Designing a Transformational Leadership Model with a Productivity Enhancement and Anti-Elitism Approach Using a Qualitative Method

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<u>**Abstract**</u>

The aim of this study is to design a transformational leadership model with a focus on increasing productivity and preventing elitism through a qualitative method. In this regard, using qualitative methodology and conducting interviews, we identified the components and indicators of the transformational leadership model with a productivity enhancement and anti-elitism approach at Bank Melli Iran. The study population included experts, bank managers, professionals, and also university professors specializing in transformational leadership. The sample size was determined to be 10 individuals using the snowball sampling method and theoretical saturation. Data collection was conducted through interviews, carried out by experts using the Delphi technique. For data analysis, MAXQDA software was employed. The results of the coding process identified 8 components and 72 indicators. Furthermore, the results indicated that the components of the transformational leadership model with a productivity enhancement and anti-elitism approach include: (1) strategic leadership thinking, (2) motivation for transformation and innovation, (3) creation of organizational opportunities, (4) an appropriate organizational environment, (5) support for talents and provision of resources, (6) skills, expertise, and competencies, (7) interaction and participation with employees, and (8) organizational transformational leadership. Among the most important identified indicators are the creation of an appropriate learning environment, satisfaction of employees' job needs and group organization, opportunity creation, increasing production and innovation opportunities, training, provision of necessary resources for employees and motivation generation, support for professionals and elite human resource talents, the quality of relationships, and the creation of opportunities for interaction with employees.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Productivity, Elitism Prevention.

1.   Introduction

Organizational change and transformation in today's dynamic environments necessitate leaders who possess both insight and strategic thinking—in other words, transformational leaders—who can more effectively and swiftly convert environmental uncertainty into organizational opportunity than their competitors (Aditya et al., 2024). Undoubtedly, successful organizations require leaders who, with deep insight, can define the appropriate direction and future path of the organization, guide individuals toward that path, and foster a motivation for transformation among employees (Babu & Kushwaha, 2024). Such leaders are today known as transformational leaders, who serve as the source of fundamental changes, fully comprehend the prevailing organizational changes, and ride the wave of transformation. These leaders are capable of providing a clearer and brighter

vision of the future, effectively articulating their vision to subordinates, and challenging them to perform exceptional tasks (Zhang & Huang, 2024). Studies show that transformational leaders maintain an optimistic approach toward daily organizational challenges. In fact, they are capable of sustaining this mindset and utilizing it to transform challenging situations and even obstacles into opportunities (Shafiq et al., 2024; Sharif et al., 2024; Sofia & Aseanty, 2024).

Transformational leadership refers to guiding and inspiring individual efforts by changing (and motivating) employees. It includes a set of behaviors that encourage followers to perform beyond expectations by altering their attitudes, beliefs, and values. This leadership strategy promotes behaviors that aim to meet the higher-order needs of satisfied employees to engage them in achieving organizational goals (Miller, 2024; Nazari & Hormozi Zadeh, 2024). Research on leadership dates back to the 1970s. Administrative managers with key leadership skills can enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The theory of transformational leadership emerged to distinguish between those leaders who build strong, motivational relationships with subordinates and those who focus primarily on exchanges and interactions to produce results (Nguyen & Sharma, 2024; Notarnicola et al., 2024). Transformational leaders have the ability to shift individual orientation from self-interest to serving the goals of their organizations (Aditya et al., 2024; Babu & Kushwaha, 2024; Bauwens et al., 2024; Belhaj, 2024; Nguyen & Sharma, 2024; Notarnicola et al., 2024). Moreover, transformational leaders help their followers develop greater ambition by focusing on the company's long-term goals. It can be stated that transformational leadership is a process through which leaders and followers continuously strive to elevate each other's spiritual strength and motivational capacity (Farhodi & Ghanbari-Nia, 2020), thereby enhancing organizational performance. Conversely, ineffective leadership can hinder the development of human capital and negatively impact employee productivity (Para-González et al., 2018).

On the other hand, if managers in organizations provide employees with necessary training while leveraging their talents, granting appropriate opportunities and resources, and creating motivation, they can observe optimal employee performance. Unfortunately, in some organizations, managers fail to adequately consider employee performance and instead make decisions based on personal desires (Shiri & Hamedi, 2018). Additionally, in today's rapidly changing world, improving productivity and efficiently utilizing available resources is no longer a choice but a necessity. In this regard, attention to transformation is one of the key factors in increasing organizational productivity (Vatankhah et al., 2017). Leadership is a vital element in the success of an organization. Dynamic and efficient leadership involves creating a vision and operational plan to ensure customer orientation and establishing a favorable environment for employees to optimize productivity and foster innovation (El Toufaili, 2018). Furthermore, the transformational leadership style—centered on honesty and trust—proves to be the best approach for building relationships with employees and enhancing their productivity (Sheard, 2020).

In recent years, the global banking industry has undergone significant transformation, with electronic banking giving way to virtual banking. In this area, our country has not made satisfactory progress. Meanwhile, we have numerous creative and specialized personnel within our organizations who could contribute to advancement, but due to managerial incompetence and lack of adequate knowledge, a suitable environment for such individuals is not created. This leads not only to organizational stagnation but also to underutilization of human resources. Consequently, specialists may either leave the organization or, due to unfavorable labor market conditions, be forced to stay—potentially leading to destructive performance within the organization. Rapid and complex transformations in the contemporary era have a substantial impact on organizational performance. To survive and remain competitive, organizations must engage in continuous transformation and environmental adaptation. Transformational leadership is one of the factors that can help organizations facilitate such changes. In fact, without transformational leaders, organizational performance would be significantly weakened, and organizations would be unable to meet internal and external demands. Through a proper understanding of transformational leadership and timely application of this style, management can implement necessary changes and steer organizations toward progress (Shir Taheri et al., 2020).

The theoretical framework of this study is based on two fundamental constructs: productivity and elitism rejection. Productivity is considered a key indicator for evaluating the performance success of an individual, team, or organization. High productivity is equated with success, whereas a decline in productivity is viewed as failure. According to Narulita et al. (2019), belief in one's ability to perform better than before is central to achieving success, and increased work productivity is essential (Narulita et al., 2019). Wibowo (2016) emphasized that productivity improvement can be achieved by increasing output

relative to specific levels of input, thereby reflecting both the efficiency and effectiveness of utilizing resources. From a conceptual standpoint, productivity is the ratio of outputs to inputs (Wibowo, 2016). Furthermore, motivation and work experience are vital factors that enhance productivity and support a company's success in attaining its goals (Niswaty et al., 2017; Saggaf et al., 2017; Salimi et al., 2020; Simic, 1999). High levels of motivation and experience can drive employees to perform exceptionally and boost productivity (Rozi & Sunarsi, 2020; Sutrisno & Sunarsi, 2019). For instance, initiatives by companies like Starbucks Coffee—providing workplace amenities, insurance, bonuses, and training—are aimed at fostering motivation and enhancing productivity. Education level and work experience, particularly in administrative roles, are also pivotal (Masriah, 2021).

In contrast, elitism rejection represents a significant organizational challenge. Elitism refers to the belief that certain individuals possess superior qualities—such as intelligence, education, experience, or lineage—that make them more influential or authoritative (Alizadeh & Hadavi-Nejad, 2019). However, in practice, especially within public institutions, elite individuals often do not receive the attention or support they require, leading to systemic neglect (Seyedi Javadian & Pahlevan Sharifi, 2011). Elite migration from developing to developed countries poses a threat to national progress, with estimates indicating the loss of millions of dollars in human capital annually (Weinberg, 2011). Despite the value that elites bring to organizations, some environments are marked by hostility, exclusion, and professional stagnation, referred to as "elitism rejection" (Feldman & Weitz, 1988; Robinson et al., 2013; Vecchio, 2000). Such conditions can harm both individuals and organizational performance, especially when leaders create toxic atmospheres characterized by political behavior, envy, and injustice (Hadavinejad & Kalvandi, 2016). Although elite talent management is recognized in management literature, it is not always practiced effectively. Sometimes this neglect is intentional, reflecting a broader societal trend that hinders elite participation in reform and development efforts (Rezaqoli, 2014). Therefore, transformational leadership that recognizes and fosters elite talents is essential for organizational growth and the prevention of talent attrition.

The literature on transformational leadership, productivity, and elitism rejection provides a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between these concepts in organizational settings. Alvandi and Mazaheri (2020), through content analysis, identified 39 strategies employed by managers in Iranian public organizations to exclude elites, grouped into personal, managerial, organizational, and occupational categories (Alvandi & Mohammadzaheri, 2020). Alizadeh and Hadavinejad (2019), using grounded theory, revealed that elite rejection originates from elite competence, a cultural homogeneity assumption, and weak performance monitoring systems, which create toxic leadership and complicit staff environments (Alizadeh & Hadavi-Nejad, 2019). Jafari Harandi (2018), through regression and structural equation modeling, found that transformational and transactional leadership styles significantly predicted organizational performance, with transformational leadership explaining 51% of the variance (Jafari Harandi, 2018). Monavarian et al. (2017) developed a grounded theory model for utilizing scientific elites in academia, identifying influential factors, barriers, and strategies (Monavarian et al., 2017). Ghojali and Bahmani (2017) confirmed that transformational leadership positively affects human resource productivity, mediated by workplace spirituality (Ghojali & Bahmani, 2017). Yim and Park (2021) explored how corporate elitism and groupthink influence organizational empathy during crises (Yim & Park, 2021). Dwivedi et al. (2020) demonstrated that knowledge sharing fully mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and employee productivity (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Purwanto et al. (2020) challenged the perception of transformational leadership as elitist or anti-democratic, asserting its inclusive, empowering nature (Purwanto et al., 2020). Buil et al. (2019) found that identification, engagement, and proactive personality mediate the impact of transformational leadership on employee performance (Buil et al., 2019). Narulita et al. (2019) reported that transformational leadership and motivation significantly influence teacher productivity in Indonesian primary schools (Narulita et al., 2019). Lastly, Louw et al. (2017) identified a strong relationship between transformational leadership competencies and leadership effectiveness in Kenyan indigenous banks, highlighting its cross-cultural relevance (Louw et al., 2017). This body of research underscores the essential role of transformational leadership in fostering productivity and mitigating elitism across organizational contexts.

Successful organizations need leaders who can, with deep insight, determine the right direction and future trajectory of the organization and instill the motivation for transformation in their workforce. The importance of transformational leadership lies in the fact that organizational adaptation requires the establishment and institutionalization of new systems and processes— something that is not possible without effective leadership (Pirjaded Samarin, 2020). Transformational leadership is the most appropriate style in the current era. This form of leadership possesses the capacity to transform systems—a necessity in today's world. Due to rapid technological change, leaders who believe in change are those capable of overcoming the challenges of the 21st century (Khan et al., 2018). Moreover, in every organization today, human resources are among the most important assets available to managers. How effectively and optimally human resources are used is a critical determinant of organizational efficiency and performance (Dadgostar et al., 2019). On another note, the issue of brain drain and the emigration of experts from the country, as a social phenomenon driven by economic, cultural, social, and political factors, has left damaging effects on economic, political, and social development. According to statistics, the emigration of each elite individual from the country results in a loss of approximately 5 million dollars in national capital annually. Therefore, identifying the motivations behind elite migration and the influential factors—of which elitism rejection may be one—and examining practical solutions for controlling this phenomenon is more necessary than ever. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to design a transformational leadership model with a productivity enhancement and anti-elitism approach using a qualitative method.

2.   Methods and Materials

The statistical population consists of experts, bank managers, specialists, and university professors in the field of transformational leadership. The sample size was determined to be 10 participants using the snowball sampling technique and based on theoretical saturation. The data collection tool was interviews, conducted by experts using the Delphi method. Initially, several experts were purposefully selected to extract and analyze the core categories in the first stage. In qualitative sampling, the number of participants is guided by theoretical saturation, and sampling continues until no new themes or concepts emerge from the data.

In the present study, the first step involved library research and expert interviews, which were transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA software. Through open and axial coding, key indicators and components were identified and summarized. Then, using the Delphi method, these indicators and components were confirmed by experts. In the final stage, selective coding was used to develop the final framework of the model.

Stage One: Open Coding (Initial Coding): In grounded theory, open coding is an analytical process through which concepts are identified and elaborated based on their characteristics and dimensions. The interviews conducted with experts were fully transcribed into MAXQDA software and reviewed multiple times to ensure a comprehensive understanding. Then, key themes and concepts were extracted from the interview statements and relevant literature, conceptualized, and labeled with codes. Figure 1 illustrates an example of raw data from the interviews analyzed through open coding in MAXQDA. In open coding, the intent of the interviewee is derived from each sentence, phrase, and section, and concepts are extracted from the documents.

Stage Two: Axial Coding: xial coding is based on categorization, reviewing prior research, and achieving deep theoretical understanding of the subject to identify shared features among indicators around a central theme. In this phase, the commonalities of the identified concepts were determined and categorized, leading to the formation of categories and components. At this stage, the researcher engages in category development. This phase begins once all data have been coded and compiled, and a list of various codes is created. Analysis is then undertaken to explore how different codes can be combined to form a set of components. In this stage, eight components of the transformational leadership model—aimed at enhancing productivity and preventing elitism rejection—were confirmed and categorized by the experts. These components include: (1) strategic leadership thinking, (2) motivation for transformation and innovation, (3) creation of organizational opportunities, (4) appropriate organizational environment, (5) support for talents and provision of resources, (6) skills, expertise, and capabilities, (7) interaction and participation with employees, and (8) organizational transformational leadership.

Stage Three: Selective Coding: In the final stage, selective coding was used to illustrate the relationships among the identified concepts, dimensions, and components, thereby completing the development of the final model framework.

3. Findings and Results

The results of the open and axial coding included the identification of components and indicators, which were finalized through expert consensus using the Delphi method, as shown in the table below:

Table 1. Final Indicators Identified through the Three-Stage Delphi Method

| Component	No.	Indicator	Weight
Strategic Leadership Thinking	1	The organization possesses strategic thinking aimed at organizational change and transformation.	1
	2	The organization guides and inspires individual efforts.	1
	3	Employees are encouraged to perform beyond expectations.	1
	4	Interaction with employees is conducted to meet higher-level needs.	1
	5	In response to rapid change, organizational methods and models are reconsidered regarding human resources.	1
	6	Strategic and transformational leaders exist to create dynamism in organizational processes.	1
	7	Development and empowerment of followers lead to entrepreneurship within the organization.	2
	8	Leadership competencies in strategic thinking are appropriate.	1
	9	Leaders possess honesty, team-building abilities, and emotional intelligence.	2
	10	Leadership focuses on building harmonious working relationships between leaders and followers.	1
Motivation for Transformation and Innovation	11	Leaders identify the right direction and future path of the organization with deep insight.	1
	12	Leaders motivate employees to initiate transformation.	2
	13	Leaders are the source of fundamental changes and master the organizational change processes.	2
	14	Leaders present a clearer and better vision of the future.	2
	15	Leaders effectively articulate their vision to followers and challenge them to achieve exceptional outcomes.	1
	16	Leaders build strong and motivational relationships with subordinates.	2
	17	Leaders consistently demonstrate idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.	1
	18	The leader is a role model and sacrifices for the whole group.	2
	19	Leaders persuade and motivate followers to achieve goals by framing them attractively and with rewards.	1
	20	Intellectual stimulation by leaders enables followers to solve problems in innovative ways.	1
	21	Leaders and followers continually strive to enhance each other's emotional strength and motivation.	2
	22	Leaders motivate followers to perform beyond expectations.	3
	23	Effective leadership in managing and directing human capital exists to promote motivation and productivity.	2
Organizational Opportunities	24	Leaders transform threats and strengths into organizational opportunities faster than competitors.	2
	25	Leaders adopt an optimistic approach toward daily organizational challenges.	2
	26	Leaders convert challenging situations and obstacles into opportunities.	3
	27	Leaders promote research and training programs to encourage employees, thereby enhancing productivity.	1
	28	Leaders possess the ability to create a shared vision, strengthen unity, and exercise effective power.	1
	29	Leaders create opportunities by empowering others, fostering appropriate learning environments, satisfying job needs, and organizing teams.	3
	30	Leaders enable satisfaction, commitment, mutual influence, cultural competence, and adaptability.	1
	31	Leaders seek to increase opportunities for production and innovation.	3
Organizational Environment	32	Leaders transform environmental uncertainty into organizational opportunity more effectively than competitors.	2
	33	Leaders provide a vision and action plan to ensure customer orientation.	2
	34	Leaders create an enabling environment for employees to optimize productivity and innovation.	2
	35	Leaders can inspire employees and develop a desirable organizational culture.	1
	36	Leaders view ethical practices as behavioral norms and attempt to anticipate environmental changes.	1
	37	The organization remains static in response to various internal and external environmental changes.	2
	38	The organization operates in a highly secure environment.	2
Organizational Support and Resources	39	Leaders provide employees with necessary training based on their talents.	3
	40	Leaders offer appropriate opportunities and resources, motivating optimal performance among employees.	3
	41	Leaders pay adequate attention to employee performance and do not make decisions based solely on personal interests.	1

	42	Efficient use of available resources is considered essential rather than optional.	1
	43	Change and transformation are recognized as key drivers of productivity growth.	1
	44	Leaders acknowledge the influence of elites on others.	2
	45	Leaders understand that elites require support from others to achieve great tasks.	3
	46	Leaders achieve maximum results with minimal resources.	3
	47	This organization provides facilities and supports experts even in rural areas.	3
	48	This organization supports small markets and low-income clients with low deposit levels.	3
	49	The organization uses time and resources to encourage effective and creative learning.	2
Skills, Competence, and Expertise	50	Leaders' attention to the personal and professional development of employees positively impacts satisfaction.	2
	51	Individualized consideration encourages employees to improve their capabilities.	1
	52	Many creative and skilled personnel exist in the organization.	2
	53	Leaders assign a special role to expertise and innovation.	2
	54	Leaders associate organizational advancement and development with specialization and preventing elitism rejection.	3
	55	Leaders view the utilization of elite human resources as essential for organizational growth.	3
	56	Creative and specialized employees can significantly contribute to organizational progress and transformation.	1
	57	Leadership involves influencing others through skills, knowledge, and behavior.	1
Interaction and Participation with Employees	58	Leaders focus on employee participation and interaction to achieve optimal results and productivity.	1
	59	Honesty and trust are at the core of leader-employee relationships.	2
	60	Positive relationships between leaders and employees increase employee productivity.	2
	61	Quality relationships improve employees' long-term attitudes.	3
	62	Leaders aim to maintain interaction and participation among organization members.	3
	63	Leaders and employees consistently consult and collaborate to achieve shared goals.	2
	64	Leadership shows high enthusiasm for work and creating opportunities to interact with employees.	3
Organizational Transformational Leadership	65	Involving employees in decision-making and goal-setting fosters responsibility and motivation.	1
	66	Elites in the organization have the opportunity to advance within the hierarchy.	2
	67	Managers consciously allow elite personnel to grow without forced job stagnation.	1
	68	Human resource development, skill enhancement, and knowledge growth are strategic managerial priorities.	2
	69	Leaders with emotional intelligence positively affect employee productivity through self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management.	2
	70	Leaders possess enduring ideal influence and firm resolve.	1
	71	Leaders prioritize others' needs over their own and seek to fulfill them.	2
	72	Leaders stimulate followers intellectually, encouraging creative problem-solving.	2

A total of eight components and seventy-two indicators were finalized for the transformational leadership model aimed at enhancing productivity and preventing elitism rejection, based on expert evaluations in the three-stage Delphi process.

Following these stages, the final conceptual model of transformational leadership, along with the corresponding questionnaire, was developed and is depicted in Figure 1.
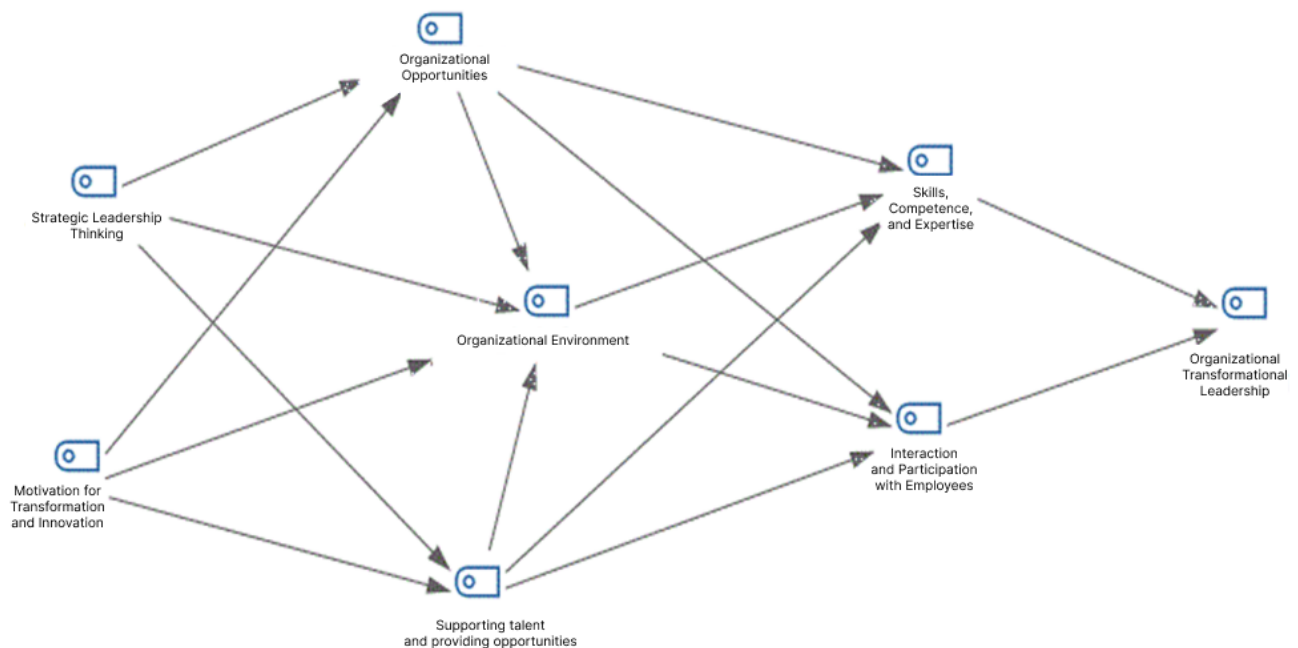
Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to design a transformational leadership model that not only enhances productivity but also addresses the issue of elitism rejection within organizations, particularly in the context of Iran's public banking sector. Through a qualitative approach involving expert interviews, the Delphi method, and multi-level coding via MAXQDA software, eight core components and seventy-two specific indicators were identified and validated. These components included strategic leadership thinking, motivation for transformation and innovation, organizational opportunities, organizational environment, organizational support and resources, skills and expertise, interaction and participation with employees, and organizational transformational leadership. Each component was supported by detailed indicators, emphasizing the multi-dimensional nature of transformational leadership in facilitating both organizational efficiency and inclusive leadership practices.

The first major component, strategic leadership thinking, was found to be essential for driving organizational change in complex and uncertain environments. This finding is in line with the results of Louw et al. (2017), who highlighted the significance of competencies such as inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence in effective leadership practices (Louw et al., 2017). The presence of strategic thinking among leaders enables them to guide teams beyond routine performance expectations and foster dynamic processes. Similarly, the identification of motivation for transformation and innovation as a key component supports the arguments by Narulita et al. (2019), who found that motivational leadership directly impacts the productivity of both teachers and managers in educational settings (Narulita et al., 2019). The findings reinforce that transformational leaders should embody visionary insight, challenge subordinates intellectually, and build trust-based, motivational relationships to achieve higher productivity levels.

The third component, organizational opportunities, reflects the ability of leaders to transform internal and external challenges into growth possibilities. This is consistent with the findings of Dwivedi et al. (2020), who emphasized the mediating role of knowledge sharing between transformational leadership and employee productivity (Dwivedi et al., 2020). The leaders' capacity to encourage research, learning, and innovation, while fostering a shared vision, confirms previous work by Ghojali and Bahmani (2017), which demonstrated a significant relationship between transformational leadership, workplace

spirituality, and human resource productivity (Ghojali & Bahmani, 2017). The fourth component, organizational environment, elaborates on the role of leadership in creating a supportive, ethical, and stable climate that enhances staff motivation and engagement. These findings echo those of Alizadeh and Hadavinejad (2019), who suggested that toxic or unresponsive organizational environments often result in elite rejection (Alizadeh & Hadavi-Nejad, 2019). A proactive and dynamic culture led by transformational leaders thus becomes vital to retaining talent and maximizing performance.

The fifth component, organizational support and resources, addressed the importance of aligning employee training and motivation with available resources, particularly in underrepresented or rural contexts. The results support the work of Alvandi and Mazaheri (2020), who found that managers in public organizations often unconsciously or deliberately avoid empowering elite employees, leading to strategic underutilization (Alvandi & Mohammadzaheri, 2020). In contrast, our findings suggest that providing material and emotional support to elite staff—through professional development, autonomy, and acknowledgment—can significantly enhance productivity. Similarly, the sixth component, skills, competence, and expertise, aligns with the grounded theory model proposed by Monavarian et al. (2017), which emphasized the need for robust talent management frameworks in academic institutions (Monavarian et al., 2017). Leaders who prioritize expertise and creativity not only drive innovation but also mitigate the systemic risks of elitism rejection and forced job stagnation.

The seventh component, interaction and participation with employees, emphasizes relational leadership behaviors that enhance trust, collaboration, and long-term commitment. These findings are reinforced by Boyle et al. (2019), who demonstrated that the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance is mediated by identification and employee engagement. Our results suggest that open communication, mutual respect, and cooperative goal setting play a central role in increasing employee morale and productivity. Finally, the component of organizational transformational leadership encapsulates all the previous themes, offering a comprehensive framework that promotes shared decision-making, upward mobility for elite personnel, strategic skill development, and emotional intelligence in leadership. The alignment with the findings of Purwanto et al. (2020)—who concluded that transformational leadership is not inherently elitist or anti-democratic—supports the validity and inclusiveness of the proposed model (Purwanto et al., 2020).

In addition to aligning with existing scholarship, this study provides novel insights into the phenomenon of elitism rejection within organizational structures. Several researchers have addressed the adverse outcomes of elite marginalization, including forced stagnation, envy, and toxic politics (Feldman & Weitz, 1988; Robinson et al., 2013; Vatankhah et al., 2017). Our findings expand upon this by illustrating how transformational leadership can counteract these trends. Leaders who embrace transparency, inclusive decision-making, and equitable resource distribution are more likely to retain high-potential employees and reduce brain drain. As noted by Yim and Park (2021), groupthink and elitism within companies can erode empathy and decision-making quality in crises (Yim & Park, 2021). The model developed here mitigates such risks by fostering a participatory culture that values both performance and potential.

Moreover, the model confirms that transformational leadership not only benefits individual and organizational performance but also fosters a culture of mutual growth. This echoes the assertion by Farhodi and Ghanbarinia (2020), who described transformational leadership as a reciprocal process of motivational and psychological upliftment between leaders and followers (Farhodi & Ghanbari-Nia, 2020). The emphasis on individual development, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership within our framework strongly supports this relational view. Additionally, the study addresses contextual challenges specific to Iranian public sector organizations, where hierarchical rigidity and limited elite mobility are often cited as barriers to innovation and performance (Seyyedjavadeyn & Pahlavansharif, 2011). The model, therefore, presents a culturally responsive and operationally feasible alternative for leadership development.

One limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size (n=10), which, although sufficient for qualitative saturation, may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives across different sectors and regions. The focus on the banking sector within a specific national context (Iran) also limits the generalizability of the findings to other industries or countries with differing organizational cultures and leadership norms. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported expert interviews may introduce subjective biases, and the Delphi method, while robust, depends heavily on the consistency and expertise of selected participants.

Future studies could apply the finalized model quantitatively across multiple sectors using structural equation modeling to validate the relationships among components and test the model's predictive power on organizational outcomes such as retention, innovation, and job satisfaction. Comparative studies across public and private sectors, or between different countries, would also offer deeper insights into how cultural and structural variables mediate the effectiveness of transformational leadership. Moreover, longitudinal designs would help assess how these leadership components evolve over time and in response to internal or external shocks, such as economic crises or technological disruption.

Organizations should integrate the model's components into their leadership development programs, emphasizing emotional intelligence, ethical practice, and inclusive decision-making. HR departments should implement systems to identify and support elite talent, ensuring upward mobility and meaningful engagement. Managers should be trained to convert organizational challenges into strategic opportunities and foster collaborative environments that enhance productivity and innovation. Structured feedback systems, mentorship opportunities, and transparent promotion criteria can help operationalize the model's principles. By embedding transformational leadership practices, organizations can simultaneously enhance performance and retain their most capable employees.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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