible barrier to advancement into top positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The causes are multifaceted and systemic. Research identifies a combination of factors including: unconscious bias in hiring and promotion committees (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012); a disproportionate burden of informal service and pastoral care, often uncredited in formal career assessments (Guarino & Borden, 2017); a lack of access to powerful informal networks and sponsorship crucial for career progression (Ibarra et al., 2013); and gendered expectations that penalize women for exhibiting stereotypically "masculine" leadership behaviors such as assertiveness, while also devaluing stereotypically "feminine" communal styles (Eagly et al., 2003). This creates a "double bind" where women's leadership is perpetually scrutinized and found wanting against conflicting norms. The consequences extend beyond individual equity; numerous studies link gender-diverse leadership to enhanced organizational creativity, more robust governance, and improved financial and academic performance (Dezsö & Ross, 2012), suggesting that the underutilization of female talent represents a significant strategic loss for universities.

Transformational Leadership Theory, advanced by Burns (1978) and operationalized by (Bass, 1985), has become one of the most influential paradigms in leadership studies. It posits that effective leaders transform followers by appealing to their higher ideals and values, motivating them to exceed self-interest for the sake of the organization. (Bass & Riggio, 2006) delineate four key components (the "Four I's"):

**Idealized Influence (Charisma):** Leaders act as ethical role models, earning trust and admiration.

**Inspirational Motivation:** Leaders articulate a compelling vision, using symbolism and emotion to foster team spirit.

**Intellectual Stimulation:** Leaders challenge assumptions, encourage creativity, and solicit novel approaches.

**Individualized Consideration:** Leaders act as mentors, attending to individual followers' needs for growth.

TLT is particularly salient in the context of higher education. Universities are professional bureaucracies populated by knowledge workers (academics) who value autonomy and are motivated by intellectual recognition and purpose. Leading such an organization requires influence over authority, persuasion over command. Transformational leadership, with its emphasis on shared vision, intellectual engagement, and personal development, aligns closely with academic values and the collaborative, consensus driven nature of university governance (Bryman, 2007). It is seen as an antidote to rigid, top-down management, offering a style suited to navigating the complex, change-intensive modern academic environment.

## The Intersection: Gender, Leadership Style, and Transformational Leadership

A critical strand of research investigates whether and how leadership styles vary by gender. Meta-analyses by Eagly and colleagues provide robust evidence that, on average, women tend to adopt leadership styles that are more transformational and participative, and engage more in rewarding constructive behavior, compared to men. Specifically, women score slightly higher on facets of individualized consideration (mentoring, supportive behavior) and inspirational motivation. This alignment suggests that women may bring a natural propensity for behaviors central to transformational effectiveness.

Within academia specifically, studies suggest female leaders often employ more democratic, collaborative, and interpersonal approaches (Blackmore, 2014). They are frequently associated with building relational trust, fostering inclusive climates, and emphasizing teaching and student success. However, this literature also cautions against essentialism not all women lead this way and highlights the contextual challenges. The very transformational behaviors women may exhibit can be misconstrued: collaboration seen as indecisiveness, mentorship as a lack of strategic focus (Morley, 2013). Thus, while female academics may possess strengths congruent with TLT, organizational cultures and biases can prevent these strengths from being fully recognized or effectively leveraged for institutional impact.

While existing literature robustly addresses gender disparities in academia and the applicability of TLT separately, and while gender-leadership style correlations are well-established in generic management studies, there is a relative paucity of research that explicitly and systematically links Transformational Leadership Theory to the developmental pathways of female managers within the specific context of higher education. Most discussions remain either descriptive of barriers or prescriptive of generic leadership training. This paper seeks to fill this gap by constructing a coherent argument that positions TLT not just as a descriptive model of effective leadership, but as a targeted developmental framework for addressing the unique challenges and leveraging the potential strengths of women ascending to leadership roles in universities. It moves beyond identifying what the barriers are to proposing how a specific theoretical lens can inform the design of interventions to overcome them.

This analysis is anchored in Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), which serves not merely as a descriptive model but as a robust diagnostic and developmental framework. Its core utility lies in providing a structured lens to dissect the complex interplay between individual leadership behaviors and the constraining or enabling forces of the academic environment, specifically for women. While the four components—Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration—are well-established, their significance here is in their gendered enactment and contextual reception within universities.

The fundamental premise of this framework is that leadership development is a dialectical process situated within a specific organizational field. For female academics aspiring to or occupying managerial roles, the cultivation of transformational capabilities occurs not in a vacuum but within a “gendered organizational context.” This context is characterized by often-invisible architectures of power, implicit bias in evaluation, gendered division of labor (e.g., higher service loads), and informal networks that frequently exclude women. These elements act as systemic filters, mediating how a woman’s leadership behaviors are perceived, legitimized, and rewarded. For instance, a display of Idealized Influence by a woman may be scrutinized differently than by a male counterpart, where assertiveness can be misread as abrasiveness, diluting her moral authority. Similarly, Inspirational Motivation requires a platform and credibility that may be harder for women

to secure due to historical underrepresentation in senior roles (Alameeri et al., 2023; Hastie et al., 2023; Majbar, 2026).

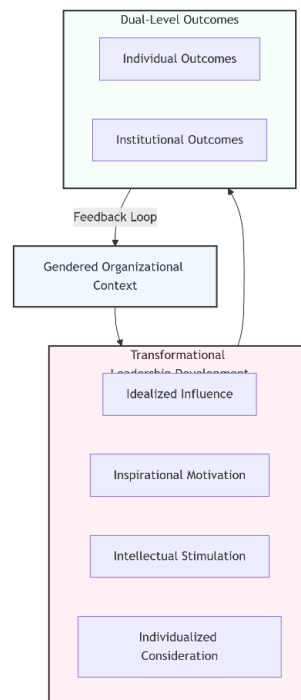
Consequently, the framework posits that effective development must be dual-pronged, targeting both the individual and the context. At the individual level, development programs must move beyond generic skills to strategically nurture the four dimensions in ways that account for gendered challenge (Novovic, 2023; Sinha et al., 2025; Zeng, 2025). This involves helping women build Idealized Influence through authentic authority and strategic networking; hone Inspirational Motivation by crafting inclusive, data-backed visions that command legitimacy; practice Intellectual Stimulation in climates that may be resistant to challenge from underrepresented voices; and leverage Individualized Consideration as a strategic asset for talent development without being pigeonholed into pastoral roles alone.

Simultaneously, and of equal importance, the framework demands attention to the organizational conditions that serve as the crucible for development. This involves actively dismantling the negative filters and constructing supportive infrastructures. Key levers include formal sponsorship programs that provide access to power (amplifying Inspirational Motivation), transparent and equitable promotion criteria (validating Idealized Influence), workload models that recognize and redistribute service equitably (freeing capacity for Intellectual Stimulation), and fostering a culture that values diverse leadership styles.

The intended outcome of this integrated approach is the creation of a virtuous cycle. Successful development leads to Enhanced Individual Outcomes for women, such as stronger leadership identity, efficacy, and career advancement. It also generates Positive Institutional Outcomes, including more innovative and inclusive departmental climates, better team performance, and more sustainable change initiatives. These successful outcomes, in turn, provide empirical evidence and lived examples necessary to challenge and gradually transform the very organizational context that initially posed barriers. The feedback loop is critical: each successful female transformational leader helps normalize women's authority, reshape biased perceptions, and expand the pathways for those who follow, thereby progressively altering the gendered filters themselves.

## Methodology

This study employs a conceptual research methodology, drawing on theoretical synthesis and critical analysis of existing literature on gender, leadership, and higher education. The research examines Transformational Leadership Theory as an analytical framework for understanding female managers' leadership development in university settings. Through systematic review and integration of peer-reviewed journals, books, and theoretical texts spanning multiple decades and geographical contexts, the study identifies key themes and constructs related to women's leadership experiences within academic institutions. This comprehensive approach enables the synthesis of diverse theoretical perspectives while revealing patterns and contradictions in existing scholarships. The conceptual approach particularly facilitates exploration of how organizational culture including institutional norms, values, and practices - and strategic platforms interact with transformational leadership dimensions to shape female managers' capacity for institutional influence, career advancement, and meaningful organizational change.



**Figure 1. Integrated Framework for Female Leadership Development in Academia**

In summary, this theoretical framework reconceptualizes leadership development through TLT as a deeply contextual and systemic intervention. It provides a coherent structure for analyzing where and how interventions from training workshops to policy reforms can be most effectively applied to unlock the transformational leadership potential of women in academia, for their benefit and for the enhanced adaptability and integrity of their institutions.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the conceptual analysis and synthesis of existing literature, two major findings emerged. First, female academic managers demonstrate several leadership strengths that align closely with the dimensions of Transformational Leadership Theory. Second, the effectiveness of these transformational behaviors is significantly influenced by organizational culture, access to strategic networks, and institutional support mechanisms.

### Female Leadership in Academia: Strengths, Challenges, and the Transformational Link

The experience of female managers in universities is shaped by an interplay of individual, interpersonal, and organisational factors. A significant body of research, including Eagly and Carli's work, suggests that women often face a "double-bind": they are expected to exhibit communal qualities (e.g., nurturing, collaborative) yet are evaluated for leadership roles against often masculine-coded agentic standards (e.g., assertive, directive). When women conform to gender stereotypes, they may be perceived as not tough enough to lead; when they defy them, they risk being labelled as

The ascent of women into formal leadership roles within universities is not merely a numerical game of representation; it involves navigating a complex terrain where personal capability intersects with deeply ingrained institutional norms and gendered expectations. This chapter delves into this terrain, analyzing the distinct strengths female leaders often bring to academic management, the persistent challenges that constrain their efficacy and advancement, and how these factors collectively create a unique nexus with Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT). Understanding this intersection is crucial for moving beyond generic diversity rhetoric to designing targeted and effective developmental support.

#### Documented Strengths: Alignment with Transformational and Collegial Norms

Empirical research, alongside qualitative accounts from within higher education, consistently highlights a set of leadership strengths frequently associated with women in academic management. These strengths resonate profoundly with both the tenets of TLT and the collegial, consensus-driven ethos idealized in academic culture. **Relational and Collaborative Approach:** Female leaders are often noted for prioritizing relationship-building, fostering trust, and employing participative decision-making processes. This aligns directly with the TLT components of Individualized Consideration (attending to team members' needs) and building the trust foundation for Idealized Influence. In an academic context, this collaborative style can enhance faculty buy-in, reduce resistance to change, and improve departmental climate.

**Mentorship and Developmental Focus:** A pronounced commitment to mentoring students, early-career researchers, and junior staff is a well-documented trait. This is the practical embodiment of Individualized Consideration, focusing on elevating followers' potential and capacity. Such mentorship is critical for talent retention and building a robust academic pipeline. **Inclusive Communication and Vision Articulation:** Studies suggest women often excel in communicative practices that are inclusive, empathetic, and aimed at building shared understanding. This skill set is essential for Inspirational Motivation, as it enables leaders to articulate a compelling vision that resonates across diverse disciplinary and personal backgrounds, thereby mobilizing collective action.

**Ethical Stewardship and Role Modeling:** Facing higher scrutiny, many female leaders develop a strong emphasis on procedural fairness, transparency, and ethical conduct. This reinforces Idealized Influence, positioning them as credible and principled role models who lead by example, a quality highly valued in academic communities. These strengths suggest that many women are instinctively inclined towards transformational behaviors. Their leadership approach can effectively address the motivational and collaborative needs of academic professionals, potentially making them well-suited to lead in the modern, complex university environment.

#### Persistent Challenges: The Gendered Organizational Context in Action

However, these inherent or cultivated strengths are deployed within a “gendered organizational context” that systematically generates challenges. These challenges often distort, diminish, or penalize the very transformational behaviors women exhibit. **The Double-Bind and Likability Penalty:** Women leaders frequently confront the “double-bind” where demonstrating assertiveness and authority (necessary for Idealized Influence and driving change) can lead to being perceived as abrasive or unlikeable, violating stereotypical gender expectations. Conversely, exhibiting communal qualities may be interpreted as a lack of

decisiveness or strategic acumen. This bind makes the authentic integration of transformational behaviors exceptionally challenging.

**The Invisible Service Burden:** Women academics, including those in management, often shoulder a disproportionate burden of “invisible service” – committee work, student advising, departmental citizenship, and emotional labor. This relentless demand drains time and cognitive resources that could be directed towards the strategic activities underpinning Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation, thereby constraining their capacity for visionary and innovative leadership. **Lack of Sponsorship and Access to Networks:** Advancement to senior leadership often depends on sponsorship – powerful advocacy by those in top positions – and inclusion in informal networks where strategic information and opportunities circulate. Women are frequently excluded from these old-boy networks, limiting their access to the platforms necessary to exercise broad Inspirational Motivation and to be seen as legitimate candidates for top roles embodying Idealized Influence.

**Gendered Evaluation and Stereotype Threat:** Implicit bias can lead to the undervaluation of women’s achievements and leadership styles. Furthermore, operating under “stereotype threat” – the fear of confirming negative stereotypes – can induce anxiety and impede performance, indirectly hampering a leader’s ability to confidently exhibit Intellectual Stimulation or charismatic authority.

#### The Transformational Link: A Framework for Leverage and Intervention

The critical link to TLT lies in reframing these strengths and challenges not as isolated personal attributes or barriers, but as factors dynamically interacting within the theoretical framework. TLT provides the vocabulary and structure to convert this understanding into actionable insight.  
**Strengths as a Developmental Foundation:** The natural proclivity of many women towards relational and mentoring behaviors provides a strong foundation upon which to consciously build the other dimensions of TLT. Development programs can start from this strength in Individualized Consideration and systematically scaffold skills in Inspirational Motivation (strategic visioning) and Intellectual Stimulation (leading innovation) without dismissing the core relational competence.

**Challenges as Contextual Moderation:** The challenges outlined above are the concrete manifestations of the “gendered filters” in the theoretical framework. They explicitly moderate the relationship between a female leader’s behavior and its organizational reception/outcome. Therefore, effective leadership development must be twofold: it must equip women with strategies to navigate these filters (e.g., communication tactics to mitigate the double-bind) while simultaneously advocating for organizational changes to dismantle the filters themselves (e.g., equitable service loads, formal sponsorship schemes). **TLT as a Legitimizing Discourse:** Framing female leadership strengths explicitly through the respected, evidence-based lens of TLT can help legitimize them within the university. Behaviors like collaboration and mentorship can be recast not as “soft” feminine skills, but as strategic applications of Individualized Consideration essential for talent development and organizational health. This discursive shift can help alter perceptions and evaluation criteria.

In conclusion, female leadership in academia exists at a powerful yet precarious intersection. Women often possess strengths deeply congruent with the transformational demands of the sector, yet these are frequently constrained by a gendered context that can punish their expression. Transformational Leadership Theory illuminates this paradox, not by pathologizing women or the system alone, but by providing a coherent

framework to strategically develop innate strengths, tactically navigate systemic barriers, and ultimately advocate for an organizational environment where transformational leadership in all its diverse expressions can truly flourish. This sets the stage for proposing concrete developmental strategies in the following chapter.

### Developing Transformational Leadership: Strategies and Programs for Female Academic Managers

Building upon the identified alignment between female leadership strengths and Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), as well as the systemic challenges that constrain their expression, this chapter translates theory into actionable practice. It proposes a multi-tiered framework for leadership development, targeting the individual, relational, and organizational levels to cultivate the "Four I's" within a supportive ecosystem. The central argument is that effective development must move beyond isolated training workshops to become an integrated, systemic organizational intervention.

#### Individual-Level Development: Targeted Cultivation of the "Four I's"

Development initiatives must provide women with the specific competencies and reflective space to consciously build their transformational leadership repertoire, while navigating gendered expectations. Forging Idealized Influence and Authentic Leadership: Programs should incorporate workshops on authentic leadership development, guiding women to articulate a coherent leadership philosophy that integrates personal values with institutional demands. Training should include strategies for building executive presence, navigating the "double-bind" through calibrated communication, and leveraging personal narrative to establish credibility and trust. Role-playing and case studies of ethical dilemmas can strengthen moral reasoning and the courage to act as a principled role model.

Enhancing Inspirational Motivation and Strategic Agency: Women need access to high-level "strategy labs" or fellowships that focus on institutional analysis, financial acumen, scenario planning, and competitive positioning. Training in persuasive communication for different audiences (e.g., skeptical faculty, external donors, governing boards) is crucial. Importantly, institutions must create deliberate "stretch assignments" - such as leading a cross-disciplinary strategic initiative or chairing a major accreditation review - to provide platforms for practicing visionary leadership.

Fostering Intellectual Stimulation and Change Leadership: Development should create safe-to-fail environments for practicing change agency. Action Learning Projects (ALPs), where small teams address a real institutional challenge, are ideal for honing skills in challenging assumptions, facilitating creative problem-solving, and managing resistance. Complementary training in design thinking, change management models, and managing difficult dialogues can equip women to confidently stimulate innovation.

Deepening Individualized Consideration as Strategic Mentorship: While often a natural strength, this dimension can be strategically enhanced. Training in advanced coaching techniques, conflict mediation, and building inclusive, high-performance teams can transform informal mentoring into a powerful leadership tool. Furthermore, development programs must equip women to set boundaries, delegate effectively, and avoid being pigeonholed solely into pastoral roles, ensuring their caring approach is sustainable and recognized as strategic talent development.

## Relational and Network-Level Development: Building the Support Ecosystem

Leadership is enacted and recognized within a web of relationships. Development must actively construct supportive networks that counter isolation and provide access to influence. Formal Sponsorship Programs: Institutions must move beyond voluntary mentorship to implement formal sponsorship schemes. Senior leaders (especially male allies in positions of power) should be explicitly tasked with advocating for high-potential women - nominating them for key committees, promoting their achievements, and providing protective “air cover” for risky, high-visibility projects. This directly addresses the network gap and amplifies women’s Idealized Influence and Inspirational Motivation.

Structured Peer and Cross-Institutional Networks: Creating curated women’s leadership networks within and across universities provides a vital forum for shared learning, solidarity, and strategic alliance-building. These networks offer a safe space to discuss gender challenges, exchange tacit knowledge about institutional politics, and build social capital, thereby reducing the sense of isolation and providing collective resilience.

## Organizational-Level Enablers: Shaping the Gendered Context

Individual and relational development will falter without concurrent changes to the organizational structures and culture that serve as the ultimate moderators of success. Equitable Policies and Processes: A systematic audit of promotion, tenure, and appraisal criteria is necessary to ensure they value transformational and collaborative leadership behaviors. Transparent workload allocation models that recognize and fairly distribute service and emotional labor are essential to free women’s capacity for strategic work. Robust, well-communicated family-friendly policies (e.g., equitable parental leave, on-campus childcare) must be implemented and their use actively normalized for all genders.

Cultural Accountability and Symbolic Action: Senior leadership must visibly and consistently champion gender equity as a strategic priority. This includes publicly celebrating the achievements of female leaders, ensuring diverse representation on all high-stakes committees, and holding department heads accountable for climate and advancement metrics. Leaders must model inclusive behaviors and call out microaggressions. Deliberately appointing women to lead mission-critical, institution-wide projects (e.g., digital transformation, major research initiatives) sends a powerful symbolic message about their capability and legitimacy.

## *D. Towards an Integrated Development Program Model*

An effective approach synthesizes these tiers into a cohesive program. A proposed model is a 12-18 month “Women’s Transformational Leadership Fellowship” featuring:

Diagnostic Entry: 360-degree feedback based on TLT competencies.

Modular Workshops: Focused on each of the "Four I's," integrating theory, skill practice, and case studies from academia.

Action Learning Project: A small-group consultancy on a live institutional challenge, sponsored by a senior executive.

Dual Support System: Pairing each fellow with both a senior sponsor and an external executive coach.

Network Events: Regular colloquia with senior leaders and peer cohort meetings.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** A briefing session for the fellows' line managers on how to support their development and advocate for their career progression.

In conclusion, developing transformational leadership in female academic managers requires a sophisticated, multi-pronged strategy. It demands targeted skill-building for the individual, the intentional construction of supportive relationships, and, most critically, the courageous reform of organizational policies and cultures. By implementing such an integrated framework, universities can transition from merely identifying the "leaky pipeline" to actively installing a new, inclusive, and empowering infrastructure for leadership development one that unlocks the full transformational potential of their female talent for the benefit of the entire institution.

The analysis presented in this paper carries significant implications for both leadership theory and the practical administration of higher education. First, it contributes to theoretical discourse by moving Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) beyond its predominant role as a descriptive or evaluative framework for effective leadership. By applying it specifically to the gendered context of academic career progression, the paper reframes TLT as a powerful diagnostic and developmental lens. This shifts the focus from simply measuring whether women exhibit transformational behaviors to understanding how organizational systems can systematically inhibit or cultivate these very behaviors. It thus enriches TLT by compelling it to account for the powerful moderating effects of context particularly gendered structures and biases thereby bridging micro-level leadership behaviors with macro-level organizational sociology. This integrative perspective offers a more nuanced theoretical model for studying leadership development as a socio-political process, not merely a personal skills acquisition journey.

For practice, the primary implication is that leadership development for women in academia cannot be relegated to a standalone human resources program. It must be reconceived as a strategic, institution-wide change initiative. The proposed multi-tiered framework - encompassing individual skill-building, relational network development, and systemic policy reform - demands coordinated action from all levels of university governance. Practically, this means senior leadership, particularly vice-chancellors and deans, must visibly champion and resource these efforts, moving beyond rhetorical support to tangible accountability. Resources must be allocated not only to flagship fellowship programs but also to the less visible work of auditing promotion criteria, reforming workload models, and training senior male academics as active sponsors. The implementation sequence is critical: launching a high-profile women's leadership program without simultaneously addressing structural barriers (like unequal service loads) can lead to participant frustration and program failure, as women are trained for roles the organization is not yet fully prepared to support.

Looking forward, this analysis points to essential areas for future research and longitudinal assessment. There is a pressing need for empirical studies that track the long-term career outcomes of participants in integrated, theory-informed development programs compared to those in generic training. Furthermore, research should investigate the specific mechanisms of effective sponsorship and the return on investment of such systemic interventions in terms of institutional performance metrics such as innovation, staff retention, and student success. Ultimately, this paper argues that intentionally fostering transformational leadership among female managers is not a diversity and inclusion adjunct but a core strategic imperative for universities. In an era of existential challenges, institutions cannot afford to leave half of their leadership talent underdeveloped. Investing in this holistic development is an investment in building more adaptive, ethically grounded, and innovative universities capable of fulfilling their mission in the 21st century.

## Conclusion

The leadership development of female managers in universities represents a critical leverage point for institutional advancement, best understood and facilitated through the lens of Transformational Leadership Theory. By examining the persistent underrepresentation of women in senior academic roles and the complex gendered dynamics they navigate, the analysis demonstrates that transformational leadership is a particularly resonant framework for harnessing the strengths and addressing the challenges faced by women leaders. The proposed integrated development model, which concurrently targets individual capability building, relational network cultivation, and systemic organizational reform, provides a concrete pathway for translating theory into practice. However, this study is not without limitations, as it primarily draws on existing literature without capturing contextual variations across different institutional types or cultural contexts, and the proposed model remains theoretically grounded rather than empirically validated through longitudinal or intervention-based research.

To address these gaps, future research should conduct empirical investigations to assess the model's effectiveness in real-world university settings, including comparative studies across diverse institutional and cultural contexts to identify contingent success factors. Additionally, intersectional perspectives examining how race, class, and other social identities intersect with gender would enrich the current analysis, while longitudinal research tracking career trajectories of female managers engaged in transformational leadership development would provide valuable insights into lasting impacts on both individual advancement and institutional transformation. Ultimately, intentionally and systematically investing in the transformational leadership of women is not an optional equity initiative but a fundamental strategic imperative, essential for building more innovative, adaptable, and ethically grounded universities capable of thriving in an era of unprecedented change.

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