

Transforming Leadership:

Key Principles

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Transforming Leadership

Burns first wrote about transformational leadership (TL) in 1978. His research into leadership and historical leaders led him to identify and define two leadership styles: transactional or transformational. Burns describes the more common transactional leadership as exchange based. This is where the leader gives something in return for the followers' action or compliance (p. 4). He defines a transformational (also called "transforming") leader as one who "... recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower [and] looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (p.4). The transforming leader interacts with the human side of followers. Burns also regularly emphasized the importance of morality in TL. In his seminal book, he discussed moral leadership as a requisite of TL. Transforming leaders had to consider the higher needs and aspirations of both the individual and the group, or else they were at best transactional leaders, or at least, rulers.

Bass (1985) defines TL as a style of leadership that transforms followers to rise above their self-interest, alter their morale, ideals, interests, and values, and motivate them to perform better than initially expected. An excerpt from his 1985 book was published in *Organizational Dynamics* (1985) and his summary paints a wonderful picture of a transforming leader (p. 33).

The leader provided a model of integrity and fairness and also set clear and high standards of performance. He encouraged followers with advice, help, support, recognition, and openness. He gave followers a sense of confidence in his intellect, yet was a good listener. He gave followers autonomy and encouraged their self-development. He was willing to share his greater knowledge and expertise with them. Yet he could be formal and firm and would reprimand followers when necessary.

This summary clearly aligns with the description provided by Burns (1978) showing how the leader engages with the human and emotional side of followers.

The list of leaders described by Burns (1978) is a who's who of admirable and impactful figures: Ghandi, FDR, Thomas Jefferson, and more. Given the historical impact these figures have had on the world, the study of transforming leadership and its principles may help leaders of today create their own impact.

This paper will focus on the key principles of TL.

Key Principles of Transforming Leadership

The principles of TL have been described in different ways by different authors. Northouse (2019) describes transforming leaders as charismatic. He uses the word "charismatic" to describe their actions and impact and lists 5 specific behaviors (p. 166-167):

1. They are strong role models.
2. They appear competent to followers.
3. They articulate ideological goals with a moral overtone.
4. They communicate high expectations
5. They arouse task-relevant motives that may include affiliation, power, or esteem.

Kouzes and Posner (2017) define the 5 practices of exemplary leadership, which are very similar to the charismatic TL principles above. They list the practices as:

1. Model the way
2. Inspire a shared vision
3. Challenge the process
4. Enable others to act
5. Encourage the heart

Also, Bass himself contributes a list of principles that are core to TL. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999)

summarize 4 components of TL:

1. Idealized influence
2. Inspirational motivation
3. Intellectual stimulation
4. Individualized consideration.

These 4 behaviors align with those described by Northouse, Kouzes, and Posner. Below, I will lay out

Bass and Steidlmeier's 4 principles and connect them with the principles stated from other authors (see

Table 1).

| | Bass & Steidlemeier (1999) | Northouse (2019) | Kouzes & Posner (2017) |
|-------------|--|---|---|
| Principle 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idealized influence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong role model • Appear competent to followers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model the way |
| Principle 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspirational motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideological goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire a shared vision |
| Principle 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual stimulation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate high expectations • Arouse task-relevant motives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge the process |
| Principle 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualized consideration | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable others to act • Encourage the heart |

Table 1. Bass and Steidlemeier's 4 principles of TL aligned with the principles from Northouse, Kouzes, and Posner.

Idealized Influence

This first principle is all about being a person who others want to follow. Transforming leaders lead by example, they are role models, and they set a high moral standard. Bass and Steidlmeier state "If the leadership is transformational, its charisma or idealized influence is envisioning, confident, and sets high standards for emulation" (1999, p. 187). Transforming leaders honestly care about others, about their

aspirations, and about their needs. However, some leaders only care about personal gain. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) call these leaders “inauthentic” and have this to say (p. 188):

The authentic are inwardly and outwardly concerned about the good that can be achieved for the group, organization, or society for which they feel responsible. The inauthentic and pseudo-transformational may publicly give the same impression and be idealized by their followers for it, but privately be concerned about the good they can achieve for themselves. They are captains who sail under false colors. They are spiritual leaders who are false prophets.

The concept of pseudo-transformational leaders will be revisited in principles below.

This first principle aligns with two of Northouse’s points. First, “be a strong role model.” Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. are examples of leaders who advocated nonviolence and practiced what they preached. They were strong role-models with moral standing, and they had many loyal followers. Second, “appear competent to followers.” The previously mentioned leaders were all competent and were outstanding communicators. A study by Flauto (1999) showed that leaders with better rated communication skills were perceived as better leaders. Leaders with better communication skills appear more competent. How the leader acts and speaks demonstrates their competence, at least as perceived by followers.

Finally, this first principle from Bass and Steidlmeier aligns with the first from Kouzes and Posner (2017): “model the way.” These authors write that credibility is the foundation of leadership (p. 25). When they asked survey participants about traits they look for in a leader they would willingly follow, credibility came out on top. Kouzes and Posner describe credibility with phrases like, “they practice what they preach,” and, “they walk the talk” (p. 43). This is the same authenticity referred to by Bass, Steidlmeier, and Northouse. To summarize, transforming leaders are authentic, moral, and competent, and demonstrate all of these traits as admirable role-models.

Inspirational motivation

Transformational leaders inspire followers. Bass and Steidlmeier state, “The inspirational motivation of transformational leadership provides followers with challenges and meaning for engaging in shared goals and undertakings” (p. 188). This not only includes having worthy aspirations, but also the ability of the leader to communicate high expectations and inspire commitment to the shared vision of the organization (Northouse, 2019, p. 171). Northouse’s second principle of charismatic leadership, “Ideological goals,” fits well in this category. He states how leaders “articulate ideological goals that have moral overtones” (p. 166). There is clearly alignment between these two principles as both deal with goals and aspirations.

Kouzes and Posner describe this principle of inspiration similarly. They state, “envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities, [and] enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations” (p. 94). The idea of “shared aspirations” acknowledges the leader’s responsibility to the needs and desires of the group. A pseudo-transformational leader would not pay attention to shared aspirations for the benefit of others, but only as a tool to increase their power or standing. They may tout shared goals, but only for their own individual ends. This principle assumes that the transforming leader is communicating to inspire the group toward a mutually beneficial aspiration.

Intellectual Stimulation

This principle deals with the minds, perceptions, and arguments of the followers, and communication skills are key. Authentic transformational leaders persuade others on the merits of the issues (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 189). While topics can be emotional, the focus is on rationale discourse. Leaders can also change the values of followers by connecting the mission and challenges to long-term benefits of the followers. This principle includes the leader supporting followers’ creativity and innovation to challenge their own beliefs, as well as those of the leader (Northouse, 2019, p. 171). Leaders who use

intellectual stimulation empower followers to try new solutions, think things out on their own, and problem-solve.

Intellectual stimulation fits inline with the two charismatic traits described by Northouse:

communicating high expectations and arousing task-relevant motives. By communicating high expectations and exhibiting confidence in followers, Northouse states that individuals can increase their sense of competence and self-efficacy (p. 167). He also describes how charismatic leaders empower the followers to take action and solve problems, thereby increasing affiliation and esteem.

Kouzes and Posner describe similar effects with their principle “challenge the process.” They invite leaders to empower followers to seize initiative, look for solutions to problems, experiment, take risks, and learning from experience (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 144). Also, they argue that taking action and using one’s intellect builds psychological hardiness, helping individuals convert adversity into advantage (p. 175). It should be noted that all these points require a combination of intellect, rationale, and taking-action. Intellectual discourse without action would be impotent. Transforming leaders support action, and they do so with intellectual considerations.

Individualized Consideration

The final principle of TL as described by Bass and Stiedlmeier is individualized consideration. According to the authors, this “... underscores the necessity of altruism if leadership is to be anything more than authoritarian control, [and] the transformational leader treats each follower as an individual and provides coaching, mentoring and growth opportunities.” This principle also highlights how leaders are interested in turning followers into leaders. Transforming leaders are interested in helping each individual realize their potential. Pseudo-transformational leaders see individuals as tools or pawns to achieve their own ends. These inauthentic leaders do not wish to see followers become leaders, lest

they ruin the ends set forth by the ruler. Transforming leaders act as coaches, listening to individuals, and assist them in becoming fully actualized (Northouse, 2019, p. 171).

Kouzes and Posner's final 2 principles for exemplary leadership fit within this category, enable others to act and encourage the heart. Enabling others to act is just as it sounds. Even though taking action is a main point, it belongs here instead of the previous category. While the previous category also considers action, this final section is for personal considerations. To enable others to act, Kouzes and Posner promote creating climates of trust and facilitating relationships (p. 197). These efforts require individual consideration. Relationships are made of individuals and a leader can have significant impact by providing coaching personalized to each situation. "Encouraging the heart" includes recognizing contributions and celebrating values and victories by "... creating a spirit of community" (p. 246). While a leader can do this at a team level, providing individual acknowledgement and celebration recognizes the contributions everyone makes.

Final Thoughts

Transforming leadership is powerful. Not only can it help organizations make changes to achieve new heights, but it can also help teams grow and realize their aspirations. If organizations desire to transform and turn followers into leaders, then there must be a set of principles to follow. The principles described by Bass and Steidlmeier provide a solid groundwork on which leadership can be related and other principles can be expounded. Northouse's charismatic-leader principles and Kouzes and Posner's exemplary-leadership principles align very well with the transforming leadership principles. Studying the principles proposed by Bass and Steidlmeier can help teams identify and build leaders for the betterment of the organization.

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