Transformational Leadership

by
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**Clearly the leader who commands compelling causes
has an extraordinary potential influence over followers.**
James MacGregor Burns

The current research in leadership is overflowing with articles and books describing the virtues of "transformational" leadership. Recent authors include Noel Tichy, *The Leadership Engine* (1997), John Kotter, *On What Leaders Really Do* (1999), and articles written in the Journal of Leadership Studies by Dong Jung, Walter Einstein and John Humphreys (2001) to name a few. James MacGregor Burns coined this term in 1978 to describe the ideal situation between leaders and followers. James Keagen used Burns' ideas to build a developmental model of leadership that explains further the continuum between transformational and transactional leadership. What radical new form or fad of leadership is this? What is the difference between transformational leadership and transactional leadership and which is the most effective? How does a leader get everyone performing to their potential? **Are there any pitfalls with transformational leadership?** What is the relationship between leadership and management? What are the attributes of the transformational leader? Finally, what conclusions can be drawn about the usefulness of transformational leadership?

After reading Burns, Kotter, Tichy, Jung, Einstein, Humphreys, and the biographies of military leaders from throughout the ages, the conclusion seems quite clear. Leadership principles are timeless, while, the models that examine those principles may change. The

transformational model offers one of many good ways to examine leadership and the type of leader, and follower, who are ideally suited for today's and tomorrow's strategic environment. This is especially so for the profession of arms and in particular the Air Force. While all the services and government agencies espouse leadership principles, this paper more closely examines the Air Force. No doubt the similarities and differences between the services and government agencies are very interesting.

Since Burns coined the term's transformational and transactional leadership, it might be useful to look at his definitions. Burns wrote, "I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations-the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations-of *both leaders and followers*." [Italics original] The leader is not merely wielding power, but appealing to the values of the follower. In this sense, values mean, "A principle, standard, or quality regarded as worthwhile or desirable ," (Webster's New Riverside University Dictionary). Burns insists that for leaders to have the greatest impact on the "led," they must motivate followers to action by appealing to shared values and by satisfying the higher order needs of the led, such as their aspirations and expectations. He said, ". . . transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and the led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both."

Burns and much of the current literature make the point that the way leaders influence followers is based on their shared sense of what is important, worth doing well, and expending energy on it. In a sense the more significant the endeavor, the more the undertaking itself takes on an importance greater than either the

follower or leader. "Such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused." The goals, then, take on a life of their own. In business, this leads to market domination and profit. In the military, this leads to professionals leading inspired subordinates through tough budgets, difficult deployments, the rigors of combat, and ultimately victory. Burns recognized that "transformational" leadership does not stand alone in the leadership lexicon. As mentioned, he coined another leadership term, "transactional."

Transactional leadership is based on a transaction or exchange of something of value the leader possesses or controls that the follower wants in return for his/her services. "The relations of most leaders and followers are transactional-leaders approach followers with an eye to exchanging one thing for another: jobs for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions." The transactional style is precisely what happens in a contracting scenario. The contractor provides the specified service purchased. Liontos explains, "This only works well when both leader and led understand and are in agreement about which tasks are important." Transformational leadership and transactional leadership are not at odds with one another, but complement each other as the circumstance dictate. There is no magic formula or checklist that dictates when one is more relevant than the other in any given situation. When to make the transition is an art borne of experience and education.

Bernard Bass, a disciple of Burns, points out the relationship between transactional and transformational leadership. "The best

leadership is both transformational and transactional. Transformational leadership augments the effectiveness of transactional leadership, it does not replace transactional leadership, (Walsman, Bass, & Yammarino, 1990)." "Transaction" continues to be an effective tool, and a necessary tool, for leaders at all levels. Transformational leaders, whose choice would be to gain agreement by appealing to the values of the followers or peers, finding the road blocked, may resort to the transactional style. "When the transformational leaders sees himself/herself in a win-lose negotiation he tries to convert it into a win-win problem solving situation. If this is not possible, then he or she can display the transactional skills necessary as an effective negotiator, (Walsman, Bass, & Yammarino, 1990)." On the surface it appears that the "transactional" style provides the basis of most leader-follower encounters. Why, if the transactional style "works," not just stick to the tried and true?

While the transactional style may be the most prevalent, it produces results that may not be as high as with the transformational style. To explain this phenomena, Karl Kuhnert and Phillip Lewis examined R. Kegan's six stage developmental theory. Kegan's theory is that people may develop higher-order leadership traits as they mature. The six stages range from 0-5; Khunert and Lewis explored stages 2, 3, and 4. They used these stages to examine "transactional (stage 2)," "higher-order transactional (stage 3)," and "transformational (stage 4)," leadership traits. It may be useful to use Kegan's model of these stages to distinguish between the previously mentioned leadership traits.

A stage 2 leader, for example, is explicitly transactional. What they do for the organization is done for whatever the organization has

promised in return for the person's output. In other words, their ". . . commitment to the organization is one of reciprocity." A stage 3 leader, however, is the bridge between a stage 2 transactional leader and a stage 4 transformational leader. The stage 3 leaders are able to operate apart from personal goals and agendas to focus on being connected to their followers and even sacrifice their personal goals to maintain those connections. Trust and respect between leader and follower develop and form the bond between them resulting in mutual support, promises, expectations, obligations, and rewards. This creates a hazard for a stage 3 leader most easily exacerbated in an ethical dimension. "Stage 3 leaders may feel 'torn' in situations of conflicting loyalties (e.g., loyalty to the organization versus loyalty to their subordinates)." This feeling of competing loyalties may tempt these leaders to engage in situational leadership to resolve the dilemma of conflicting loyalties.

Stage 3 leaders, while being transactional, do exhibit some of the qualities of a transformational relationship with their followers. For example, ". . . they [the stage 3 leaders] use relational ties to motivate followers to believe work is more than the performance of certain duties for certain concrete payoffs. Followers may perform at exemplary levels with little immediate payoff in order to maintain the respect of their leader." This begins to look like a transformational relationship, however, a key element is missing for this to be a stage 4 transformational relationship. "Although followers who are persuaded by higher level transactional leaders may expend extraordinary effort to maintain a certain level of mutual regard with their leader, their beliefs and goals typically have not changed (Bass, 1985)." It is this factor that differentiates transformational leadership from the higher-order transactional

style. In the transformational relationship, followers integrate the leader's goals and values.

Leaders that are at stage 4 don't have competing loyalties. They have developed an internal compass of where they are going and why. "This is because stage 4 leaders have developed a subjective frame of reference (organizing process) that defines their selves, not in terms of their connections to others (the hallmark of stage 3), but in terms of their internal values or standards; that is what Burns (1978) called end values. At this stage, leaders are able to take an objective view of their goals and commitments; they can operate from a personal value system that transcends their agendas and loyalties." Transformational leaders have internalized a sense of commitment to their goals and articulate this in such a way to their followers so as to convert their followers to a high level of commitment as well. As stated earlier by Bass, leaders learn to use the best style of leadership for the situation. "Sometimes transformational leaders use transactional methods to lead, but stage 4 leaders have the ability to understand the available options and to act in the manner that is most appropriate to the situation." The military professional must weigh the pros and cons of these leader/follower relationships to judge which is best and when. This is by no means an easy task and usually results in a great deal of thought, for being a leader is work!

Before we can determine which leadership style most effectively serves the profession of arms, it is necessary to reflect on the kind of leaders and followers who will most likely succeed in a challenging environment. Business literature has proclaimed their preference, "…today's networked, interdependent, culturally diverse organizations require transformational leadership to bring out…in

followers…their creativity imagination, and best efforts, (Walsman, Bass, & Yammarino, 1990)." Is this what is desired in senior military leaders? People, who think on their feet, are creative, come up with the best solutions, don't need to be closely supervised and do what is necessary just because it is the right thing to do? This is exactly the type of leader and follower who needs nurturing, developing, and rewarding in the Department of Defense. All people, including those not in uniform, are part of the team-ideally this would extend to all government employees and to all who do business with the government.

To be effective now and in the future, almost all of the leadership literature and the author's personal experience agree that, people can not be treated like sheep, blindly herded from place to place. Their expertise, experience and intuition need to be encouraged, not stifled, if challenging situations are to be negotiated successfully. Avolio states, "What most organizational leaders agree on, however, is that their organizations must move away from encouraging employees to 'leave their brains at the door', to systems where employee's intellectual capital is nurtured, developed, and more directly rewarded." For government, military, and Air Force effectiveness, the thrust of this paper asserts that everyone must be treated as and expected to be a valued member of the team. "The Air Force of tomorrow and beyond must encourage individuals to be comfortable with uncertainty and willing to make decisions with less than perfect information." This would seem to be intuitive. Of course high performing organizations want all their people, leaders and followers, contributing to their maximum potential-to give their all for the good of the organization. How do you get there from here?

In most organizations there is a transaction process that pays people a salary to perform their work. Additionally, in professions the new entrant also begins an enculturation process. This process ingrains in the individual the goals and values of the profession. For leaders and followers to adopt the transformational model, they must all be in tune with the same culture and share similar values. In the Air Force, initial and subsequent training and education imbues the individual with core values, encouraging them to conform their behavior to the ethical and moral standards of the Air Force. Why? The core values serve as a starting point so all understand what behaviors and conduct are acceptable and should be emulated. They act as beacons vectoring people to the path of professional conduct. (Little Blue Book)

> . . . [V]alues are internalized so deeply that they define personality and behavior as well as consciously and unconsciously held attitudes. They have become an expression of both conscience and consciousness. [Italics original] Hence, holders of values will often follow the dictates of these values in the absence of incentives, sanctions, or even witnesses . . . .

In the final analysis, transformational leadership, in the military should fuse the leader's vision so strongly in the follower, that both are motivated by high moral and ethical principles. This process raises them above self-interest to perform their exacting duties, even to the ultimate sacrifice, for the GOOD of the nation.

How do leaders develop the bonds necessary to make transformational leadership possible? Bernard Bass has four interrelated components that he views as essential for leaders to move followers into the transformational style.

- First is **idealized influence**. He maintains that genuine trust must be built between leaders and followers. "If the leadership is truly transformational, its charisma or idealized influence is characterized by high moral and ethical standards." Trust for both leader and follower is built on a solid moral and ethical foundation.
- The second component is **inspirational motivation**. "Its [transformational leadership's] inspirational motivation provides followers with challenges and meaning for engaging in shared goals and undertakings." The leader's appeal to what is right and needs to be done provides the impetus for all to move forward.
- Next, is **intellectual stimulation**, ". . . intellectual stimulation helps followers to question assumptions and to generate more creative solutions to problems." The leader's vision provides the framework for followers to see how they connect to the leader, the organization, each other, and the goal. Once they have this big picture view and are allowed freedom from convention they can creatively overcome any obstacles in the way of the mission.
- Lastly, is **individual consideration**, " . . . individual consideration treats each follower as an individual and provides coaching, mentoring and growth opportunities." This approach not only educates the next generation of leaders, but also fulfills the individuals need for self-actualization, self-fulfillment, and self-worth. It also naturally propels followers to further achievement and growth.

One may get the impression that transformational, participative decision-making is based solely on the consensus of the leader and follower. This is after all the military, and leader and led often times can not afford the luxury of debate as to the best course of action in combat. Accordingly, while the transformational style offers a good model for many cases of problem solving, "Under various conditions, directive leadership is more appropriate and acceptable to all concerned than is participative leadership." Certainly there is a time and place for input to be heard, such as the planning process where consensus is the leader's goal:

> The Transformational leader strives to achieve a true consensus in aligning individual and organizational interests. In true consensus, the interests of all are fully considered, but the final decision reached

may fail to please everyone completely. The decision is accepted as the best under the circumstances even if it means some individual members' interests may have to be sacrificed.

After the planning phase, it is up to the leader to implement the plan or direct the operation. As inspiring as this sounds, inevitably there is the however comma.

Most powerful tools are potentially double-edged. Transformational leadership, or pseudo-transformational leadership has a potential immoral and unethical dimension that could be exploited by an unscrupulous leader inflicted on naïve and unsuspecting followers. Bass and Steidlmeier in their "Ethics, Character and Authentic Transformational Leadership," say: "Fundamentally, the authentic transformational leader must forge a path of congruence of values and interests among stake holders, while avoiding the pseudo-transformational land mines of deceit, manipulation, self-aggrandizement and power abuse." Hitler may be viewed as a case study in transformational leadership gone wrong. He appealed to the values and ethics of the German people, but, it could be argued that instead of fulfilling his follower's higher order needs and aspirations he lead them to ruin. He was a powerful, charismatic leader that would probably fit the definition of a pseudo-transformational leader, because his aim ultimately did not lead to the betterment of his followers, but rather his own fulfillment through abuse of power. There is yet another argument that warrants attention.

Bass and Steidlmeier gave another warning, "Transformational leadership is seen as immoral in the manner that it moves members to sacrifice their own life plans for the sake of the

organization's needs. There is no moral justification for the vision of the CEO [military leader] becoming the future sought by the employees." In order to overcome their warning, the leader's agenda must be uplifting and as Burns said, ". . . transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and the led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both." As stated earlier, transformational leadership may be double-edged, however, with high moral values as ethics espoused by both leader and led, the dark side is mitigated and the forces for good are championed. Now that up and downsides of transformational leadership have been explored, how does this relate to management?

When discussing leadership inevitably a discussion of management ensues. So, what if any, is the relationship between transformational leadership and management? According to Kotter, "The fundamental purpose of leadership is to produce change, especially nonincremental change. The fundamental purpose of management is to keep the current system functioning." So, leadership is distinguished by appealing to the values of the follower by, ". . . satisfying the basic human needs for achievement, a sense of belonging, recognition, self-esteem, a feeling of control over one's life, and the ability to live up to one's ideals."

Management on the other hand, ". . . develops the capacity to achieve its plan [the leaders] by *organizing and staffing* [Italics original]-creating an organizational structure and set of jobs for accomplishing plan requirements, staffing jobs with qualified individuals, communicating the plan to those people, delegating responsibility for carrying out the plan, and devising systems to monitor implementation." So while leadership works hand in hand

with management, their focus is different. Leadership envisions the future course and management builds the administrative processes to get there, producing orderly results, and maintaining the desired end-state.

At this point it may be useful to list some attributes of transformational leadership that a research of the current literature has highlighted to further portray the attributes of this leadership style.

- Authentic transformational leadership builds genuine trust between leaders and followers.
- " . . . without the continuous commitment, enforcement and modeling of leadership, standards of business ethics cannot and will not be achieved in organizations…badly led businesses wind up doing unethical things.
- Transformational leaders concentrate on terminal values such as integrity and fairness. They see the responsibility for their organization's development and impact on society.
- They increase the awareness of what is right, good, important, and beautiful, when they help to elevate followers' needs for achievement and self-actualization, when they foster in followers higher moral maturity, and when they move followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of their group, organization, or society.
- The truly transformational leader who is seeking the greatest good for the greatest number and is concerned about doing what is right and honest is likely to avoid stretching the truth or going beyond the evidence for he/she wants to set an example to followers about the value of valid and accurate communication in followers.
- There is a moral justification for the transformational leader's efforts to achieve value-congruence between the leader and the led. When it is achieved, both are more satisfied emotionally. (Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins, 1989). Much of this congruence results in leaders being seen by

followers as more considerate, competent, and successful (Weiss, 1978) and followers are more satisfied with their jobs.

- Leadership and followership in transformistic organizations are predicated less on positional authority and more on interdependent work relationships centered on common purposes.
- Kelley (1995) indicates that leadership and followership are equal but different activities often played by the same people at different times. Individuals who assume leadership roles have sound visioning, interpersonal and organizational skills, and the desire and willingness to lead. Effective followers are distinguished by their capacity for self-management, strong commitment and courage.
- When organizational participants are empowered to act as effective leaders and followers based on core values and a unifying purpose, the potential for unprecedented advances and exceptional outcomes are greatly enhanced.
- Transforming leadership is elevating. It is moral but not moralistic. Leaders engage with followers, but from higher levels of morality; in the enmeshing of goals and values both leaders and followers are raised to more principled levels of judgement.

The ingredients necessary for transformational leadership to occur may be summarized in a variety of ways. In the author's mind, it seems obvious that one of the most important characteristics of a great leader is his/her ability to make sound judgements and good decisions based on their internalized vision. A leader who can make reasoned judgements and decisions in the context of the ideas embodied in this paper surely would be successful. At the risk of oversimplification, the below ten tenets may be a useful summation of this paper:

1. Leaders have high moral and ethical values.
2. Leaders express genuine interest in followers.
3. Leaders have an inspirational vision.
4. Genuine trust exists between leaders and led.
5. Followers share leader's values and vision.
6. Leaders and followers perform beyond self-interest.

7. Participatory decision-making is the rule.
8. Innovative thinking and action is expected.
9. Motivation is to do the right thing.
10. Leaders mentor.

Thus, the goal of transformational leaders is to inspire followers to share the leader's values and connect with the leader's vision. This connection is manifested through the genuine concern the leaders have for their followers and the followers giving their trust in return. Leaders exhort followers to support the leader's vision by sharing ideas, imagination, talents, and labor to reach agreement and attain virtuous goals for the good of the leaders, followers, and the organization. Both leaders and followers rise above their self-interests for the betterment of all, and both achieve genuine satisfaction. Authentic transformational leadership, because of all the reasons mentioned above, raises leaders above their self-interest and short-circuits pseudo-transformational leadership tendencies. Management in the end codifies the changes and puts in the administrative structures necessary to solidify their maintenance. But it is through the leader's hard work that followers come to share the leader's goals and values to transcend their self-interest and accomplish the mission.

In conclusion, the merits of transformational leadership should speak for themselves. In light of the ambiguous strategic environment, it would appear to be obvious that most large organizations, the federal government, the military, and the Air Force require leaders and followers steeped in the same core values and energized to tackle the tough issues together. When transformational leaders are connected with their followers great things can happen. When leaders and led are on the same strategic page all their energy is focused to achieve maximum results with less oversight, because the leader has articulated the

target goal so everyone understands the direction to move toward. To put this into the context of combat, below is an excerpt from an Army officer in Afghanistan. It is an example at the tactical level but the hope is that it would follow at the strategic level as well:

> A Chechen commander was killed. On his body was a diary that compared fighting the US with fighting Russians. He noted that when you take out the Russian leader, the units stops and mills about, not sure of what to do next. But he added that when you take out a US leader, somebody always and quickly takes his place with no loss of momentum. A squad leader goes down, it may be a private that steps up to the plate before they can iron out the new chain or command. And the damn thing is that the private knows what the hell he is doing.

When leader and led values are in sync, followers don't have to be supervised -- they will know what to do when the time comes, and isn't that the goal of good leadership?

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