


# Investigating the Role of Influential Factors on Transformational Organizational Leadership with a Strategic Thinking Approach and Prevention of Elitism Rejection (Case Study: Bank Melli Iran)



Hossein Mokhberi<sup>1</sup>, Rashid Zolfaghari Zafarani<sup>2,\*</sup> and Behzad Mashali<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Public Administration, Roudehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; 

<sup>2</sup> Department of Public Administration, Roudehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran; 

<sup>3</sup> Department of Industrial Management, Faculty of Humanities, University of Science and Culture, Tehran, Iran; 

\* Correspondence: Rashid\_zo@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to investigate the role of influential factors on transformational organizational leadership with a strategic thinking approach and prevention of elitism rejection (Case Study: Bank Melli Iran). In this regard, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the factors influencing transformational organizational leadership. The study population included employees of Bank Melli Iran with at least a bachelor's degree. The statistical population consisted of 5,314 individuals, and based on Krejcie and Morgan's table, the sample size was determined to be 361 individuals. The data collection tool was a questionnaire, whose content validity was confirmed by experts, and its construct validity and structure were verified through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using SmartPLS software. The reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Additionally, the Friedman test was applied in SPSS software for ranking the components and indicators. For data analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess normality, and CFA along with structural equation modeling were used to validate the model in SmartPLS. The results indicated that strategic thinking in leadership and the motivation to foster innovation lead to the creation of organizational opportunities and the provision of resources and support for talents. This, in turn, facilitates employee engagement and participation, enhancing their expertise and skill levels. Furthermore, the component ranking results revealed that "supporting talents and providing resources" received the highest rank, while "creating organizational opportunities" was ranked lowest by the statistical sample.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Strategic Thinking, Elitism Rejection.

## 1. Introduction

Robbins and Coulter (2017) defined leadership as the process of guiding a group and influencing it to achieve its objectives [1]. This is essentially what leaders do. Leaders with emotional intelligence can positively influence employee outcomes through self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management [2].

Leadership styles represent recurring patterns of behavior exhibited by leaders [3]. Leaders tend to sustain interaction and engagement among team members and interact with various personalities, thus laying a foundation for the study of transformational leadership as well as transactional leadership styles [4]. Individualized

consideration refers to leaders' special attention to the needs of followers, appreciation of high performance, and efforts to align individual goals with organizational objectives [5]. Through intellectual stimulation, a leader motivates followers to think creatively and logically before taking action, with an emphasis on problem-solving. Intellectual stimulation involves challenging followers to develop new and diverse solutions to problems [6]. Leadership is one of the most important factors in motivating employees in the workplace, leading to improved performance [7].

Gyanchandani (2017) demonstrated that leaders serve as role models for their followers, inspiring them through the development of a strong organizational culture and value system. Therefore, transformational leaders encourage followers to work more creatively, which impacts overall productivity and organizational outcomes [8]. The more leadership and decision-making styles in organizations shift toward a transformational orientation, the more likely they are to yield positive results due to enhanced employee and organizational productivity [9]. The rapid and complex transformations of the present era have had a profound impact on organizational performance. For organizations to sustain operations and remain competitive, they need continuous transformation and alignment with their environment. One factor that can support organizations in initiating such transformations is transformational leadership. In reality, without transformational leaders, organizational performance significantly weakens, making it difficult for organizations to respond to both internal and external environments [10].

Transformational leadership is a type of leadership in which the individual does not merely direct team members toward right or wrong actions. Instead, they work collaboratively with the team to identify potential opportunities and challenges and develop strategies accordingly [11, 12]. According to Bass and Avolio, three characteristics define transformational leaders. First, there is an increased awareness of the importance of processes and efforts. Second, support fosters prioritization of community interests over personal gain. Third, the follower is inspired to progress toward self-esteem and higher levels of development [13]. Transformational leadership is a style that helps leaders foster organizationally supportive behaviors among employees, even beyond their personal interests [14, 15]. Tabassi et al. (2017) argued that transformational leadership can significantly impact organizational performance through the environment and conditions created by leaders in the workplace—such as interpersonal communication, member participation, responsibility and accountability, conflict and competition, and interpersonal relationships [16]. Transformational leadership is one of the paradigms of leadership aimed at improving organizational performance in today's turbulent environment by motivating employees and developing an organizational culture in which ethical practices become a behavioral norm. Transformational leaders shape a vision of a promising and necessary future [14, 17].

Without effective transformational leaders, it is predicted that organizations will be less likely to achieve superior or even satisfactory performance when facing significant challenges [18]. Leadership research and studies date back to the 1970s. Administrative managers with key leadership skills can enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The theory of transformational leadership emerged to distinguish leaders who establish strong and motivational relationships with subordinates from those who primarily focus on exchange or transactional approaches to achieve results [18]. Transformational leaders are capable of directing individuals to serve the goals of their organizations rather than merely pursuing their personal interests [19]. In addition, these leaders help followers develop greater ambition by focusing on long-term organizational objectives [20]. Overall, transformational leadership is a process in which leaders and followers continually strive to elevate each other's spiritual energy and motivational capacity [21], thereby enhancing company performance [22]. Conversely, ineffective leadership can hinder human capital development and negatively affect employee productivity [20].

On the other hand, if managers provide employees with the necessary training, opportunities, and resources — while also fostering motivation—they can elicit the best performance from their employees [23]. The critical responsibility of management and leadership must be entrusted to individuals who possess specific personality traits and employ appropriate leadership and management styles. By involving employees in decision-making and goal-setting processes, such leaders instill a sense of responsibility and stimulate greater employee efforts to achieve organizational goals [24]. Employee performance plays a vital role in achieving company objectives, whether in the public or private sector. The quality of leader–employee relationships influences employee attitudes and, over time, affects their performance [25]. Elites are individuals with certain superior qualities and potential expertise, such as distinguished lineage, intrinsic value or quality, intelligence, wealth, advanced education or experience, or other traits that render them more influential or authoritative than others. Their views on specific issues should be taken more seriously, and their opinions are generally more beneficial to society. Their extraordinary skills, abilities, or wisdom make them particularly suited for leadership [26]. Elitism is the belief or tendency that some individuals possess exceptional traits and potential expertise that make their influence or authority greater than others. Their viewpoints should be valued more highly, as they are more likely to benefit society. Their exceptional capabilities render them uniquely qualified for leadership [26]. The flight of elites becomes a social problem when its long-term detrimental effects burden the fabric of society—especially in current circumstances, where scientific understanding of social dimensions and solving societal problems are essential for progress. Elite migration from underdeveloped provinces hampers national and regional growth and development. Due to a lack of capital and numerous other factors in these areas, a substantial portion of elite human resources remains underdeveloped. Others, due to limited opportunities, consider migrating to other regions [27]. This perspective is referred to as epistocracy [28]. Despite the need to benefit from elite talent in organizations, this potential is often neglected in practice. Elitism rejection is not limited to organizational frameworks; it sometimes occurs at the national level and, according to some theoretical claims, can be rooted in history. For instance, it has been claimed that in Iran, economic, political, and social structures are configured in such a way that elites fail to reform existing conditions, leading to systemic exclusion of elites [29]. Today, in every organization, human capital is one of the most critical resources available to managers. Optimal utilization of this resource is a key determinant of organizational efficiency and effectiveness [30]. Furthermore, the phenomenon of elite and specialist migration from the country — arising from economic, cultural, social, and political factors in Iranian society — has had detrimental effects on the processes of economic, political, and social development. Understanding the motivations behind elite migration and identifying its contributing factors—including elitism rejection—along with exploring practical solutions to mitigate it, are increasingly essential. Given the importance of transformational leadership in advancing and increasing organizational productivity, attention to its development has grown. Different approaches have been taken to promote transformational leadership. Considering current changes and advancements, and the high productivity and facilitative role of elites in organizational performance, there is a growing need to adopt transformational leadership approaches that enhance productivity and prevent elitism rejection [26].

In recent years, the banking industry worldwide has undergone significant transformation, with electronic banking giving way to virtual banking. In this area, Iran has not made sufficient progress. Meanwhile, many specialized and creative personnel in Iranian organizations could contribute to their institution's advancement, but due to poor managerial judgment and lack of expertise and knowledge, the environment is not conducive to their growth. It appears that in recent years, elitism and elite development have remained merely rhetorical due to neglect or disregard. This suggests that advocacy for meritocracy remains largely superficial. Undoubtedly, human

resources are the most valuable asset of any organization. As people spend most of their lives in or in relation to organizations, issues such as selecting leadership styles that affect employee productivity are critical for achieving organizational goals and should be given proper attention. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of influential factors on transformational organizational leadership with a strategic thinking approach and the prevention of elitism rejection (Case Study: Bank Melli Iran).

## 2. Methodology

The present study is an applied research project, as its findings can be practically implemented in similar organizations. The employed method is descriptive-analytical, using confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis within the framework of structural equation modeling (SEM). In the theoretical section, a library method was used (including articles, internet texts, books, etc.), while the required data were collected through field methods using a questionnaire.

The statistical population consisted of 5,314 employees of Bank Melli Iran. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's table, the sample size was determined to be 361 individuals. The data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire, whose content and face validity were confirmed by experts using the Delphi technique, and whose construct and structural validity were verified using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in SmartPLS software. Its reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient in SPSS software.

For data analysis, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to assess normality, the Friedman test was applied to prioritize components and indicators, and structural equation modeling was employed in SmartPLS for path analysis and model validation.

## 3. Findings and Results

Descriptive statistics show that among the respondents to the questionnaire, 86.7% were male and 13.3% were female. The age group of 31 to 40 years had the highest frequency at 60.4%, while the age group of 51 to 60 years had the lowest frequency at 1.1%. The highest educational frequency belonged to those with a master's degree at 53.5%, and the lowest to those with a doctorate at 16.9%. The majority of respondents were married.

Regarding the descriptive statistics of the main variables in the conceptual model, it can be stated that all variables had an acceptable average value. It is worth noting that an acceptable average is greater than 3, and if a variable falls within this range, it is considered to be in a favorable state in the statistical population.

In the inferential statistics section, the normality of the variables was first assessed. Accordingly, this assumption was tested for all research variables.

**Table 1. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test for Normality of Research Variables**

Variable	Strategic Thinking	Motivation for Transformation	Creating Organizational Opportunities	Supportive Organizational Environment	Talent Support and Resource Provision	Skills, Expertise, and Competence	Interaction and Participation	Transformational Organizational Leadership
Test Statistic	0.106	0.069	0.079	0.094	0.102	0.089	0.136	0.108
Significance Level	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

According to the significance levels in the table above, all values are 0.000, which are less than 0.05. Therefore, the data distribution significantly differs from a normal distribution. As a result, the data are non-normal, and non-parametric tests should be used for inferential analysis.

It is important to note that since SmartPLS software is not sensitive to data distribution, it can be used for path analysis and model validation.

The first criterion examined in reflective measurement models is internal consistency reliability. The traditional metric for assessing this is Cronbach's alpha, which estimates reliability based on internal correlations among indicators. If Cronbach's alpha exceeds 0.70, internal consistency and unidimensionality of the block are confirmed. In addition to Cronbach's alpha, PLS path models also use composite reliability to assess internal consistency. If the value of this index exceeds 0.70, composite reliability is also confirmed. The relevant results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha**

Research Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Motivation for Transformation	0.904473	0.919111
Creating Organizational Opportunities	0.900077	0.920280
Interaction and Participation	0.774448	0.838435
Strategic Thinking	0.852543	0.882680
Talent Support	0.913889	0.927991
Transformational Leadership	0.798889	0.853449
Supportive Organizational Environment	0.882282	0.908625
Skills and Expertise	0.889834	0.912443

As shown, the values obtained for both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are all greater than 0.70, indicating desirable reliability.

The most important type of validity assessed to confirm measurement models is convergent validity. Convergent validity means that a set of indicators explain the underlying construct.

**Table 3. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**

Construct	AVE
Motivation for Transformation	0.569606
Creating Organizational Opportunities	0.692655
Interaction and Participation	0.536876
Strategic Thinking	0.534863
Talent Support	0.642012
Transformational Leadership	0.537193
Supportive Organizational Environment	0.688005
Skills and Expertise	0.667927

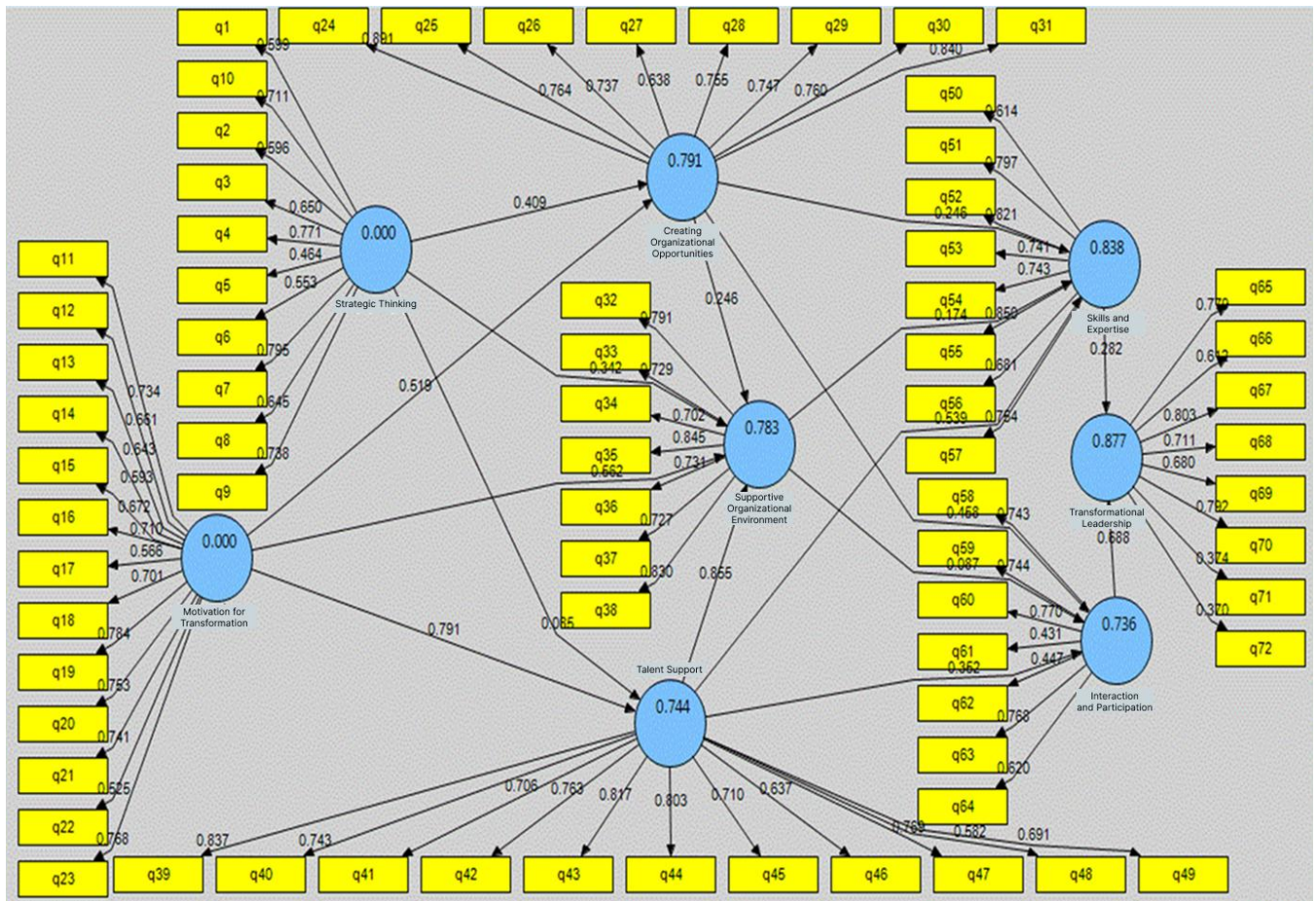
As shown in the table above, the AVE value for all latent variables exceeds 0.50. Therefore, the convergent validity of the measurement models is considered desirable.

The overall model fit index (GOF) is calculated as the geometric mean of  $R^2$  and average shared variance. The GOF value of 0.685 indicates the overall goodness of fit for the model. Since this value is greater than 0.35, it can be concluded that the model fit is acceptable. Thus, the overall model is validated.

To evaluate the overall research model, structural equation modeling (SEM) was also used. According to the significance level of 0.05, the critical value must be greater than 1.96; any parameter value below this threshold is not considered significant in the model. Similarly, p-values less than 0.05 indicate a significant difference between

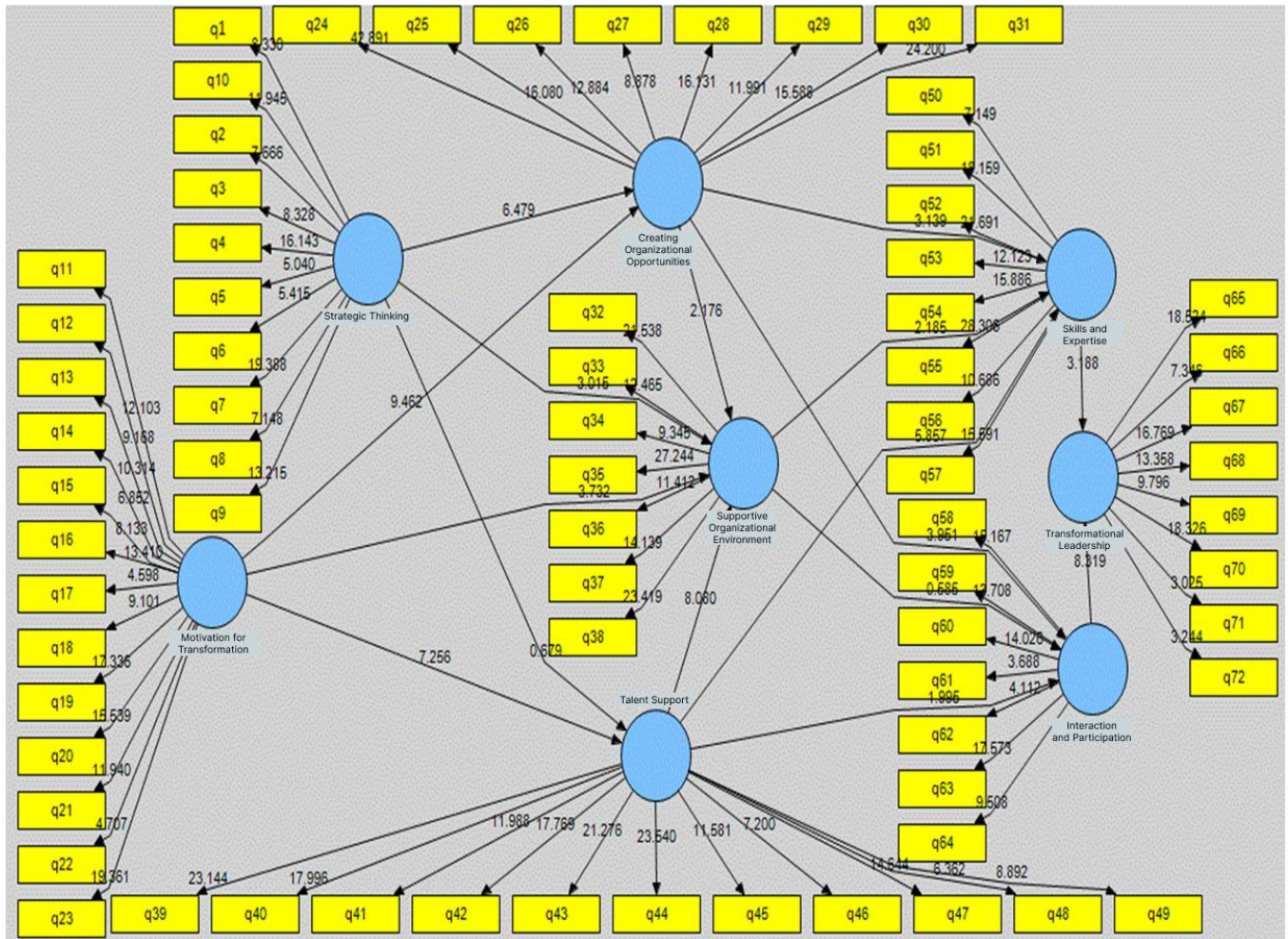


the estimated regression weights and zero at the 95% confidence level. The output of the conceptual model is illustrated using SmartPLS software in Figures (1) and (2).



**Figure 1. Measurement of the Overall Model and Hypothesis Results (Standardized Form)**

The following figure shows the significance levels of the path coefficients. Significance levels greater than 1.96 or less than -1.96 are considered acceptable.



**Figure 2. Measurement of the Overall Model and Hypothesis Results (Significance Form)**

As illustrated in the figure, most path coefficients demonstrate acceptable significance levels, as they exceed the critical value of 1.96.

To examine the causal relationships among the research variables and test the hypotheses, path analysis was used. A summary of the hypothesis testing results is presented in Table 4:

**Table 4. Summary of Hypothesis Results**

Path	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Coefficient	T-Value	Result
1 to 3	Strategic Thinking in Leadership	Creating Organizational Opportunities	0.409	6.479	Confirmed
		Supportive Organizational Environment	0.342	3.015	Confirmed
		Talent Support and Resource Provision	0.085	0.675	Rejected
4 to 6	Motivation for Transformation and Innovation	Creating Organizational Opportunities	0.519	9.469	Confirmed
		Supportive Organizational Environment	0.662	3.732	Confirmed
		Talent Support and Resource Provision	0.791	7.256	Confirmed
7 to 9	Creating Organizational Opportunities	Skills, Expertise, and Competence	0.246	3.129	Confirmed
		Interaction and Participation with Employees	0.458	2.185	Confirmed
		Supportive Organizational Environment	0.246	3.951	Confirmed
10 to 11	Supportive Organizational Environment	Skills, Expertise, and Competence	0.174	2.185	Confirmed
		Interaction and Participation with Employees	0.087	0.586	Rejected



12 to 14	Talent Support and Resource Provision	Supportive Organizational Environment	0.855	8.060	Confirmed
		Skills, Expertise, and Competence	0.539	5.857	Confirmed
		Interaction and Participation with Employees	0.352	1.995	Confirmed
15	Skills, Expertise, and Competence	Transformational Organizational Leadership	0.282	3.188	Confirmed
16	Interaction and Participation with Employees	Transformational Organizational Leadership	0.688	8.319	Confirmed

Based on the table above, Hypotheses 3 and 11 have T-values lower than 1.96, indicating a lack of statistical significance. Thus, these hypotheses are rejected. All other hypotheses, with T-values exceeding 1.96, are confirmed.

The Friedman test was used to rank the components, as shown in Table 5:

**Table 5. Component Ranking**

Components	Rank
Strategic Thinking in Leadership	4.47
Motivation for Transformation and Innovation	4.67
Creating Organizational Opportunities	3.62
Supportive Organizational Environment	4.05
Talent Support and Resource Provision	5.03
Skills, Expertise, and Competence	4.64
Interaction and Participation with Employees	4.67
Transformational Organizational Leadership	4.85
Chi-square Test Statistic	95.688
Significance	0.000

According to the Friedman test significance level, which is 0.000 and less than 0.05, the components show significant differences from one another. The results also indicate that “Talent Support and Resource Provision” received the highest rank, while “Creating Organizational Opportunities” received the lowest rank based on the statistical sample.

The prioritization of components in descending order is as follows:

1. Talent Support and Resource Provision
2. Transformational Organizational Leadership
3. Interaction and Participation with Employees
4. Motivation for Transformation and Innovation
5. Skills, Expertise, and Competence
6. Strategic Thinking in Leadership
7. Supportive Organizational Environment
8. Creating Organizational Opportunities

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study, which aimed to investigate the role of influential factors on transformational organizational leadership with a strategic thinking approach and the prevention of elitism rejection, provide strong empirical evidence for the proposed model. Out of the sixteen research hypotheses, fourteen were confirmed through structural equation modeling, supporting the significance of the relationships among strategic thinking in



leadership, motivation for innovation, organizational environment, employee interaction, and transformational leadership.

The results confirmed that strategic thinking in leadership significantly influences the creation of organizational opportunities and the development of a suitable organizational environment. These findings align with previous studies that emphasized the importance of strategic foresight in guiding organizations through transformation and positioning them to take advantage of emerging opportunities [31]. However, the lack of significant influence of strategic thinking on talent support and resource provision suggests that strategic thinking alone may not be sufficient for empowering employees unless supported by practical policies and inclusive managerial structures.

Motivation for innovation and transformation demonstrated a strong positive impact on creating organizational opportunities, enhancing the organizational environment, and increasing support for talents and resource provision. These findings resonate with the study by Ekhsan and Setiawan (2021), which showed that transformational leadership positively affects employee motivation and performance. Their study also emphasized that employee motivation acts as a key mediator between leadership and productivity [25]—supporting the central role of motivation in enabling innovation and facilitating supportive organizational mechanisms.

The hypothesis testing further indicated that the creation of organizational opportunities significantly affects employee skill development, interaction, and the overall organizational climate. These findings reinforce the idea that fostering innovation-friendly spaces and reducing organizational rigidity promotes the development of capabilities that are vital for long-term success. Similarly, the organizational environment was found to have a direct impact on skills development but did not significantly influence employee interaction and participation. This result suggests that while structural factors and workplace conditions can enable competence building, fostering participation may require more relational and leadership-centered interventions.

Support for talent and the provision of resources emerged as a powerful predictor of a favorable organizational environment, employee competence, and interaction. The findings are consistent with the study by Bernarto et al. (2020), which demonstrated that perceived organizational support enhances job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. In the context of the present research, talent support not only ranked as the highest priority in the Friedman test but also showed the strongest path coefficients in SEM analysis—highlighting its central role in organizational transformation.

The final paths analyzed in the model showed that both employee competence and participation significantly contribute to transformational organizational leadership. These results support the study by Farhudi and Ghanbarinia (2020), which emphasized the reciprocal dynamic between leaders and followers in enhancing motivation and performance. Furthermore, transformational leadership was positively influenced by organizational mechanisms that promote engagement and skill-building, in line with the findings of Noghrehhoo et al. (2020), who argued that leadership indirectly affects performance through its impact on motivation and the work environment.

These findings are further supported by the research of Qojali and Bahmani (2017), who highlighted the role of leadership in employee empowerment, especially through idealized influence and intellectual stimulation—two key aspects of transformational leadership. Their study emphasized the importance of equipping managers with the necessary leadership competencies to foster empowerment [32], which complements the current findings that associate transformational leadership with talent support, competence, and interaction.

The overall model fit was also verified, with a goodness-of-fit index (GOF) of 0.685, confirming that the research model has an acceptable fit. This high level of model validity indicates that the proposed relationships between constructs accurately reflect the reality of transformational leadership in the case organization.

One limitation of this study lies in its sampling scope, which was restricted to employees of Bank Melli Iran. While the sample size was statistically adequate, the findings may not be generalizable to other organizations, especially private-sector banks or non-banking institutions. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer long-term causal relationships. The use of self-reported questionnaires may also introduce response bias, as participants may have provided socially desirable answers rather than fully objective responses.

Future studies could replicate this research in both public and private banking institutions and compare the findings to identify sector-specific dynamics. It would also be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies to capture changes in leadership practices over time and evaluate the long-term impact of transformational leadership on organizational performance. Moreover, future research could focus on designing models that specifically address organizational elitism rejection, exploring its effects on productivity, innovation, and employee retention. Developing models of productivity management that incorporate elite development as a strategic focus may further enrich the literature. Finally, examining the impact of different leadership styles on elite development and organizational performance could offer more nuanced insights into effective leadership practices.

Organizations should enhance employee engagement by involving them in decision-making and responding to their needs. They should prioritize human resource development in line with entrepreneurial goals, selecting leaders with honesty, emotional intelligence, and team-building capabilities.

Leaders must provide a clear, forward-looking vision and create motivation for transformation. They should initiate and manage change effectively while forming strong, motivational relationships with employees.

They should be proactive in identifying threats and weaknesses, transforming them into strengths and opportunities, and promoting optimistic perspectives on organizational challenges. Research and training initiatives should be leveraged to empower employees, create a supportive work environment, and meet job-related needs.

Leaders must implement customer-centric operational plans and treat ethical conduct as a behavioral norm. The organization should maintain resilience to both internal and external environmental changes.

Managers should provide appropriate training and resources aligned with employees' talents and focus on motivation enhancement. Leaders must recognize the influence of elites, support their initiatives, and optimize resource use, including in rural and underserved regions.

Organizations should appoint creative, skilled professionals and encourage a meritocratic culture. Talent and expertise should be leveraged as a core strategy for organizational growth, and qualified employees must be included in decision-making processes.

Participation and interaction between leaders and employees should be prioritized. Transparency and trust should underpin all relationships, with strong communication channels fostering enhanced productivity.

Finally, employees should be given opportunities to rise through the organizational hierarchy. Leaders should support elite advancement, avoid forced stagnation, and make human capital development a strategic priority, with emotional intelligence as a key leadership trait to improve productivity through relationship management and social awareness.

## **Authors' Contributions**

Authors equally contributed to this article.

### **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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