

Abrupt Implementation of Telework in the Public Sector During the COVID-19 Crisis

Challenges to Transformational Leadership

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Abstract: Lockdown regulations during the COVID-19 outbreak resulted in abrupt changes to work situations and presented new leadership challenges. This short report explores how leaders perceived their options for leading transformationally when their teams were forced to rapidly switch to virtual collaboration. We interviewed 20 supervisors using semistructured telephone interviews who described their general leadership behavior before the lockdown and the evaluated possibilities and difficulties of leading transformationally during the lockdown. The article provides insights into the preconditions for transformational leadership in the public sector during change processes. High workload, time pressure, and role conflicts, combined with restricted freedom of action, restrained their options of transformational leadership. Communicative problems further hindered the transfer of transformational leadership behavior to new working arrangements during the Covid-19-crisis. The article derives implications for ways of helping managers to employ the potentials of transformational leadership in virtual settings and during change processes in the public sector.

Keywords: virtual leadership, public sector, transformational, leadership, change management

Abrupte Einführung von Telearbeit im öffentlichen Sektor in Zeiten der Covid-19 Krise. Herausforderungen für transformationale Führung

Zusammenfassung: Lockdown-Verordnungen im Zuge der COVID-19-Krise haben in der öffentlichen Verwaltung zu abrupten arbeitsplatzbezogenen Veränderungen geführt und stellen Führungskräfte vor neue Herausforderungen. In diesem Kurzbericht untersuchen wir, wie es gelingt, bei einer kurzfristigen Umstellung auf virtuelle Teamarbeit transformational zu führen. Zwanzig Vorgesetzte wurden in halbstrukturierten Telefoninterviews befragt. Sie beschrieben ihr Führungsverhalten vor dem Lockdown und bewerteten die Möglichkeit und Hindernisse, während des Lockdowns transformational zu führen. Der Artikel gibt Einblicke in Voraussetzungen für transformationale Führung im öffentlichen Sektor, insbesondere im Zuge von Veränderungsprozessen. Arbeitsüberlastung, Zeitdruck und Rollenkonflikte, sowie begrenzte Handlungsspielräume schränken die Möglichkeiten ein, transformational zu führen. In der aktuellen Corona-Krise erschweren Kommunikationsprobleme die erfolgreiche Übertragung des transformationalen Führungsstils auf das virtuelle Setting. Implikationen für die Unterstützung von Führungskräften zur Nutzung der Potenziale transformationaler Führung in virtuellen Settings sowie in Veränderungsprozessen im öffentlichen Sektor werden abgeleitet.

Schlüsselwörter: Virtuelle Führung, Transformationale Führung, COVID-19, Öffentliche Verwaltung, Veränderungsmanagement

In March 2020, the World Health Organization officially announced a pandemic crisis caused by the virus COVID-19. To prevent the spread of the disease, many countries introduced lockdown regulations resulting in economic, social, and psychological disruptions (Kramer & Kramer, 2020). In the German public sector, physical distancing became a necessity to implement governmental lockdown strategies. Leaders as well as their teams had to switch rapidly to virtual collaboration. While working from home

decreases the individual's risk of being infected with the virus, the change process and the new work arrangements create challenges to employees and their leaders (de Filippis et al., 2020). Past research demonstrated that transformational leadership behavior (Bass & Avolio, 1995) does give supervisors opportunities to lead in an effective manner, especially in times of change (Herold et al., 2008; Moynihan et al., 2013). However, empirical knowledge and theories about the specific antecedents of

transformational leadership in the course of disruptive changes in the public sector are still scarce.

To fill this void, this paper explores how leaders in the public sector evaluate their options of leading transformationally before and during the lockdown. The paper reports findings from semistructured interviews with 20 leaders, conducted at the peak of the first wave of the pandemic crisis during the switch to telework in the public sector. We make at least two contributions: First, we provide insights into the organizational preconditions for transformational leadership in the public sector; second, we provide valuable insights into the executives' perspective on an abrupt change process and its impact on the ability to lead transformationally.

Theoretical Background and Research Questions

Options and Constraints for Transformational Leadership in the Public Sector

Bass and Avolio (1995) conceptualize typical transformational behaviors based on four essential leadership aspects: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Leaders scoring high on the first facet of transformational leadership, *idealized influence*, succeed in reaching out to their followers on an emotional level (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). They encourage their followers by acting as role models and expressing self-confidence. The second dimension of transformational leadership is *inspirational motivation*. Supervisors with high scores on this dimension increase their subordinates' intrinsic motivation through emotional communication of visions, tasks, and goals. Furthermore, they set high performance standards and emphasize the importance of completing tasks (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Third, transformational leaders lead by *intellectual stimulation*. Bass and Avolio (1995) define this facet as leadership behavior that encourages employees to use and expand their creativity and innovative abilities in the workplace. The fourth element of transformational leadership is *individualized consideration*, which implies that leaders assume the role of a supportive coach and foster the development of their employees.

Meta-analytic findings revealed that the transformational leadership style is commonly applied and can also be effective in the public sector (Lowe et al., 1996). However, many scholars argue that in the public sector, with its bureaucratic structure and reduced flexibility (Boyne, 2002), transformational leadership should be less

common and less effective (Pawar & Eastman, 1997). Rafferty and Griffin (2004) confirm empirically that the higher the degree of formalization and centralization is in an organization, the less leaders exhibited transformational behaviors. Wright and Pandey (2010) show that the stronger the hierarchical structure in public administration offices, the less likely leaders are to show transformational leadership behavior. On the other hand, the authors revealed that a lack of options to motivate via extrinsic rewards and a diminished scope of discretion – as is often the case in the public sector (Van Slyke & Alexander, 2006) – even enhance the degree of displayed transformational leadership style. There is still a need for more detailed insights into the organizational preconditions for transformational leadership in the public sector. By adding the supervisors' perspective to the research on this matter, this article seeks to answer the following question:

RQ1: To what extent do leaders in public administration perceive options and constraints in their working environment that influence their ability to lead in a transformational way?

Options and Constraints for Transformational Leadership During the Change Process

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, leaders in most sectors have had to guide their employees through unknown transitions and constantly adapt their policies to changing regulations (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). They are confronted with high expectations to make decisions, communicate changes, and support their employees, who feel insecure and are facing a high level of strain themselves (Sanders et al., 2020). Research confirms that the four aspects of transformational leadership mentioned above help leaders to cope with the challenges of change processes (Peng et al., 2021). The typical visionary practices provide the potential to promote followers' readiness for change (Haque et al., 2016). Inspirational motivation creates a work environment that fosters job characteristics that are positively linked to the commitment to adapt to new requirements, such as autonomy and interesting tasks (Hornung & Rousseau, 2007). Additionally, intellectual stimulation enables employees to cope better with a changing environment (Eisenbach et al., 1999). Supportive leadership behavior further raises employees' commitment to and openness to organizational change (Neves, 2011). Accordingly, during the COVID-19 crisis, the public sector could presumably profit from transformational leadership. However, studies on the implementation of transformational leadership in a virtual context show inconsistent results on its effective-

ness. Purvanova and Bono (2009) revealed that, in a virtual setting, leaders adapted their behavior to varying degrees. The question of why some leaders increase their transformational behaviors in virtual settings while others adhere to their accustomed leadership style is yet to be answered. Balthazard et al. (2009) point out that conditions that are relevant for the emergence of transformational leadership in face-to-face interaction are different from those in virtual team settings. More insights into the preconditions that enable leaders in the public sector to implement transformational behavior during the shift to virtual collaboration are necessary. This article sheds light on the supervisors' perspective on conditions that enable and hinder the realization of transformational leadership behavior in the process of abruptly implementing telework in the public sector:

RQ 2: Which options and constraints to leading transformationally during the COVID-19 crisis do leaders in public administration perceive?

Methods

Research Setting and Sample

We apply a qualitative design using individual semistructured interviews with 20 supervisors from the State Office for Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Areas of Schleswig-Holstein (LLUR). The working conditions, job contents as well as the leadership culture of this institution can be characterized as prototypical for German administrative authorities. The LLUR is a state authority subordinate to the Ministry for Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Areas of the State of Schleswig-Holstein in Kiel. It creates the basis for integrated environmental protection as well as for the sustainable protection of water-related natural resources and fulfills its tasks by monitoring the implementation of environmental agreements, ensuring their enforcement, consulting, and public relations (LLURVO, 2008).

To ensure a representative overview of the situation in the organization, supervisors from each of the LLUR departments took part in the interviews. The head of the LLUR informed the 57 leaders about the goals of the interviews and asked them to participate on a voluntary and anonymous basis. Six women and 14 men, aged 31 to 63 years, agreed to participate. The average age in the sample was 50 years. General management experience ranged from 8 months to 33 years. The managers interviewed stated that they were supervising an average of 29 employees, ranging from 5 to 105. The interviewees lead multidisciplinary teams of technicians, engineers,

and scientists from different disciplines who address a broad variety of temporally changing tasks that often combine office work and fieldwork, such as on-site inspections. When the interviews took place, the teams were mainly occupied in socially distanced, remote work. The change had occurred quite abruptly. At the time of the interviews, the leaders were communicating with their employees mainly via telephone and email.

Data Collection and Analysis

The supervisors were interviewed in May 2020. We conducted semistructured interviews via telephone. In addition to the questions relevant to the research questions for this report, the project included questions on health-oriented leadership issues for a further research project. The shortest interview lasted 40 minutes, the longest 2 hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Ten interviewers conducted the interviews, adhering closely to the interview guideline in terms of content and sequence. To classify the options of leading transformationally during the transition phase, the interviewers gave a short, one-by-one description of the four facets of transformational leadership. For each of the facets, the interviewers asked the interviewees to name concrete situations in which these facets could be observed in their everyday behavior *before* COVID-19. Next, the interviewers asked the supervisors to reflect on obstacles that hinder and resources that help them to realize this leadership facet independent of the current situation. Subsequently, supervisors described how the conditions had changed since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. We analyzed the interviews using a structured content analytical procedure (Gioia et al., 2013), having developed categories according to the facets of transformational leadership. We further built categories inductively for the described options and constraints. The first 10 % of the passages were categorized by two coders. The codings were compared and discrepancies between the two coders were discussed and led to a modification of the final coding system.

In the next step, all transcribed sections were assigned to the respective categories. We calculated the intercoder reliability ICR, using 20 % of the content of the interviews (Campbell et al., 2013). A second coder categorized the answers of all the interview partners independently from the first coder (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). With an ICR of Cohen's $k = 0.89$ the agreement can be judged as very high (Campbell et al., 2013) (see ESM, Table E2).

Table 1. Options and constraints for transformational leadership in the public sector

	Idealized influence	Inspirational motivation	Intellectual stimulation	Individual consideration
Options in the public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Authentic communication• Role model (principles, rules, and relationships)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meaningful tasks• Organizational goals• Positive team climate• Participation• Empowerment• Personal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussions• Culture of error tolerance• Trustful relationship• Personal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Close contact• Supportive atmosphere• Situational reaction to needs
Constraints in the public sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time pressure• High workload• Restricted options of participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time pressure• High workload• Restricted options to participate• Restricted scope of action• Monotonous tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time pressure• Restricted scope of action• Low developmental background	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time pressure• High leadership span• Restricted scope of action

Findings

Options and Constraints for Transformational Leadership in the Public Sector

To answer the first research question, the supervisors evaluated the suitability of the four facets of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1995) for their leadership situation and gave examples of how the facets are realized. Furthermore, the supervisors described obstacles they encounter when trying to realize transformational leadership behavior. Table 1 gives an overview of the central findings, referring to the four facets of transformational leadership. The number of statements as well as an example for each of the categories are provided in the ESM (Table E1).

Most of the supervisors confirm that the facet of idealized influence fits their perception of their own leadership role. They place a high value on being authentic and talking openly, and describe the importance of their role model function regarding obeying the principles and rules of the public sector and building strong personal relationships. However, the leaders perceive limits in leadership in the sense of idealized influence. First, they often feel unable to act as role models because of a lack of time and high workload resulting from the large variety of tasks and strict deadlines. Second, some of the supervisors are skeptical about the options of building a strong vision in their leadership domain, as their options for participating in the vision-building process are restricted.

Concerning the dimension of inspirational motivation, most supervisors emphasize that convincing employees from the public sector of the meaningfulness of the tasks and the goals of the organization is an effective motivator. As further central motivating factors, the supervisors

mention a positive team climate as well as the empowerment of their employees by actively enabling participation, stimulating creative behaviors, giving room for maneuver, and offering a variety of tasks. Further, the supervisors support the development of their employees by providing feedback and showing individual appreciation. However, the supervisors also identify various obstacles to inspirational motivation. Many leaders describe that their subordinates often must postpone conceptional work because of a high degree of time pressure and workload. Additionally, the leaders do not feel that they have the chance to influence their employees' degree of participation. Decisions are often made on the political level, while the administration merely implements new regulations. The majority of the supervisors have difficulties in achieving a feeling of meaningfulness as their employees' recommendations are not considered by the decision-makers. Their scope of action is further diminished because of a lack of extrinsically motivating options other than feedback and social appreciation. Also, they report that monotonous, administrative tasks hinder motivation.

Most supervisors consider intellectual stimulation to be central to successful leadership in their situation. They discuss different perspectives with their employees in regular team meetings. They state that establishing a culture of error tolerance, by motivating the employees to try out new ways of dealing with their task and creating their own solutions, fosters successful task fulfillment. Many interviewees report that they give clear signals to their employees that they trust their judgment. A further aspect mentioned by some supervisors is that they encourage their employees to take part in development programs. However, almost half of the leaders note that the high number of regulations and requirements of the authorities restricts their degree of freedom and their employees' creative options. As further obstacles for

Table 2. Options and constraints for transformational leadership in the COVID-19 crisis

	Idealized influence	Inspirational motivation	Intellectual stimulation	Individual consideration
Options in the COVID-19 situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thoughtful communication• Reflection of emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Balance of work and family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Empowerment through autonomy	
Constraints in the COVID-19 situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of personal contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of personal contact• High effort to communicate• Restricted perception of the level of motivation• Restricted exchange between team members• High workload• Less structured processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restricted options to exchange ideas• Restricted options to discuss	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced casual contacts and team meetings• Restricted perception of need for support• Fewer options to help and cooperate

intellectual stimulation, they identify a perceived lack of need for cognition and a low level of general educational background among some of their employees. Time pressure is described as a major hindrance for trying out new ways of working.

All supervisors point out that the facet of individualized consideration is the central leadership principle in their organization. They try to remain in close contact with every employee and establish an atmosphere in which the subordinates feel open to communicating their wishes and needs. The leaders state that they react to the needs of the employees, give support situationally, and derive individual developmental steps. However, certain organizational conditions are perceived as specifically challenging for fulfilling individualized consideration. The supervisors are constantly under high time pressure. Furthermore, restrictions arise because of the large number of people in the team and the absence of options for personnel planning or assigning their staff to suitable tasks to ensure a good person-environment fit.

Options and Constraints for Transformational Leadership During the COVID-19 Crisis

The second intention of our study is to identify which additional constraints supervisors encountered during the abrupt switch to virtual teamwork during the COVID-19 crisis. This can help foster the transfer of transformational leadership behavior into a virtual team situation. Table 2 gives an overview of the central findings, referring to the four facets of transformational leadership.

Some of the leaders comment that there are positive aspects to the changes that occurred during the COVID-19 crisis regarding the first facet of transformational leadership (idealized influence). They describe the communication via telephone as more thoughtful and better

prepared, and they feel they are better able to reflect on their emotions before reacting. This enables them to act as better role models. Nonetheless, one-third of the supervisors feel less able to act as role models in the COVID-19 situation, because of the lack of personal contact.

When it comes to inspirational motivation, several supervisors identify a positive development regarding their motivational options. Certain employees have a higher motivation and can better combine family and work. Nonetheless, most supervisors see their options for inspirational motivation restricted because of a lack of personal contact and the greater effort required for communicating with their employees. They have difficulties detecting the employees' individual level of motivation, which in turn makes it harder to react to employees' demotivation and to inspire them through direct feedback and discussions. Another aspect hindering motivational inspiration is that the leaders feel restricted in enabling exchange between team members. Consequently, the team climate is not as motivating as before the implementation of virtual teamwork. Lastly, leaders state that dealing with the additional tasks of managing the COVID-19 situation leaves them less time to motivate the employees. Some supervisors say that they already perceive that their own as well as their employees' performance and fulfillment of their goals has deteriorated because of less structured work processes.

In the aftermath of the changes caused by COVID-19, some supervisors state that they still have enough means available to intellectually stimulate their employees and motivate them to be creative. One leader points out that, because of the distance, employees are forced to make more decisions on their own, as opportunities to ask the leader personally in passing do not exist. However, nearly half of the supervisors indicate that their opportunities for intellectual stimulation have diminished because of the restricted communication options. They state that they no

longer hold team meetings, limiting the exchange of stimulating ideas.

Half of the supervisors describe negative consequences. Because casual encounters in the office are not possible, there are fewer options for informal conversations, and leaders find it difficult to identify their employees' support needs. Furthermore, the employees are less inclined to talk about problems when using electronic forms of communication. Individual support on concrete tasks is harder as it is not possible to share documents simultaneously because of a lack of video conference tools. Especially the onboarding of new employees when socially distanced poses enormous challenges.

Discussion

The present study provides new insights into options of leading transformationally (Bass & Avolio, 1995) in the public sector during the radical change of working conditions triggered by the COVID-19 crisis. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to consider the perspective of supervisors on identifying preconditions and obstacles for implementing this leadership style in the public sector. We hope to contribute specifically to the literature on structural antecedents of transformational leadership. In particular, we broaden the understanding of conditions that foster the adaptation of traditional leadership concepts to virtual work settings.

The study evaluated the role of transformational leadership in the public sector from the perspective of supervisors. The leaders interviewed judged all four facets of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to be essential for leading in an effective and goal-oriented way in the public sector. The concept of transformational leadership seems to fit the challenges of leading in public administration. This assessment also confirms meta-analytic findings that the transformational leadership style is commonly applied and effective in the predominantly bureaucratic institutional leadership situation of the public sector (Lowe et al., 1996). Nonetheless, the current study reveals some fundamental organizational obstacles to transformational leadership in the public sector. Most importantly, supervisors are confronted with a high workload combined with time pressure as well as role conflicts, especially in middle-management positions. The interviewees' perception supports previous findings on leadership in the public sector which show an increasing workload (Skagert et al., 2008) and growing demands because of restructuring and downsizing (Christensen, 2001). Additionally, options of leading transformationally are restrained by reduced freedom of action, especially in

the area of personnel responsibility. Furthermore, this study identifies limited leadership opportunities for delegating intrinsically motivating tasks and enabling participation in decision-making processes. This finding underpins previous observations in the public sector, revealing a low scope of authority, especially regarding personnel administration (Orazi et al., 2013). However, the scope of authority is particularly important in promoting self-determination and enabling effective change processes (Gagné et al., 2000).

For the first time, the study discloses that one of the most central paths toward realizing all facets of transformational leadership in the public sector is through direct, personal communication and strong relationships between team members and their leaders. However, precisely this instrument cannot be adapted to the virtual work setting during the COVID-19 crisis. The supervisors interviewed highlight communicative problems as the central obstacle to the transfer of transformational leadership style to the new working arrangements. One reason for their difficulties in keeping up the valuable close connection to their employees is that they possess neither the authorization nor the technical equipment for leading video conferences. This also confirms the present state of knowledge on virtual leadership. The standard of the available technological equipment plays a decisive role in the development of good leadership, trust, social exchange, and effectiveness when teams work together virtually.

Practical Implications

The study gives valuable insights into current leadership conditions in the public sector. Three main implications can be derived from the findings. First, the results help to improve the preconditions for realizing transformational leadership in the public sector. Second, based on the findings, suggestions may be made on how to transfer the hitherto successful transformational leadership practices to the virtual leadership setting. Third, the results uncover structural and organizational conditions that can harness the potentials of transformational leadership for change effectiveness in the public sector.

Our results show that leaders often feel unable to demonstrate transformational leadership behavior because of a high workload and time pressure. Against the background of the high value of this leadership style for effective leadership, especially in times of change and crisis, an important step would be to consider reducing the workload of the supervisors. As Wallin et al. (2014) show, reducing the management span of control is a particularly effective way of reducing demands and

strains on the supervisors in the public sector. A second step toward improving leadership conditions that would enable supervisors to lead transformationally is to increase the leaders' scope of action. The interviewees expect that more flexibility and control options regarding personnel planning and task allocation would improve their ability to act transformationally. Third, the findings indicate that efforts to decrease the formalization and centralization of decision-making processes and to enable the greater participation of administrative employees and their leaders in these processes would further enhance transformational leadership culture.

Transformational leadership has proved beneficial for the success of virtual teams (Eisenberg et al., 2019). The results of this study give first recommendations from the perspective of supervisors on how to ameliorate leadership options in this context. The first basic requirement is to provide proper technical equipment for team communication in virtual settings. The development of secure and modern solutions for public administration should be given high priority. Second, the supervisors need to be offered training on how to communicate, give feedback, identify strains and motivators, and support employees via electronic forms of communication. The supervisors in this study felt that they were less able to maintain their close relationships with employees in a virtual context. The results of this study emphasize the importance of both a good team climate and the feeling of having common goals and visions as motivators in the public sector. In a virtual context, new team processes and routines for inspirational exchange must be established. This study reveals that supervisors in the public sector need support in these duties.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, change processes had already become increasingly necessary in the public sector because of changing client demands and new options emerging from technological innovations, but also triggered by the financial crisis (Kuipers et al., 2014). In the future, social and economic disruption will remain a permanent companion because of ensuing turbulent events, such as climate change, terrorist threats, and waves of migration (Ansell & Trondal, 2018). As Ansell et al. (2020) point out, the public sector is well advised to make use of the experiences made during this current crisis. Our results give first insights into possible ways of preparing the public sector for a robust reaction to such turbulences. The leaders evaluate the options of greater participation in decision-making processes, more empowering work conditions, and developmental perspectives for their employees as central to providing inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. However, they also ascertain that these resources are scarce in public administration, which hinders them in realizing trans-

formational leadership behavior. Our findings allow the conclusion that more empowerment options, such as sharing responsibilities in teams via distributed leadership concepts, could prove to be promising paths to more innovativeness and readiness for change in public administration.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the qualitative design of the study enriches the current research about antecedents of transformational leadership, it bears some risks for the validity of the findings. First, the answers of the participants could be distorted by a social desirability bias (Richman et al., 1999), leading to a decreased heterogeneity of the answers and an overestimation of both the positive attitudes of the participants toward a transformational leadership style and the status of its implementation. Second, data quality could be limited by the retrospective assessment of leadership behaviors (Motheral et al., 2003). In turn, the results could be selective and influenced by hindsight or attributional biases (Huber & Power, 1985), which might lead to an overestimation of organizational influences on the inability to react to the crisis, while internal influence might be diminished in hindsight. Furthermore, leaders might expect political advantages from the way they depict their own leadership situation. The interviewers were trained to adhere to the structure of the interview guideline. We further intended to reduce these biases by encouraging the leaders to elaborate on their responses and to give concrete examples of typical situations and behaviors (see Huber & Power, 1985). In future studies, the results should be additionally validated by applying multimethod and multisource approaches.

While this study applied a qualitative approach to identify the main options and constraints of transformational leadership in an exploratory way, future studies could further systematically analyze the antecedents of transformational leadership during change processes in the specific context of the public sector in quantitative longitudinal studies. In line with van Knippenberg and Sitkin's (2013) observation, some of the statements could not clearly be assigned to only one of the facets of transformational leadership unambiguously. There still is a need for further studies to sharpen the clarity of the constructs.

Because this study took place in only one department of the Schleswig-Holstein administration, the transferability of the results to other institutions in the public sector should further be examined. Compared to the private

sector, the context of change processes in the public sector is strongly determined by political influences and a complex stakeholder field (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Therefore, it remains unclear whether the identified preconditions for transformational leadership in the COVID-19 crisis can be transferred to crisis situations in the private sector.

In the future, the leadership role in public sector organizations will become even more demanding because of the upcoming digitization developments (Ansell et al., 2020). Leaders will have to meet increasingly complex requirements, foster and enable collaboration with other departments, and manage both ethical and technical challenges (Tizard, 2012). As Kuipers et al. (2014) point out, there is a research gap regarding the understanding of process variables that ensure successful change management in the public sector. We call for more studies to verify whether the preconditions for transformational leadership identified during the COVID-19 crisis can be deemed central in other types of crises and change management processes, regarding different outcomes.

Electronic Supplementary Material

The electronic supplementary material is available with the online version of the article at <https://doi.org/10.1026/0932-4089/a000367>

ESM 1. Table E1 und E2

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