

# TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

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The study of leadership has gone through many phases and fads. 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 phenomenon. 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, one 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 moral 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 passé 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 poli-

tics. Abraham Zelenznik has observed that a "technologically oriented and economically successful society tends to depreciate the need for great leaders" who are capable of seeing beyond the status quo and to worship the rational, or managerial approach to problem 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. Burt 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-

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icipation, which are essential in organizations characterized by complex tasks and a high degree of interdependency, decline under these conditions.

Anne Roberts sees a similar problem occurring in academic 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 payroll, further complicating the organizational structures. The bureaucratic model, according to Roberts, has increased the isolation of the library within the university. "The nineteenth-century world of the academic librarian was one of vision; the twentieth-century world of the academic librarian is one of fragmentation, and the view is cluttered with pieces of systems, networks, and methods,"

### 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 positions of power, and the lack of a relevant leadership model. Burns attempts to synthesize the reservoir of literature on leadership with recent studies in the area of humanistic psychology for the purpose of developing a central concept which is relevant across disciplines, cultures, and time. He distinguishes between two forms of leader-follower relations. The first, transactional leadership, occurs when the leader offers rewards, generally in the form of wages or praise, in exchange for desired behavior. Status quo administrators and incrementalists are primarily transactional.

The second type, transformational leadership, occurs when leaders and followers embrace a shared philosophy, raise one another to greater levels of motivation, and develop an understanding of mutual needs, aspirations, 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 preoccupations. Leaders who are concerned with effecting significant 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, almost stasis 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 Expectations*, Bernard Bass elaborates on Burns' theory and description of transactional and transformational leadership. The transactional leaders 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 philosophy and to help employees develop a broad perspective regarding the organizations mission. Followers' beliefs are actually "transformed" to correspond with the purpose of the organization. This form of leadership, ac-

ording 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, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

The presence of charisma allows the leaders to shape and enlarge audiences through his own self-confidence, assertiveness, and ambition. Transformational leaders pay personal attention to employee needs, avoid treating all subordinates alike, and delegate important projects. Bass speculates that transformational leaders rank high in social boldness, introspection, thoughtfulness, and energy, but not in sociability, cooperativeness, and friendliness. Bass admits that few leaders are likely to demonstrate all attributes. Ronald Reagan, for example, may be considered charismatic, but repeatedly displays an absence of intellectual rigor. However, most successful transformational leaders exhibit some level of at least one or two of these characteristics. Bass separates transactional leadership into two types: contingent reinforcement and management by exception. Contingent or positive reinforcement is used frequently by transaction-oriented leaders because their first concern is efficient process rather than substantive ideas. While contingent reinforcement 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 dysfunctional behaviors.

Whether the dominant form of leadership is transactional 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 educated 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 effective extrinsic motivator, it is unlikely to generate the highest level of performance. Transformational leaders motivate followers to work for transcendental goals instead of immediate self-interests. They communicate a vision to the subordinate, and in return, the subordinate is self-rewarded for efforts to convert the vision into reality. Avolio and Bass point out that transformational leadership cannot stand alone; it requires effec-

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tive management skills within the organization. "History is strewn with visionaries whose lack of management skills or disciples with such skills resulted in the rapid demise of their efforts."

Since the work of Burns and Bass, several publications 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 development, the individual is motivated and defined by personal 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 simultaneously 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 solutions.

In their book *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus describe the transformational 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 confidence level. Mistakes are seen as opportunities to improve performance, rather than blunders. Bennis and Nanus argue that the validity of the transformational theory is based on the assumption that most employees, regardless of rank, are capable of commitment, enthusiasm, and hard work, unless subjected to prolonged exploitation. The "I-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 administrators 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 period. 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 MacMillan'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, multi-level approval process. Interestingly, the successful CEO's used no specific extrinsic rewards 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 undermine 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 revitalized, the transformational leader must succeed in overcoming technical, political, and cultural resistances. 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 purchased computer system even if it does not satisfy the organization's needs. Political resistance may exist in powerful coalitions which represent the old guard. Psychologically, 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 deterrents 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 transformational leader is to replace anxiety with relief, and stress with exhilaration and energy. Administrators who try to force change too quickly, without recognizing the psychological stages of transition which employees 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 disengaging themselves from the past and discarding old norms that have created their professional identity. Transformational leaders must learn to deal with those who, frequently out of fear, deny that a new order is necessary. Resisters 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 philosophical 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 a particularly difficult challenge because of what Tichy calls the "boiled frog phenomenon." In a fictitious experiment, a frog is placed in a pot of cold water, which is slowly heated. Because the change is so gradual, the frog remains oblivious to the surroundings, and eventually boils to death. Since changing external conditions 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 inward 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 prevent war 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 buzz words? 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, competition, and uncertainty, it is advisable to subdue 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 ex-

ists 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 word leadership conjures up images of Gandhi, Churchill, and others with enormous stature beyond the grasp of ordinary mortals. Kotter discusses the need for leadership with a small *l* and the necessity to consider some degree of leadership potential in virtually all hiring decisions.

Although 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 Riggs, authors Florence Kirwin, Donald Sager, and Thomas Galvin describe an environment similar to that which provoked the call for transformational leadership in business. Kirwin's essay considers several external trends which will effect the structure and services of small public libraries. The development of the private information sector will increasingly compete with the local public library, and the diversity of new information products will put a strain on most budgets. Because of these and other challenges, the small public library does not need administrators who simply react to events, even if their reactions are based on sound judgment. The small library needs leaders who can anticipate challenges, and "design innovative solutions to meet the turbulent and uncertain environment of the future." She calls for a rejection of the traditional model of leadership that is focused on internal control and the coordination of activities. She suggests a new model based on reorganization designed to be more adaptive to societal change. Sager's essay describes the condition 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 as a drafty, monolithic, outdated structure, with a contemporary picture which fully represents the library's potential service to the community. Leaders must make major changes, and in order to do 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-

larly 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 a vision and inspire others to meet the challenge.

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*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.