Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders. Enacted in its authentic form, transformational leadership enhances the motivation, morale and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. These include connecting the follower's sense of identity and self to the mission and the collective identity of the organization; being a role model for followers that inspires them; challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, so the leader can align followers with tasks that optimize their performance....

Background

James MacGregor Burns (1978)[1] first introduced the concept of transforming leadership in his descriptive research on political leaders, but this term is now used in organizational psychology as well. According to Burns, transforming leadership is a process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation". Burns related to the difficulty in differentiation between management and leadership and claimed that the differences are in characteristics and behaviors. He established two concepts: "transforming leadership" and "transactional leadership". According to Burns, the transforming approach creates significant change in the life of people and organizations. It redesigns perceptions and values, and changes expectations and aspirations of employees. Unlike in the transactional approach, it is not based on a "give and take" relationship, but on the leader's personality, traits and ability to make a change through example, articulation of an energizing vision and challenging goals. Transforming leaders are idealized in the sense that they are a moral exemplar of working towards the benefit of the team, organization and/or community. Burns theorized that transforming and transactional leadership were mutually exclusive styles. Transactional leaders usually do not strive for cultural change in the organization but they work in the existing culture while transformational leaders can try to change organizational culture.

Development of concept

Another researcher, Bernard M. Bass (1985), extended the work of Burns (1978) by explaining the psychological mechanisms that underlie transforming and transactional leadership; Bass also used the term "transformational" instead of "transforming." Bass added to the initial concepts of Burns (1978) to help explain how transformational leadership could be measured, as well as how it impacts follower motivation and performance.[2] The extent to which a leader is transformational, is measured first, in terms of his influence on the followers. The followers of such a leader feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect for the leader and because of the qualities of the transformational leader are willing to work harder than originally expected. These outcomes occur because the transformational leader offers followers something more than just working for self gain; they provide followers with an inspiring mission and vision and give them an identity. The leader transforms and motivates followers through his or her idealized influence (earlier referred to as charisma), intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. In addition, this leader encourages followers to come up with new and unique ways to challenge the status quo and to alter the environment to support being successful. Finally, in contrast to Burns, Bass suggested that leadership can simultaneously display both transformational and transactional leadership.

Now 30 years of research and a number of meta-analyses have shown that transformational and transactional leadership positively predicts a wide variety of performance outcomes including individual, group and organizational level variables (see Bass & Bass 2008, The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications" 4th edition Free Press).

The full range of leadership introduces four elements of transformational leadership:

1. **Individualized Consideration** – the degree to which the leader attends to each follower's needs, acts as a mentor or coach to the follower and listens to the follower's concerns and needs. The leader gives empathy and support, keeps communication open and places challenges before the followers. This also encompasses the need for respect and celebrates the individual contribution that each follower can make to the team. The followers have a will and aspirations for self development and have intrinsic motivation for their tasks.

2. **Intellectual Stimulation** – the degree to which the leader challenges assumptions, takes risks and solicits followers' ideas. Leaders with this style stimulate and encourage creativity in their followers. They nurture and develop people who think independently. For such a leader, learning is a value and unexpected situations are seen as opportunities to learn. The followers ask questions, think deeply about things and figure out better ways to execute their tasks.

3. **Inspirational Motivation** – the degree to which the leader articulates a vision that is appealing and inspiring to followers. Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge followers with high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide meaning for the task at hand. Followers need to have a strong sense of purpose if they are to be motivated to act. Purpose and meaning provide the energy that drives a group forward. The visionary aspects of leadership are supported by communication skills that make the vision understandable, precise, powerful and engaging. The followers are willing to invest more effort in their tasks, they are encouraged and optimistic about the future and believe in their abilities.

4. **Idealized Influence** – Provides a role model for high ethical behavior, instills pride, gains respect and trust.

As a development tool, transformational leadership has spread already in all sectors of western societies, including governmental organizations. As an example, the Finnish Defence Forces is using widely Deep Lead© Model as basic solution of its leadership training and development. The Deep Lead© Model is based on the theory of transformational leadership.

Research in the area

When researching transformational and transactional leadership the most frequently used survey is called "the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire" (MLQ Form 5X). This is a questionnaire that measures each of the components of the full range of leadership, initially starting with Bass' (1985) factors and analysis. The original scales in the questionnaire are based on a initial factor analysis and earlier versions.

Earlier research on transformational leadership was limited, because the knowledge in this area was too primitive for finding good examples for the items in the questionnaire. Another weakness in the first version of the MLQ related to the wording of items. Most items in the scale of charismatic leadership described the result of leadership, instead of specific actions of the leader that can be observed and that, in turn, lead to the results. In response to the critics, Bass and Avolio (1990) included in the revised and now subsequent versions many more items that describe leadership actions that are observed directly. They also split out attributions of leadership associated with Idealized Influence and behaviors and actions into two separate scales.

The current version of the MLQ Form 5X includes 36 items that are broken down into 9 scales with 4 items measuring each scale. Subsequent validation work by John Antonakis and his colleagues provided strong evidence supporting the validity and reliability of the MLQ5X.[3] Indeed, Antonakis et al. (2003) confirmed the viability of the proposed nine-factor model MLQ model, using two very large samples (Study 1: N=3368; Study 2: N=6525). Although other researchers have still been critical of the MLQ model, since 2003 none has been able to provide dis-confirming evidence of the theorized nine-factor model with such large sample sizes at those published by Antonakis et al. (2003).

Implications for managers

Yukl (1994) draws some tips for transformational leadership[4] :

1. Develop a challenging and attractive vision, together with the employees.
2. Tie the vision to a strategy for its achievement.
3. Develop the vision, specify and translate it to actions.
4. Express confidence, decisiveness and optimism about the vision and its implementation.
5. Realize the vision through small planned steps and small successes in the path for its full implementation.

Notes

[1] Burns, J.M, (1978), Leadership, N.Y, Harper and Row.

[2] Bass, B. M,(1985), Leadership and Performance, N.Y. Free Press.

[3] Antonakis, J., Avolio, B. J., & Sivasubramaniam, N. (2003). Context and leadership: An examination of the nine-factor Full-Range Leadership Theory using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The Leadership Quarterly, 14(3), 261-295.http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00030-4

[4] Yukl, G.(1999). An evaluation of conceptual weaknesses in transformational and charismatic leadership theories. Leadership Quarterly, 10, 285-305; http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(99)00013-2

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External links

- (http://www.mindgarden.com/translead.htm) White paper on transformational leadership, and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)
- (http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/print/167430593.html) Kotlyar, I., & Karakowsky, L. (2007). Falling Over Ourselves to Follow the Leader. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, Vol. 14, No. 1, 38-49
- (http://cbae.nmsu.edu/~dboje/teaching/338/transformational_leadership.htm) Tips for transformational leader
- (http://www.leadershipskills-saintmarys.com/leadership_info.html) BA and MA Degree Programs in Leadership
- BA and MA Degrees in Leadership (http://www.leadershipskills-saintmarys.com/leadership_info.html)
- Transformational Leadership Blog (http://www.transformationalleadershiphq.com)

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