“Leadership and social responsibility from the perspective of gender”

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LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER

Abstract

This study established the relationship between transformational leadership and social responsibility practices in women's organizations that produce special coffees in southern Colombia. To measure these variables using Likert scales, two questionnaires were applied: the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X short version (MLQ-5X) to measure transformational leadership, and a tool developed by the researchers to measure social responsibility. Cronbach's Alpha (α) values for the two variables showed excellent consistency (α = 0.95 and 0.90 for transformational leadership and social responsibility, respectively). For the analysis of the information, the structural equation model was used to validate the hypothesis using the SPSS AMOS software. The results indicate a significant and positive correlation between the transformational leadership practices and the perception of social responsibility, especially in the dimensions of idealized influence (behavior and attributed) and intellectual stimulation of transformational leadership, and in the dimensions of labor issues and social responsibility. These findings are consistent with existing literature, and complement aspects not addressed before (e.g. correlation between transformational leadership and social responsibility practices in women's organizations) in the framework of gender in non-conventional organizations.

Keywords coffee associations, women, transformational leadership, social responsibility, southern Colombia

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INTRODUCTION

Despite being a widely studied topic, transformational leadership has become one of the most relevant and impactful approaches regarding research (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) and management (Bono & Judge, 2004). Having received plenty of attention during the last three decades, it constitutes one of the most dominant theories of leadership (Mhatre & Riggio, 2014). This is mainly due to the relationship that research has shown between this kind of leadership and employee attitudes and behavior in particular, and the organization in general (Abbasi, 2017; Cóndor et al., 2018). Recent studies relate managers' transformational leadership style with positive results and behaviors regarding aspects such as employee attitude (Lee et al., 2013), loyalty (Lee, 2005), organizational commitment (Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, & Euwema, 2018; Cole & Bedeian, 2007), creativity and innovation (Karaman, Bayrak, Burak, & Rivera, 2008; Mohamed, 2016), performance (Aga et al., 2016; Chairina, Sularso, Tobing, & Irawan, 2019), social responsibility (Khan et al., 2019; Luu, 2012), among others. Several recent studies have sought to confirm the relationship between transformational leadership and social responsibility, and, although there is some empirical and theoretical evidence, it is necessary to continue strengthening it. Gender (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2017; Fiebig & Christopher, 2018) and small organizations (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010) are aspects scarcely addressed in this matter, therefore, they must be studied.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leadership refers to a set of leadership behaviors that transform the needs of their followers through self-realization, stimulating their expectations to higher levels. Transformation is based on the premise that transformational leadership fosters employee development and increases followers' motivation and morale (Burns, 1978). According to these approaches, transformational leaders possess four attributes or dimensions of behavior: idealized influence (which some authors call charisma), inspiring motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Idealized influence describes leaders who have great power and encouragement to be role models for their followers. Transformational leaders have high standards of moral and ethical conduct and provide a vision and sense of mission for followers. Some subsequent studies classify idealized influence as attributed or behavior (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The second dimension, inspiring motivation, involves the stimulation and increase of motivation beyond original expectations. The leader articulates an attractive vision for followers and conveys optimism about future goals. On the other hand, intellectual stimulation represents a leadership that encourages followers to think about old problems in new ways, providing them with autonomy and empowerment at work; in other words, it seeks to increase follower awareness about issues, and influence them to develop innovative or creative approaches in their solution (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Finally, the dimension of individualized consideration involves the support and receptivity of the leader facing followers' individual needs, as well as their role as mentors to each one (Avolio et al., 2004). Some studies have associated transformational leadership more with women than with men, because it emphasizes intellectual and social skills, and creativity, rather than the desire to exercise control, power and reward, the latter, generally linked to masculine styles (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010).

Social responsibility (SR) has recently become a field of interest (Serenko & Bontis, 2009). There are multiple studies that have been carried out with different purposes, e.g., to measure their practices (Wood, 2010), or their impact on the organization's financial performance and their operationalization (Padilla et al., 2017), to establish their links with organizational variables (Aguinis, 2011), etc. Based on the institutional approach, companies comply with SR through pressure from interested groups (Stevens et al., 2005), which may well be shareholders (David et al., 2007), consumers (Christmann & Taylor, 2006), media (Weaver et al., 1999), local community (Marquis et al., 2007), or interest groups (Greening & Gray, 1994). Authors from organizational approaches consider that companies participate in SR for instrumental reasons (Bansal & Roth, 2000). There are business aspects that influence responsible initiatives such as having a mission and related values or an equitable and committed management (Marcus & Anderson, 2006). Analysis at the individual level includes aspects linked to leader or manager capacities (Luque et al., 2008), as well as collaborators' needs (Aguilera et al., 2007). There is a growing interest in conducting studies of SR practices in small businesses given their particular characteristics in social and environmental matters (Johnson & Schaltegger, 2016), even proposing models such as Small Business Social Responsibility (SBSR) (Lepoutre & Heene, 2006). Faced with the importance of gender in SR, recent research has shown that organizations with women in their boards of directors or as managers develop higher levels of perception and SR practices, identifying more positive attitudes than with men, especially regarding employees (Larrieta et al., 2015).

The few investigations on the subject show that transformational leadership is associated with a high level of SR (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010), with the understanding that managers, particularly in leading positions, can influence organizations' SR (Waldman & Siegel, 2008). Maak et al. (2016) affirm that organizations can be understood as a reflection of their top executives and, therefore, the focus of an organization is influenced by its managers' leadership style (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2017). Research shows that transformational leadership is directly or indirectly linked to positive perceptions of SR and is implemented to balance the interests of the majority of stakeholders. Waldman et al. (2006) found that visionary leadership is associated with certain values that managers often apply in decision-making processes relevant to SR.

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In addition, Goswami et al. (2018) showed empirical evidence of the role of transformational leadership as a mediator between the perceptions of social responsibility and the organizational citizen behavior of collaborators. Furthermore, Manzoor et al. (2019) and Khan et al. (2019) highlighted the moderating role of social responsibility in the relationship between transformational leadership and variables such as job performance and innovation.

In summary, of the leadership approaches, especially those that emerged from the 1980s, transformational leadership seems to be of particular importance to explain the link between integrity and SR practices, especially in its dimensions of intellectual stimulation, and motivational inspiration (Waddock & Bodwell, 2007). This study seeks to determine the relationship between transformational leadership and social responsibility in organizations of women producers of differentiated coffees, considering that few studies contemplate organizations composed exclusively of women in developing countries' rural areas. In the particular case of Colombia, coffee economic activity was selected in this study, because it has a great influence on the economic and social stability of the country. More than 80% of the coffee's Colombian national production goes to international trade. In addition, Colombia ranks third in global coffee production (in volume) and first in quality in the category of "differentiated coffees" (Quintero & Rosales, 2014), generating an income for the country of about 3,000 million dollars per year for this concept (Ocampo & Álvarez, 2017). Furthermore, women associations of differentiated coffee producers were selected, since this has been a successful strategy for the segment of differentiated coffees. This is explained by the fact that they are groups of women engaged in an activity that historically has been exclusive of men. Women associations have also managed to give a shift to a sector that focused on producing ordinary coffees at uncompetitive prices towards a highly valued segment in international markets, at prices that are significantly higher.

For the above, the following hypothesis is posed: transformational leadership is significantly and positively related to social responsibility in the associations of women producing differentiated coffees.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology is described in four subsections: first, research type; second, the participants and some of their sociodemographic characteristics; third, study variables and their components; and, finally, the software for the analysis of information.

2.1. Type of research

A transversal, correlational and quantitative research was carried out (Hernández et al., 2010) to study the relationship between transformational leadership and SR practices developed in associations of women producing specialty coffees in southern Colombia.

2.2. Sample

Research was carried out in organizations of women producing specialty coffees in southern Colombia. 450 surveys were applied to their associates in 16 legally constituted organizations. The instruments were applied to elderly women associated with a special coffee production organization, who did not occupy administrative or management positions within them. Each association consists of an average of 40 to 50 women producers. The response rate per association was approximately 70%. Moreover, these associations generally operate through the sale of differentiated coffees under certain certifications such as Fair Trade (FLO), UTZ Certified or Rainforest Allience, among others.

The sample consisted exclusively of women aged between 26 and 80 years. 35% of women were between 26 and 35 years old, 48% between 36 and 45 years old, and the remaining 17% between 46 and 80 years old. Their education stands out as low-level, where 24% have no formal education, 52% have primary education, 18% have secondary education, 4% have technical training, and 2% have professional training. 48% of women are head of household and 92% have between 1 and 12 dependents. The source of family economic income consists exclusively of coffee cultivation (100%). The strata that predominate are 1 with 68.5%, and 2 with 31%. 59.4% have properties with an extension between 1 and 5 hectares, and 53% are owners.

The most representative percentage regarding acquired certifications is held by the Fair Trade certification (37%) that promotes equitable transactions for small producers and access to fair markets. Regarding the codes of conduct, the associations are more oriented to 4C, which stipulates criteria applicable to production, processing and sustainable commercialization of green coffee (20%). UTZ Certified (13%), Rainforest Allience (10%), C.A.F.E practices (3%), Certified Organic (3%), and Nespresso AAA (0.6%) are also found with lower percentages.

With respect to ethical considerations, the study protected the privacy of the individuals subject to the investigation, remaining anonymous, and for no reason or medium were their names disclosed. Likewise, no procedure was initiated without prior voluntary consent. During this process, the nature of the procedures, the importance and purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the possible uses for the information were described.

2.3. Measures

To measure transformational leadership, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X short version (MLQ-5X) by Bass and Avolio (1995) was used. The MLQ-5X is one of the most widely used leadership instruments worldwide and has been applied in several researches in Spanish-speaking contexts in general (e.g. Cuadrado & Molero, 2002), and particularly in Colombia. This version contains thirty-two items to measure both transformational and transactional leadership. For all items, people indicated their perception on a five-point Likert scale, where one (1) means total disagreement, and five (5) means total agreement.

SR was measured with an instrument prepared by the researchers based on the process of theoretical auscultation, review and analysis of associated standards, submitted to a process of construct validity through focus groups, validation with experts and variables operationalization. The questionnaire has 29 items derived from 4 dimensions:

- values, transparency and government;
- labor matters;
- environment;
- society.

For all items, people indicated their perception on a five-point Likert scale, where one (1) means total disagreement, and five (5) total agreement (see Table 1).

Table 1. Definition and operation of questionnaires' variables

Variable	Definition		Definition
Transformational leadership (TL)	Idealized influence (II)	Idealized influence (attributed) (II-A)	The leader gets followers' trust, they feel identified and tend to imitate leaders
		Idealized influence (behavior) (II-B)	Ibid, focused on specific behavior
	Motivational inspiration (MI)		Ability to motivate others to achieve superior performance, create a stimulating and attractive vision for followers, look for extra efforts and encourage change
	Intellectual stimulation (IS)		Empowers others to think about problems and develop skills to solve them
	Individual consideration (IC)		Are active listeners and strong communicators who provide care and empathy, challenges and opportunities for others
Social responsibility (SR)	Values, transparency, government (V)		It refers to the adoption and scope of values and ethical principles, government practices, and self-regulation of behavior, as transparent relationships with society
	Labor matters (LM)		Internal policies and practices oriented to work or associativity.
	Environment (E)		Adoption of an integrated approach aimed at mitigating the direct and indirect implications on the environment
	Society (S)		Actions that promote the relationship with the stakeholders (society), leadership, human rights

2.4. Data analysis

A structural equation model (SEM) was used to detect the proposed effects in the research hypothesis and evaluate the relationships and effects between the variables. The SEM is a statistical multivariate analysis technique that allows testing causal relationships using quantitative data based on assumptions or qualitative reflections on the sense of causality (Hair et al., 1999).

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3. RESULTS

The confirmatory factor analysis on the current data is shown below. The method of maximum likelihood estimation was used and the analysis was performed using a covariance matrix. The theoretical model comprised TL and SR practices perceived as latent variables and their respective indicators. The model obtained a good data fit, obtaining a significant Chi-square ($\chi 2$ [1118, N = 450] = 2456.438, $p < 0.00$), *IFI* = .91, *TLI* = .90, *CFI* = 0.91, *GFI* = 0.89, which denotes that the proposed model is very close to the model obtained. The Cronbach's Alpha values for the two variables proposed can be seen in Table 2's parentheses, showing excellent consistency (*TL*, α = 0.95, *RS*, α = 0.90).

Table 2. Averages, standard deviations and correlations of study variables

Variable	M	DE	1	2
Transformational leadership – *TL*	3.84	0.68	0.95)	
Social responsibility – *SR*	3.58	0.91	0.739**	(0.90)

Note: ** Significant correlation to 0.01 (bilateral).

A more detailed reliability analysis for the instrument's dimensions was carried out (Table 3). According to *TL* dimensions, the following indices were obtained: 0.97 for idealized influence (attributed and behavior) with 8 elements; 0.94 for motivational inspiration with 4 elements; 0.92 for individualized consideration with 4 elements; and 0.93 for intellectual stimulation with 4 elements. According to *SR* dimensions, the indices were: 0.90 for environment with 9 elements; 0.88 for society with 7 elements; 0.89 for values, transparency and government with 7 elements; and 0.92 for labor matters with 6 elements. These coefficients are adequate for convergence in all cases. Study correlations are shown through the structural equation model. All correlations were in the expected direction and provided preliminary support for the study hypothesis.

Table 3. Reliability of questionnaire dimensions

Reliability indicators	Cronbach's Alpha	N
Idealized influence – *II*	α = 0.97	8
Motivational inspiration – *MI*	α = 0.94	4
Individual consideration – *IC*	α = 0.92	4
Intellectual stimulation – *IS*	α = 0.93	4
Environment – *E*	α = 0.90	9
Society – *S*	α = 0.88	7
Values, transparency, government – *V*	α = 0.89	7
Labor matters – *LM*	α = 0.92	6

As can be seen in Figure 1, there is a positive and significant relationship between *TL* and *SR*: 0.739, $p < 0.00$. It can be inferred that the perception of *SR* of the followers in the organization will be greater as transformational leadership increases. Likewise, *TL* correlations are significant, especially the idealized influence (0.92, $p < 0.00$), intellectual stimulation (0.97, $p < 0.00$), and to a lesser extent the motivating inspiration (0, 91, $p < 0.00$), individualized consideration (0.73, $p < 0.00$). Meanwhile, in *SR* dimensions, the highest correlations occurred in labor matters (0.99, $p < 0.00$), and society (0.92, $p < 0.00$), followed by values (0.81, $p < 0.00$), environment (0.72, $p < 0.00$) (Table 4).

Regarding Table 4 and Figure 1, it should be noted that the relationships were hypothesized between the variables called transformational leadership and social responsibility, not between its components or dimensions. Because of the above, although it took into account its dimensions, the investigation did not establish relations between them, at least not as a working hypothesis. Now, the dimensions were related to their respective variable, because the hypothesis was modeled and it is important to determine the strength of the relationship between the dimensions of transformational leadership at the time of linking with social responsibility and vice versa. In this regard, determining their behavior when relationships between variables were established simultaneously was sought.

It should be noted that the hypothesized relationship was between *TL* and *SR*, and not between their components or dimensions (see Table 4 and Figure 1). While the investigation took its dimensions into account, it did not establish relationships between those two variables, at least not as a working hypothesis. The dimensions were related to their respective variable because the hypothesis was modeled, and it is important to determine the strength of the relationship between *TL* dimensions when linking it with *SR*, or vice versa. It was sought to specify its behavior regarding simultaneous relationships between variables.

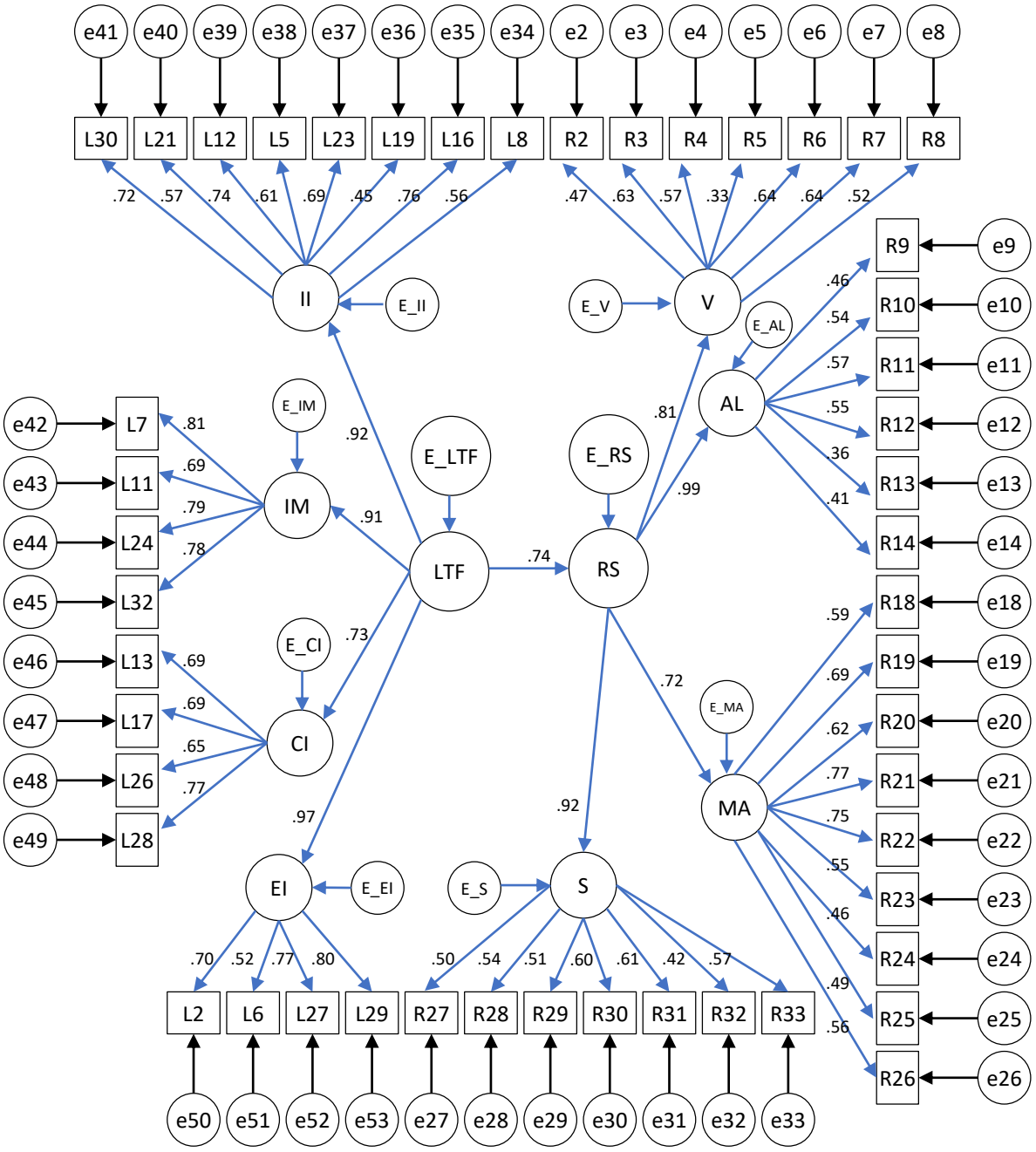

Figure 1. Results of the structural equation model

Table 4. Correlations between the variables and their dimensions

Relationship			Estimate
Social responsibility – *SR*	←	Transformational leadership – *TL*	.739***
Idealized influence – *II*	←	Transformational leadership – *TL*	.921***
Motivational inspiration – *MI*	←	Transformational leadership – *TL*	.912***
Individual consideration – *IC*	←	Transformational leadership – *TL*	.731***
Intellectual stimulation – *IS*	←	Transformational leadership – *TL*	.970***
Environment – *E*	←	Social responsibility – *SR*	.723***
Society – *S*	←	Social responsibility – *SR*	.917***
Values, transparency, government – *V*	←	Social responsibility – *SR*	.812***
Labor matters – *LM*	←	Social responsibility – *SR*	.991***

Note: *** p <0.00.

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4. DISCUSSION

There is a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and social responsibility, where the greater the perception of *TL*, the greater the perception of *SR* actions within the associations. Initially, it can be deduced that transformational leaders have reached high levels of moral development, which are reflected in the significant descriptive analysis of values, transparency and government (SR), which articulates a just and synchronized vision of interest groups' needs; making leadership transcend their own interest to a broader and more competitive vision from an SR model. The significant relationship between the attributed idealized influence and values, transparency and government allows to deduce that the more trust the leader generates for its followers, and as long as the followers feel identified with it, the more the adoption and scope of practices of government and behavior self-regulation are considered as transparent relationships with society, which shows the high correlation (0.92, $p < 0.00$) of the society dimension.

The search for internalization of values and ethical behavior to their followers is reflected in the idealized influence promulgated by the leader, generating an image of trust, which allows them to feel identified and tend to imitate them, as stated by Maak et al. (2016). However, they are more focused on specific behaviors than an influence attributed. Although the "values" dimension didn't get the highest correlations, a highly significant correlation for it was obtained (0.81, $p < 0.00$). As what was found by Waddock and Bodwell (2007), a strong relationship can be established between all SR dimensions with intellectual stimulation, which is explained by the role of leaders inciting associates to creative problem solving, especially in situations such as the confrontation of traditional family and social dynamics, the specific practices of cultivation and postharvest, among others. This has allowed women to develop skills in socially responsible practices, explaining the high level of correlation of the intellectual stimulation dimension (0.97, $p < 0.00$).

The strong correlation with labor matters can be explained especially in the nature and mission of the organization, since it moves in the market of specialty coffees, where fair trade certifications and good practices determine the success of the deal. Thus, in light of Christmann and Taylor's (2006) proposal, the companies that buy this coffee generate pressure with management and leaders to establish fair economic remunerations with the associates, as well as cordial practices with the surrounding communities. Leaders should guide their management to consolidate the labor practices as differentiated remuneration, associate welfare, training, etc., which determines their permanence (David et al., 2007) considering that pressure from associates requires beneficial work practices for them.

Leaders tend to seek to meet organizational and personal goals. This evidences the degree of significance that is granted through the four social responsibility practices mentioned. A feeling of reciprocity is established among leaders and followers, generating individual considerations before care, empathy, the provision of challenges and opportunities for each one, which are outlined in the actions for the strengthening of the association. It is striking that the environment dimension had the lowest, yet significant correlation (0.72, $p < 0.00$), a situation that contrasts with one of the strongest SR approaches that emphasizes environmental conditions.

Finally, in view of the possible differences that may exist between the results obtained in this research and those obtained in studies carried out with organizations dominated by men, no significant differences are observed, in agreement with that found by Alonso-Almeida et al. (2017). It is still necessary to deepen the investigations regarding other types of leadership.

CONCLUSION

A positive and significant relationship is confirmed between transformational leadership and the practices of perceived social responsibility in the organizations of women producing specialty coffees in southern Colombia. The dimensions that have greater correlation with transformational leadership are:

idealized influence (behavior and attributed) and intellectual stimulation, which can be explained by leaders' capacity to be an example to their follower, in the former case, and by stimulating followers to find solutions while growing coffee, planting, irrigating, harvesting, etc., in the latter. The dimensions of greater correlation with the SR were labor matters and society, denoting the importance of working conditions and remuneration, and the link the organization has with the community.

As mentioned above, the sample was exclusively composed of women members who did not occupy management positions within the organizations, so transformational leadership levels found in this study are related to the leadership practices of women in positions of authority, perceived by their supporters. These practices were found to impact the well-being and quality of life of the associates, in the sense that they allowed them to improve their planting practices, production and commercialization dynamics and, thus, the quality of life of women with low levels of education, large families, of discrete origin and with limitations on access to basic public utilities. The leaders of the organizations transmitted a vision of the future full of optimism and progress to the associates so that they aspired to improve their current situation and that of their families. Consequently, the most outstanding SR practices were linked to labor and economic aspects of the associates and their families (related interest groups). Likewise, it can be inferred that many of these characteristics of the women leaders of the associative organizations are those that have allowed the economic activity of the differentiated coffees, to be superior to that of the traditional coffees, historically dominated by men. This is explained because women leaders focus more on socially responsible practices, an aspect highly valued in the segment of differentiated coffees in international markets. In this study, an organizational strategy has been created from transformational leadership practices oriented towards SR aspects.

From elsewhere, it would be interesting to further study the influence of other leadership modalities that were not considered in this study and that the theory considers as significant. Likewise, the joint effect of other variables clearly associated with the transformational leadership style such as trust, organizational support, justice and commitment, within the framework of unconventional organizations could be explored.

A limitation of this study was that data were obtained through a cross-sectional investigation; that is, at a specific moment and the evolution or gradual relation of phenomenon over time was not contemplated. Longitudinal studies would be needed to observe the behavior of these results in the long term. Having studied a single type of leadership is also a limitation. Transformational leadership was taken into account, while literature on the subject has begun to raise and analyze other styles such as ethical, service, authentic, or responsible leadership.

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