TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

DEBORAH A. CARVER

The study of leadership has gone through many phases and fails. There is no shortage of theories or data to support many differences of opinion and contradictory conclusions. Warren Bennis, one of the most published researchers and theorists in this area, has noted that there are more than 350 definitions of leadership and thousands of empirical investigations, but “never have so many labored so long to say so little.” Historian James McGregor Burns, author of several works in the area of political leadership, has commented that leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena. Students of business and public administration have learned about scientific management, trait analysis, theory X, Y, and Z, the path-goal approach, situationalism versus the “one best style” of orientation, and the concept of “followership.” Is there anything more to say? Some would argue yes. What is needed is a synthesis of existing ideas and evidence, something that makes sense out of the current confusion, a theory of leadership that is relevant to present conditions. While much of the recent literature concerning effective leadership styles still emphasizes the role of management skills, our emerging theory—the idea of transformational leadership—has departed from the managerial focus. Transformational leadership represents a movement away from the social-scientific, rational theories of management that emphasize the systems approach to problem solving. It combines historical, biographical, and behavioral data with a humanistic approach that emphasizes the personal and ethical qualities of leadership. Since Burns first defined the term transformational leadership in 1978, a number of books and articles advocating and building on his principles have been written. In another ten years, the idea may be passed or even discredited, but for the present, it has captured the interest and approval of many leading scholars in the field.

The crisis in current administration has been well documented. There are several books and articles that lament the lack of leadership in both business and politics. Abraham Zaleznik has observed that a “technologically oriented and economically successful society tends to deprecate the need for great leaders” who are capable of seeing beyond the status quo and to worship the rational, or managerial approach to problems solving. Strong management has fostered a bureaucratic culture which is overly conservative and inert. Managers frequently adopt passive, reactive attitudes toward their work. Their main objective is to reduce conflict within the organization. Leaders, on the other hand, actively look for new, sometimes controversial approaches to long-standing problems. Bass and Nanus has also written on the predominance of managers and the absence of leaders in most organizations. According to Nanus, leaders are concerned with doing the right thing, while managers are preoccupied with doing things right. Nanus believes that the public sector is overmanaged and underled. Not enough attention is paid to the future and too much time is spent on mundane administrative details.

David Bradford and Allen Cohen contend that the model of leadership used by most administrators today is outdated and inadequate to meet the needs of contemporary organizations. In previous decades, leaders were better educated than the rank and file and able to execute tasks as well or better than most employees. Tasks were relatively simple and technological change was more gradual than it is today. Those in positions of power followed the heroic model that stressed the need for control and direct supervision. The heroic model incorporates two key assumptions: it is the leader who is responsible for finding the solution to a problem; the subordinates are responsible for implementing the decision. In today’s fluctuating environment, heroism may have several dysfunctional consequences. It often results in less responsiveness to new demands and in more parochial competing interests within the organization. Although this model has lost much of its validity, many leaders still assume the role of hero. The authors suggest that our method of selecting leaders contributes to this perpetuation. Leadership positions are frequently filled with those who have performed well in the technical aspects of the job. These leaders rely heavily on their technical expertise as a source of power and authority and a reason for assuming all responsibility for success. Employee motivation and par-
iscipline, which are essential in organizations charac-
terized by complex tasks and a high degree of
interdependence, decline under these conditions.

Anne Roberts sees a similar problem occurring in aca-
demic libraries. In response to increased pressure for
change, declining resources, and demands for new
technologies, most academic libraries have simply
added more specialists and administrators to the pay-
roll, further complicating the organizational structures.
The bureaucratic model, according to Roberts, has in-
creased the isolation of the library within the university.
“...”

A NEW THEORY OF LEADERSHIP

In his book on political leadership in the United
States, historian James McGregor Burns addresses
what he calls the mediocrity of men and women in posi-
tions of power, and the lack of a relevant leadership
model. Burns attempts to synthesize the reservoir of lit-
erature on leadership with recent studies in the area of
humanistic psychology for the purpose of developing a
central concept which is relevant across disciplines, cul-
tures, and time. He distinguishes between two forms of
leader-follower relations. The first, transactional lead-
ership, occurs when the leader offers rewards, gener-
ally in the form of wages or praise, in exchange for de-
sired behavior. Status quo administrators and incremen-
talists are primarily transactional.

The second type, transformational leadership, occurs
when leaders and followers embrace a shared philoso-
phy, raise one another to greater levels of motivation,
and develop an understanding of mutual needs, aspira-
tions, and values. Transformational leaders assume a
vital teaching role. They are able to unite persons with
separate but related interests through the pursuit of
higher goals. Followers are able to reach and sustain a
collective understanding and transcend petty preoccu-
pations. Leaders who are concerned with effecting sig-
nificant change tend to be transformational. Burns’ idea
of transformational leadership is in sharp contrast with
the myriad of how-to manuals that advocate practical,
step-by-step advice. These oversimplified recipes may
have appropriate applications in highly predictable, al-
most static situations, but in a volatile and competitive
environment, leaders must be able to foster a deeper
commitment among employees.

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER

In his book Leadership and Performance Beyond Expecta-
tions, Bernard Bass elaborates on Burns’ theory and de-
scription of transactional and transformational leader-
ship. The transactional leader focuses on actions and
behavior and is concerned with reducing resistance and
implementing decisions. The transformational leader’s
first concern is to develop and communicate a philos-
ophy and to help employees develop a broad perspective
regarding the organization’s mission. Followers’ beliefs
are actually “transformed” to correspond with the pur-
pose of the organization. This form of leadership, ac-
cording to Bass, results in greater performance levels
than previously thought possible.

Bass surveyed nearly 200 senior male administrators
to determine those attributes that would best describe
transformational leaders. Three factors emerged from
his analysis: a demonstrated degree of charisma, indi-
vidual consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

The presence of charisma allows the leaders to shape
and enlarge audiences through his own self-
confidence, assertiveness, and ambition. Transformation-
ald leaders pay personal attention to employee needs,
avoid treating all subordinates alike, and dele-
gate important projects. Bass speculates that transfor-
mational leaders rank high in social boldness, intro-
ception, thoughtfulness, and energy, but not in sociabil-
ity, cooperativeness, and friendliness. Bass ad-
mits that few leaders are likely to demonstrate all attrib-
utes. Ronald Reagan, for example, may be considered
charismatic, but repulsively displays an absence of intel-
lectual rigor. However, most successful transforma-
tional leaders exhibit some level of at least one or two of
these characteristics. Bass separates transactional lead-
ership into two types: contingent reinforcement and
management by exception. Contingent or positive rein-
forcement is used frequently by transaction-oriented
leaders because their first concern is efficient process
rather than substantive ideas. While contingent rein-
forcement can provide satisfactory results in the short
term, transformational leadership is likely to generate
more effort, creativity, and productivity in the long run.
Those who practice management by exception avoid
giving direction and intervene only when things go
wrong. This approach is likely to be the least successful
leadership style because it tends to generate employee
anxiety which in turn can result in a variety of dysfunc-
tional behaviors.

Whether the dominant form of leadership is transac-
tional or transformational depends not only upon the
personality and values of the leader, but on the external
and organizational environment. Transformational
leadership is more likely to occur under conditions of
rapid change, where organizational goals are complex
and often unclear, and where members are highly edu-
cated and are expected to be creative.

In a subsequent article, Bruce Avolio and Bernard
Bass elaborate on the concept of extrinsic and intrinsic
rewards. While transactional leadership can be an effec-
tive extrinsic motivator, it is unlikely to generate the
highest level of performance. Transformational leaders
motivate followers to work for transcendent goals in-
stead of immediate self-interests. They communicate a
vision to the subordinate, and in return, the subordi-
nate is self-rewarded for efforts to convert the vision
into reality. Avolio and Bass point out that transforma-
tional leadership cannot stand alone; it requires effec-
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Since the work of Burns and Bass, several publica-
tions have further explored the personalities and
actions of transformational leaders. Karl Kuhnert
and Philip Lewis describe the personal development
of the transformational leader. In the initial stage of develop-
ment, the individual is motivated and defined by per-
sonal goals and agendas. The young manager who
wants to be a senior executive before he reaches forty is
an example of someone in the first stage of leadership
development. In the next stage, the individual is able to
reflect on his own self-interests and consider these si-
multaneously with the interests of others. At this point,
the leader is motivated by interpersonal connections,
mutual obligations, and shared respect. At the final
stage of development, the individual assumes the role
of transformational leader and defines himself in terms
of internal values and a general philosophy of purpose
which is of primary importance to the organization.

According to Noel Tichy and Mary Ann Devanna,
transformational leaders are prudent risk takers. They
are life-long learners who talk freely of their mistakes
and can deal with complexity and ambiguity. They are
more proactive than reactive in their thinking; more
innovative in their ideas; more radical than conservative
in ideology, and less inhibited in their search for solu-
tions.

In their book Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge,
Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus describe the transform-
ational leader as a problem-finder rather than a
problem-solver. He is consistent, predictable, and has a
keen sense of timing. The transformational leader has
the ability to empower others by raising their confi-
dence level. Mistakes are seen as opportunities to im-
prove performance, rather than blunders. Bennis and
Nanus argue that the validity of the transformational
theory is based on the assumption that most employ-
ees, regardless of rank, are capable of commitment, en-
thusiasm, and hard work, unless subjected to pro-
longed exploitation. The "1-only-work-here" syndrome is
not inherent in certain jobs; it can be seen at all levels of any organization that is overmanaged and
underled.

Ian MacMillan looks at the efforts of several top ad-
ministrators to develop new programs, and analyzes
how the behavior of transformational leaders differs
from the actions of those who have failed to reach their
goal. Those who succeeded developed a substantial
amount of time to the new endeavor and were able to
sustain initial enthusiasm throughout the entire project.
Those who failed had not realized that long-
term persistence is essential. Their attention began to
wander, and they "eventually allowed themselves to
get sucked into the maelstrom of enticing, attention-
distracting crises that daily face a divisional CEO."

They expected too much too fast. According to MacMil-
lan's findings, the transformational leaders gave their
employees the freedom to initiate and implement well-
conceived ideas without having to get permission first.
Those administrators who failed remained obsessed
with the need to know and were unable to abandon their
slow, rigid, multilevel approval process. Interest-
ingly, the successful CEO's used no specific extrinsic re-
wards as motivators. The desired activity was seen
as part of the job, not a special task that called for unique
compensation.

THE CHALLENGE

There are many roadblocks that can delay or under-
mine the transformational process. Noel Tichy and
David Ulrich considered a few of the major challenges
that face today's corporate leader who aspires to bring
about significant change. Before an organization can be
reinvigorated, the transformational leader must succeed in
overcoming technical, political, and cultural resist-
tances. Technical resistance is related to habit, inertia,
and sunken costs. Because of the size of the investment,
a company may be willing to live with a newly pur-
chased computer system even if it does not satisfy the
organization's needs. Political resistance may exist in
powerful coalitions which represent the old guard. Psy-
chologically, it is very difficult for people to change
when they were involved in establishing the existing
structure. Suggested new methods are often seen as a
condemnation of the past. There are also cultural deter-
rants to change. Organizational cultures that require
a great deal of conformity often lack much receptivity to
new ideas. Since change evokes simultaneous positive
and negative feelings, the challenge facing the transfor-
mational leader is to replace anxiety with relief, and
stress with exhilaration and energy. Administrators
who try to force change too quickly, without recogniz-
ning the psychological stages of transition which em-
ployees must go through, risk revolt. New attitudes
and values take time to develop.

Tichy and Devanna expand on the various challenges
facing corporate administrators. The authors recognize
that most organizational environments, unless faced
with impending doom, are resistant to major change
and are satisfied with mediocrity. Organizations that
worship tradition in every sense are bound to stagnate
and eventually decline. Faith in tradition and resistance
to change is pervasive because most individuals have
difficulty disenraging themselves from the past and
discarding old norms that have created their profes-
sional identity. Transformational leaders must learn
to deal with those who, frequently out of fear, deny that
a new order is necessary. Resistors often try to convince
new leaders that major change is not only disruptive
but potentially destructive. Leaders who are committed
to change must also contend with managers who are
dedicated to maintenance. According to Tichy, the phi-
losophical difference between doing things right and
doing the right things creates an enormous tension in
organizations. Finally, transformational leaders must
be exceptionally sensitive to the external environment.
This is particularly difficult challenge because of what
Tichy calls the "boiled frog phenomenon." In a ficti-
tious experiment, a frog is placed in a pot of cold water,
which is slowly heated. Because the change is so grad-
ual, the frog remains oblivious to the surroundings, and
eventually boils to death. Since changing external con-
ditions are likely to be gradual, the transformational
leader must be able to notice subtle trends and fluctuations which may affect the health of his organization. Bennis and Nanus warn against the dangers of myopia. As organizations grow more complex, they can develop a new kind of focus that is only tangentially related to the original mission. New services, functions, and products are adopted that have only a tenuous relationship to the fundamental purpose. Before long, internal divisions are competing with one another with little sense of common goals. The transformational leaders must be vigilant among factions by keeping the appropriate overall mission clearly visible to all.

MacMillan mentions several challenges facing the transformational leader. He must have the ability to foster an atmosphere of creativity and initiative within a traditional bureaucracy and to sustain high energy levels for long periods of time, even when results are slow in coming. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to keep on course and not allow urgent matters to crowd out important ones.

THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS

The call for a new model of leadership has been largely provoked by the decline of U.S. corporations in a world economy and the absence of a clearly defined purpose in global politics. Most of the authors cited in this essay have been critical of existing models because they do not adequately account for the ability of some leaders to effect significant change. Bass argued that leadership theories which emphasize path-goal approaches, cost-benefit comparisons, logical positivism, operationalism, and the exchange of rewards for desired behavior do not explain the success of the world's most notable political, corporate, and religious figures. What makes transformational leadership different from all the 350 definitions and administrative buzzwords? First, it takes into account the external environment, the level of competition, decreasing worker productivity, and a pervasive distrust of those in charge. Second, it dismisses the incremental approach and stresses the need for vision. Finally, it rejects the notion that real leaders are born and not made.

Why is there a need for transformational leaders? R. Jeffery Ellis argues that during periods of volatility, confusion, and uncertainty, it is advisable to subordinate the formal authority patterns and encourage a loose structure which will stimulate initiative. The transactional approach—rewarding success and penalizing failure—legitimizes existing policies and procedures and weakens creativity. Ellis suggests that during turbulent times, leaders should adopt the role of coach, which is more in line with the theory of transformational leadership.

John Kotter agrees that traditional forms of leadership, which focus on short-term planning, budgeting, organizing, and controlling, do not work well in an unpredictable environment. An appropriate balance between leadership and management is needed. Kotter cites the case of ITT, which took a huge fall in the last decade, largely due to its limited leadership and its obsession with disciplined management. The author also suggests that the need for transformational leaders exists throughout the organization, not just in the upper echelons. Leadership in non-administrative positions requires an understanding which goes beyond the technical requirements of the job. For most people, the leadership concept includes educating children, curing a chronic ailment, reducing crime, or finding a cure for cancer. The transformational leader must also consider the small and the needed to consider some degree of leadership potential in virtually all hiring decisions.

The call for a transformational leader is not new. Much of existing literature deals with business applications, the broad theories behind transformational leadership can be useful to all organizations, particularly those that need renewal in the face of growing competition. Do libraries need transformational leaders? In a collection of essays edited by Donald Wriggs, authors Florence Kewin, Donald Sager, and Thomas Galvin describe an environment similar to that which provoked the call for transformational leadership in business. Kewin's essay considers several external trends which will effect the structure and services of small public libraries. The development of the public information sector will increasingly compete with the local public library, and the diversity of new information products will put a strain on small budgets. Because of these and other challenges, the small public library cannot function unless it is prepared for competition. Sager's essay describes the conditions of many large public libraries which is analogous to the situation confronting U.S. corporations. Sager points out the large public libraries have enjoyed decades of expansion and unquestioned support, but now face the darkness of retrenchment. Strong leaders are needed to replace the old image of the large public library with a dynamic, monolithic, outdated structure. With a contemporary picture which fully represents the library's potential service to the community. Leaders must make major changes, and it is imperative that they must have a vision of the future, even if that vision is imperfect. Galvin's essay describes the acute need for transformational leadership in library education. He discusses a number of external factors such as intense competition for funds within the university and the tremendous growth of information professions outside the library field which will require a dramatic revitalization of the curriculum. Those who assume leadership roles in library education must abandon the incremental approach and be able to make several difficult decisions in the coming years.

Many of the internal and external conditions that necessitate the need for transformational leadership in business and politics also exist in libraries—growing competition for funding; expanding numbers of private information brokers; well-educated staffs who are expected to be creative; a high degree of change, particu
larity in the area of technology: greater internal complexity, and a set of broad goals that are not always clear. Can libraries be transformational and if so, to what extent? Bass thinks that public institutions, accustomed to bureaucratic structure and political trade-offs, are fortified against the transformational process. Nevertheless, there is some degree of transformational leadership that is possible as well as desirable in virtually all organizations, including libraries. If effective leadership is needed to cope and respond to an uncertain environment, then we need to consider the validity of Burns' model and begin to develop leaders who can formulate and articulate visions and inspire others to meet the challenge.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


The nation will find it difficult to look up to the leaders who are keeping their ears to the ground.

Winston Churchill

I have a dream.

Martin Luther King, Jr.