

Are You a Transformational Leader?

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The leader of an organization is the person that is allegedly the most qualified, most knowledgeable, the strongest—and sometimes the loudest. People perceive the leader of an organization as the person in charge.

Subordinates often view the leader as the embodiment of all the characteristics that the organization values and cherishes; a charismatic, energetic, highly competent individual.

An effective leader must have direction and purpose. Vision is also a necessary tool for achieving organizational results that add value to the organization, society and the environment. It is the leader's responsibility to develop, transform, sustain and communicate that vision.

True transformational leadership is guided by a convincing and encompassing view of the future. By the leader's actions, not written or spoken words, the leader hopes to establish morale, integrity, a sense of justice, and a persuasive vision.¹

Though poor leadership is often perceived as a disjoint between words and deeds, a transformational leader's actions are more important than the written word.

Leadership theories

The Attribution Theory, an early theory of leadership, stated that leadership is simply an acknowledgment that people make about other individuals' behaviors.² According to the Attribution Theory, leaders are characterized as having specific traits, such as intelligence, an outgoing personality, verbal skills, aggressiveness, consistency, and determination.

The theory of Charismatic Leadership, an extension of the Attribution Theory, stated that "followers make attributions of heroic or extraordinary leadership abilities when they observe certain behaviors" in their chosen leaders.²

Charismatic leaders typically have a "compelling

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To carry health care organizations into the future, a physician executive must learn to be a transformational leader, a leader who inspires others to perform for the good of the organization.

vision or sense of purpose," effectively communicate that vision, are consistent and focused, highly confident, and know their own strengths and weaknesses. Accordingly, they capitalize on their strengths.² One major question of the Charismatic Leadership theory is "Are charismatic leaders born or could they be trained?" Most theorists would argue that leaders can learn to be charismatic.³

The theory of Transactional Leadership states that leaders "guide or motivate their followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying" their particular roles and tasks.² Transactional leaders specify explicit requirements and conditions of the task, and provide rewards for fulfilling those requirements. Fulfilling the requirement is completing the transaction.

The final theory of leadership, Transformational Leadership, builds upon the definition of Transactional Leadership. Transformational leaders are concerned with the individual and their intellectual stimulation, all the while possessing the attribute of charisma and inspiration. They inspire subordinates to go beyond their self-interests, to act for the good of the organization.

Understanding transformation

The idea of transformational leadership was first advanced by James McGregor Burns in 1978 and further developed by Bernard Bass.^{4,5} Burns and Bass based their work on political leaders, military officers, and business executives. A transforming leader acts to maximize the needs of the follower. The term "transformational" stems from the ability to inspire and develop people as resources and move them to a higher state of existence, transforming them in the process.



An excellent leader allows subordinates room to learn from their mistakes as well as their successes.

Burns was one of the first writers to provide an explicit definition of transformational leadership.⁵ He proposed that the leadership process occurred in one of two ways: either transactional or transformational. Transactional leadership is based on authority. Transactional leaders emphasize work standards, procedures, training, and task-oriented goals. They focus on task completion and employee obedience, relying heavily on rewards and consequences to influence employee performance.²

To Burns, transactional leadership is undeveloped because it is based on the needs of the leader rather than the follower. Transformational leadership is a process that motivates followers by appealing to higher ideals and moral values.⁶ Transformational leaders must be able to define and articulate a vision for their organizations, and the followers inherently accept the credibility of the leader. Bass and Avolio argue that the transforma-

tional leader motivates followers to act in the interest of the organization rather than themselves.⁶

Bass and Avolio proposed that transformational leadership is composed of four dimensions, referred to as the "Four I's."^{5,7}

The first dimension, idealized influence, is behavior that results in follower admiration, respect, and trust in the leader. Idealized influence includes a consideration of followers' needs over the leader's personal needs, and high ethical and moral conduct.

The second dimension is inspirational motivation. This is noted by behaviors that provide meaning and challenge to work and tasks. It includes articulation of clear expectations and the demonstration of commitment to organizational goals. In addition, team spirit is stimulated through outward enthusiasm and optimism for the future of the organization.

The third dimension is intellectual stimulation. Leaders seek out

new ideas and creative solutions to organizational problems from their followers, and encourage new approaches for performing tasks.

The fourth dimension is termed individualized consideration. This is reflected by leaders who listen attentively, paying special attention to their followers' achievements and growth requirements. Good communication skills are highly valued in this dimension.

According to Hackman and Johnson, there are six central personality characteristics of transformational leaders.⁸ They are: creativity, interaction, vision, empowerment, passion, and ethics.

Creativity is a key element of the transforming leader. Hackman and Johnson suggest that creativity is "challenging the status quo by seeking out new ideas...."⁸ Managers typically concern themselves with the maintenance of the status quo, but leaders move beyond status quo to deal with the future. Transformation requires new

methods and different perspectives to age-old questions, concerns and conflicts.

Hackman and Johnson also suggest that an interactive leader provides better direction than a non-interactive leader.⁸ In order to meet the needs of the follower, the leader must have open participation with the follower. Hackman and Johnson assert that interaction is central to motivational leadership. This interaction is communication.

Other theories of leadership also emphasize communication. Much support has been given to the requirement for open honest interaction between organizational members. Effective leaders use communication as the tool to create understanding between different levels of the social organization.⁹ A transformational leader is a clear, open communicator.

Vision is another important component of the effective leader, perhaps the most elemental characteristic of the transformational leader since "more than anything else, transformational leaders communicate a vision to their followers."⁸

Miles contends that the transformational leader must articulate a "compelling and credible vision" that can be shared with the follower.¹⁰ Zorn notes that the vision helps to rally the followers' action toward achievement of the goal.¹¹ Leaders must not only speak the vision, they must also model the vision for individuals and the organization. The vision, derived through participation, communicated through involvement, and modeled through action is at the heart of an effective leader.

The fourth aspect according to Hackman and Johnson is empowerment.⁸ Empowerment is the ability of leaders to "share power and responsibility with their employees."² Power translates into empowerment for the subordinate and empowerment, in turn, creates

more power through confidence and motivation. Empowerment is a necessity for the modern organization. Without leaders who promote responsibility, followers cannot fully achieve their potential.

Transformational leaders are passionate in both their commitment to the task and the people alike.⁸ To fully transform people, leaders must have a strong fervent commitment to their vision. Passion is essential for this strong commitment; without passion there is no direction and the vision is ephemeral.

The final characteristic proposed by Hackman and Johnson is that of high ethical standards. Any discussion of transformational leadership must include some mention of ethics, morals and values.

A manager with strong ethical standards knows and accepts the challenges of attempting to do the right thing all of the time. Ethics must not only be the result of, but ethics must be involved in, the process of decision making. An effective leader must be committed to ethical responses in any situation.¹²

Competencies

A minimum of six competencies are necessary to lead an organization's transformation:

- Having, holding, conveying and fulfilling the vision of the transformed organization
- Learning systems thinking and creativity
- Effective communication and interaction
- Building capability in self and others (empowerment)
- Passion, charisma and energy
- Protecting the organization and its employees through proper ethics and morals

Transformational leaders must formulate, emphasize and embody an

appropriate vision for the organization. Perhaps more important to having an effective vision is the ability to convey it to the people involved and have them embrace and accept it. A vision keeps the organization alive and on target with its goals.

The leader's ability to be creative is vitally important. To succeed, a transformational leader must be innovative, flexible and responsive to internal and external changes and challenges.

The leader must possess the ability to deal capably and creatively with these changes and challenges. A leader who sets a standard of "zero defects, no mistakes" is also saying "Don't take any chances. Don't try anything you can't already do perfectly, and don't try anything new." That organization will never improve.

Communication must be maintained at all levels, horizontally and vertically, and it is the responsibility of a good leader to model and enact clear communication. Positive interaction with employees demonstrates a commitment to their needs and wants and makes them feel like human beings and not faceless workers.

Empowerment makes the subordinate feel valued. Helping people feel that they make a valuable contribution to the organization may be one of the most important elements of the transformational leader. Empowerment returns the responsibility for an activity or task back to those performing the task. Empowered employees are motivated about the organization and their role.

Empowerment must be participative for the follower. In the end, the empowered employee has a strong sense of accomplishment about their part of the task, thus increasing their satisfaction and commitment to further development.

Excellence in leadership does not mean perfection; on the contrary, an excellent leader allows subordinates room to learn from their mistakes

as well as their successes. In such a climate, people work to improve and take the risks necessary to learn.

Transformational leaders must be charismatic in and about their role. Leaders must generate intense personal motivation to serve as a supportive agent of change. Passion, like creativity, must come from within the leader as does any other attitude. But leaders must also provide a set of behaviors that followers can model, thus sharing their passion. Without personal energy, the vision and the ability to empower cannot be accomplished because commitment to those objectives will not be sustained.

Leaders have the responsibility to develop and cultivate followers, and socially supportive ethical behaviors are critical for the effective transforming leader. The transformational leader must act in an ethical manner. Ethical behavior, as a cornerstone element of transformational leadership, must be reinforced since stress may result when people are unsure of how to act or where to turn when they are faced with conflicting situations or ideas. The use of unethical solutions will produce long-term calamity when the problem resurfaces due to being inappropriately handled.

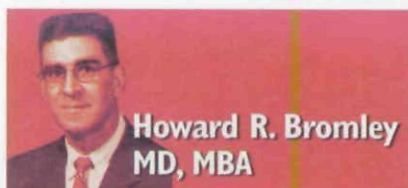
Transforming people and the organization is an important aspect of the job of any leader. By understanding and enacting transformational leadership, the organization can be managed—as well as the individuals involved—and employees can grow and flourish with the experience. Unfortunately, transformational leaders are not plentiful. Though some have begun the journey of transformation, few have completed it.

Where are you as a leader? In order to become a transformational leader, you must continue to learn and grow, and the ideas presented here are goals that are attainable. Be energetic and you can learn to be charismatic. Be open and responsive

to change, and creative in your thinking processes. Interact with people honestly, and though you may consider your verbal and written communication skills to be good, they can still be improved upon.

Enjoy the process of empowering your employees and giving them more responsibilities as you watch the organization grow and mature, even though you may admit that you tend to do things yourself quite often. And lastly, have a firm belief in ethics and morals.

If you are doing these things, then you are on the road to becoming a transformational leader. It will take time, patience, desire, knowledge and education. Lastly, a transformational leader is always a student, always learning.



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