

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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The Construct of Leadership. In order to address the definition of leadership, we must first understand the idea of a *construct*. A *construct is a concept or organizing structure hypothesized to underlie an observable phenomenon*. In simple English, constructs are “big words” that give a name, a conceptual reference point to a complex configuration of attitudes and behaviors.

So, to define leadership, we must understand it as a construct, a big word, possibly one of the broadest and most complex constructs on the planet. When we add the modifier *transformational* to the equation, it becomes even bigger and more complex. To bring a measure of clarity to our discussion we must begin by distinguishing leadership from other related but distinct constructs.

Managing and Leading Contrasted.

Our English term “lead” is derived from the Old English term “lithan” and the Old French “leden” meaning “to go”, or “to cause to go with oneself” and thus “to guide or show the way.” The term connotes a sense of movement or journey from one place to another. Jesus used the word in this way, albeit in a negative sense. “Can a blind man *lead* a blind man? Will they not both fall into the pit?” (Luke 6:39).

So, while the word leadership is technically a noun, lead is a verb. We could say that leaders are *people in motion*. Leaders venture into new territory. They take others to places they would not go on their own. Leaders show others the way and invite others to join in the journey. Leaders lead by going first, demonstrating in their person and by their actions what ends should be chosen and what should be done next in service of those ends.

In contrast, the term *manage* comes from the Old English “mano”, the Old French “manus” and present day “man”, which means, “hand.” To manage connotes a sense of firmly grasping a thing so that it can be efficiently controlled and properly handled to accomplish desired end. We manage time, tools, systems, processes and “things” in general.

So, the construct of leading is rightly and necessarily contrasted with the construct of managing. Managing is about the judicious use of things to accomplish desired ends. Leadership is about enlisting other people to join in a risky but noble endeavor. Managing is about skillfully controlling things (time, money and processes) to make the best of the present situation. Leading is about creating a whole new situation. By definition management is about the known and predictable, and leadership is about the unknown and unpredictable. Leaders employ the means of passion, inspiration and moral courage to transform the present situation and create a new and better world. Managers employ the means of planning and quality control to make the best out of this one. In

general, we manage things in light of the present and lead people in light of the future. *The science of management is of the 20th century. The art of leadership is of the ages.*

Working Definitions of Leadership. Leadership is a construct of enormous breadth and complexity. Leadership theorist James MacGregor Burns has observed, “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.” So, it is not surprising that there are dozens, possibly hundreds of legitimate definitions for the phenomena we call leadership. These definitions vary greatly because they focus on different dimensions of the construct. Some definitions focus on the relationship between desired outcomes and the activities of leaders, some on the relationship between leaders and followers, some on the leadership situation itself, and some on the dynamic interaction of all three.

To understand *transformational leadership* we must first have a measure of clarity on what we mean by *leadership*. What is it? Here are a few helpful working definitions.

Some definitions highlight the *leader’s role in the process of attaining an outcome*. Consultant and author Bobb Biehl states that a leader is “the one who knows what to do next and why, and can bring the appropriate resources to bear on the need at hand.” Author and consultant Bruce Cook defines leader as “A person working with people to accomplish a purpose.”

Some definitions highlight the element of *inspiration*. C. E. Munson defined leadership as “The creative and directive force of morale.” (“Style and Structure in Supervision.” *Journal of Education Social Work*, (17), 1981, pp. 65-72.) Napoleon agreed, offering this brief definition. “A leader is a dealer in hope.”

Some definitions highlight the element of *getting things done through others*. President and General Dwight D. Eisenhower defined leadership as “The ability to decide what is to be done and then to get others to want to do it” (A. Larson, *The President Nobody Knew*, New York, Popular Library, 1968, p. 21). According to Harry Truman, “A leader is a man who has the ability to get other people to do what they don’t want to do, and like it” (*Memoirs*, 1958, p. 139).

Some definitions highlight *the idea of movement*. Leighton Ford defines leadership as the process of “moving people to change.” Bobby Clinton defines leadership as “taking God’s people, to God’s place, God’s way.” John Kotter sees leadership as a change process, “...a process that helps direct and mobilize people and/or their ideas...” (*A Force for Change*, p. 3).

Bobby Clinton offers this technical definition of spiritual leadership. “In the biblical context, a person with a God-given capacity and a God-given responsibility to influence a specific group of God’s people toward His purposes for the group.” Clinton goes on to describe leadership as “A dynamic process over an extended period of time in which a leader (utilizing leadership resources and by specific leadership behaviors) influences the thoughts and activities of followers, toward accomplishment of aims—usually mutually beneficial for leaders, followers and the macro-context of which they are a part.”

My humble attempt at a working definition of leadership is as follows. *Leadership is the art and science of taking individuals and communities to a new and better place.*

As we can see, working definitions are helpful to a degree. But they also illustrate the enormous difficulty of getting our arms around a construct like leadership. Leadership is properly understood as a behavioral science, a performing art and a relational encounter. It is an amalgamation of spirit and heart, mind and will, character and savvy, and wisdom and emotion. While leadership may be observed, appreciated, studied, practiced, and improved upon, it will never be fully understood. Until an “academy of leadership” establishes a formal definition (don’t hold your breath) attempts to come up with the *one best or most helpful definition* are bound to fall short of doing justice to this broad and multifaceted construct.

Transformational Leadership Defined—or at least described

The term *transformational leadership* is relatively recent, first coined in 1973 by J. V. Downton in his book, *Rebel Leadership: commitment and charisma in a revolutionary process*. According to leadership theorist James MacGregor Burns, transformational leadership is “A relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents.”

Francis Yammarino describes the process of transformational leadership. “...the transformational leader arouses heightened awareness and interests in the group or organization, increases confidence, and moves followers gradually from concerns for existence to concerns for achievement and growth...in short, transformational leaders develop their followers to the point where followers are able to take on leadership roles and perform beyond established standards or goals...” (Indirect Leadership: Transformational Leadership at a Distance, in Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio (ed.) *Improving Organizational Effectiveness Through Transformational Leadership*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994, p. 28).

According to Bernard Bass, “Transformational leaders attempt and succeed in raising colleagues, subordinates, followers, clients or constituencies to a greater level of awareness about issues of consequence” (*Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*, Free Press, NY, 1985, p. 17).

I define transformational leadership as the process of creating, sustaining and enhancing leader-follower, follower-leader and leader-leader partnerships in pursuit of a common vision, in accordance with shared values and on behalf of the community in which leaders and followers jointly serve. In the context of this process of service and partnership, both the leader and follower, and eventually the entire community experience increasing levels of congruity with the ethos, vision and values of the community.

Transformational leaders initiate and sustain a *process of partnership in and through which leaders and followers and the entire community experience increasing levels of congruity between the vision and values they espouse, and their character, capacities and conduct*. Transformational leaders are catalysts for a process of change in which leaders, followers and the community become more and more like who they aspire to be and act more and more in accordance with what they want to do. Leaders invite followers and the entire community to journey with them to a better future, which more fully embodies their personal and collective vision and honors their shared values.

Metaphor. A metaphor is the *characterization of a phenomenon in more familiar terms*. Metaphors can help us fill in what definitions of a complex construct like leadership leave out. As we saw in Chapter Two, metaphors like *children, slave, servant* and *steward* are especially helpful for gaining insight into the nature and practice of Kingdom leadership.

Unlike theories, metaphors are not verifiable. Metaphors are not true or false. Thus, they offer little by the way of descriptive or explanatory power. Rather, metaphors are *appropriate or inappropriate, insightful or not, helpful or not*. The comparison suggested by a metaphor should be *in keeping with* what we know about the phenomena under question. So, we must ask, given what we know about leadership from research, the biblical record and our experience, is transformational leadership in some meaningful ways *like* being a servant, child, slave or steward? If it is, the metaphor is appropriate and helpful. If not, the metaphor only hinders our effort to gain a clear understanding of what it means to lead.

From what we know about transformational leadership, the biblical metaphors for Kingdom leaders as *children, servants, stewards* and *shepherds* are fully appropriate and enormously helpful in gaining insight into what it means to be a transformational leader whether in a biblical community or not. Transformational leadership in general and Kingdom leadership in particular is in some important and meaningful ways *like* being a child or a *servant* in that it is a low status, high service endeavor. Transformational leadership is in some ways *like* being a *steward* in that it involves the wise utilization of resources not our own to bring benefit to the owner and those under the owner's care. These metaphors give us a sense of the ethos, the ethical and spiritual context in which Kingdom leadership is expressed and thus into the nature of Kingdom leadership itself.

Two Families of Leadership Theory

There is no mountaintop offering a privileged and final vantagepoint with respect to leadership theory. We have no central, grand theory of leadership, though transformational leadership theory has emerged as a prominent, possibly *the* prominent theory in the leadership discussion over the last three decades. Transformational leadership theory differentiates between two broad leadership constructs, *transformational leadership* and *transactional leadership*. Both constructs have theory families, which attempt to explain them, transformational theory and transactional theory.

It is important to note that transformational theory does not call for an *either-or* approach in comparing and contrasting itself with transactional theory. Rather a continuum of theories is suggested, with some theories *more or less* transformational or transactional than others. I will make the following comparisons and contrasts between transformational and transactional theory with the *more or less* idea in mind.

Transactional Leadership Theory. The construct of transactional leadership refers to behaviors in the context of *scripted, rational exchanges* between leaders and followers, typically with a view to the accomplishment of a prescribed task or goal. Transactional leadership theory seeks to explain and describe the behaviors in and around these interactions or *transactions*.

A *transaction* occurs when one person takes the initiative to make contact with another for the purpose of an *exchange of valued things*. For instance, one valued commodity (lower taxes or forty hours of my time) is brokered, bartered, negotiated and eventually exchanged for another valued commodity (my vote for you as Governor or a weekly paycheck).

Transactional *leadership* occurs when a leader, typically a person with a task or goal oriented need, makes contact with a follower, typically someone in possession of a resource relevant to the task or goal, like a skill, experience or available time. This leader follower *contact* is made for the purpose of a establishing an implied or explicit *contract*. The leader gets the follower to use his or her valued commodity to help the leader accomplish the task or goal in *exchange for* something of value to the follower (money, approval, or the satisfaction of a meaningful job well done). And the follower in turn fulfills their end of the bargain by exchanging something of value to the leader (an important need met, task accomplished or goal achieved). Transactional leadership revolves around “the deal” that appeals to the self-interest of both leader and follower, thus creating a *win-win* set of interactions or *exchanges* flowing from the intersection of mutual self-interest between leader and follower.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Different Constructs. Transactional theory and transformational theory explain and describe significantly different constructs. Whereas transactional theories focus on the construct of a *task oriented leader-follower exchange*, transformational theory focuses on a *community oriented leader-follower engagement*. Transformational theory defines leadership as broader than *event-oriented exchanges between leaders and followers*. Without denying that leadership is at least this (remember this is not an either-or distinction), transformational theory views leadership more broadly as a process of leader-follower engagement in the context of the community or organization. This is no small difference of degree or semantics, but rather a profound conceptual distinction.

In Comparison. Transformational theory seeks to describe and explain leader-follower *engagement*. This means that leaders and followers are bound together in a mutually uplifting partnership and thus focused on inspiring, motivating one another. And this

mutual partnership is caught up in a broader process of community wide transformation. The process of *mutual transformational engagement* raises the level of aspiration and conduct of not only leaders and followers, but the entire community. As such, transformational leadership is ultimately and necessarily ethical in nature.

Transactional leadership is more a *scripted event* driven by concerns for the efficient and effective implementation of defined tasks. These tasks are typically embedded in prescribed community roles, which crisply distinguish between the function and behavior of leaders and followers. While transactional leadership is focused on accomplishing a goal or task, the leader follower engagement of transformational leadership transcends any one specific task or goal. Transformational leadership, while concerned with matters of efficiency and effectiveness, is driven by broader and higher community concerns of ethics and ethos, which flow from the vision and values of the community and are focused on the long term welfare of the community.

Transactional theory calls for leaders and their followers do what is good, right and required given the boundaries of the task the requirements of the role. Transformational theory calls for its leaders and their followers do what is good, right and necessary given the task *and* the values and vision of the community.

The transactional leader helps followers gain the skills and experience to efficiently and effectively do what is required of them in a particular task and in their defined follower role. Transactional leaders help followers accomplish tasks by modeling attitudes and behaviors appropriate to the efficient and effective implementation of the task at hand. In the transactional theory of exchange, at best, you get what you set out to do. Followers efficiently accomplish what the role demands and the task requires.

Transformational leaders do the same. In the transformational theory of leader-follower engagement, you indeed get what you set out to do, but much more. Leaders set the pace on the extra mile. And along the way they add the ethical dimension of helping followers become increasingly aware of the community's values and the noble aspirations both leaders and followers pursue. Transformational leaders help followers see the vision so clearly and embrace the values so passionately that they *move themselves* to sustained, even sacrificial extra mile effort as a way of life.

Transformational followers go the proverbial extra mile. Why? Certainly not because a leader demands they do so. That kind of discretionary effort isn't something leaders can command. Rather, followers give an extra mile effort only because the mile is their mile. They are motivated to embark on the journey by a vision and sustained along the way of the extra mile by values, which they personally own. Extra mile followers go beyond what the task *requires* to do *whatever the vision and values necessitate*.

In the context of this extra mile partnership, many followers themselves become transformational leaders and many transformational leaders become catalysts for substantive and healthy change in the community and beyond.

The Rules of Engagement: How Transformational Leadership Works

Transformational leadership theory makes the following assumptions about how the process of leader-follower engagement works. We might call these the rules of engagement.

The Source and Focus. First, at the headwaters of transformational leadership is a compelling vision and a configuration of core values, not tasks or goals. When transformational leaders engage potential followers with a credible and compelling vision, shared values, and the high performance expectations attached to these, the cumulative effect of this engagement results in substantive change, indeed a transformation of moral and ethical dimension in the lives of *both* followers and leaders. Leaders and followers not only engage each other. They also engage the vision and values that have brought them together in the first place. As a result, a powerful environment, an ethos is created not only for the mutual exchange of valued commodities, but beyond this for a process of *mutual, transformational engagement*.

The Person. Second, the person doing the transformational leading must be in the process of transformation himself or herself. Of necessity, the transformational leader will increasingly manifest a critical mass or configuration of interdependent personal attributes, what I call *core essential capacities*. Transformational theorists call these the 4-I's; (1) idealized influence (charisma), (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized concentration. (Bernard Bass, "Does the Transactional-Transformational Leadership Paradigm Transcend Organizational and National Boundaries?" *American Psychologist*, February, 1997, pp. 130-139). The transformational leader must first and foremost be a transformational partner and this requires that the leader be caught up in a process of personal transformation in accordance with the vision and values he or she espouse.

Qualitative and Quantitative Outcomes. Third, as a result of the mutual, substantive and ongoing transformation of leaders and followers, agendas are indeed accomplished (e.g., important tasks and goals are achieved), but beyond these a series of transformational outcomes is secured on behalf of the community. By definition, vision and value driven results flowing from a transformational engagement are inherently unpredictable and thus uncontrollable. But, nonetheless, a pattern of "beyond expectation" outcomes is set in motion. Congruent with and reflective of the vision and values of the community, this pattern of results is imbued with an ethical quality which transcends the limitations of a task oriented, leader-follower transaction (Bernard Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*, New York, Free Press, 1985).

Community Impact. Fourth, this chain reaction of "beyond expectation" results is a catalyst for the transformation not only of individual followers and leaders, but also the broader community. Both followers and leaders covenant together not only to get important things done, but also to transcend the limitations of self-interest and task-oriented exchanges for the higher and more meaningful outcomes mandated by the

community's vision and values. Leaders and followers in transformational partnership engage one another and the community in a change process that addresses "higher-order outcomes" in the arena of community culture, values and ethics. The focus is not only *what do we want to accomplish today*, but *who do we want to become tomorrow*.

An Ongoing Community Process. Fifth, transformational leaders and followers serve not only as catalysts for a chain reaction of "beyond expectation" performance. They also serve as social architects, creating and sustaining the transformational community and embodying and shaping the emerging community ethos.

The ultimate aim of the transformational leader, his or her highest leadership act, is to create and sustain a community culture, which embodies the ethos, values and vision of the community, and fosters high performance expectations (an extra mile mind set) in service of the vision and values. In short, transformational leaders create, sustain and enlarge healthy transformational communities.

As more and more followers become transformational leaders and more and more transformational leaders become catalysts for vision and value-driven transformation in the community, substantial and ongoing change is initiated and sustained on the level of community ethos and culture. *A trajectory of community transformation*, substantive change according to the ethical and spiritual imperatives of the community, is now deeply embedded in the daily life of the community, defining its unique ethos and flavor, and shaping the hearts and habits of each person in the community. The end result is a substantively healthy (certainly not perfect) transformational community with the capacity to enlarge its reach and serve those beyond its borders as its vision and values dictate.

Summary: At the End of the Day.

Connected not Separate. In a transactional leadership *exchange*, the leader and follower are essentially short-term bargainers and consequently have no enduring purpose beyond the transaction itself. When the exchange is completed they go their separate ways. James MacGregor Burns writes, "The object in these cases is not a joint effort for persons with common aims acting for the collective interests of followers but a bargain to aid the individual interests of persons or groups going their separate ways" (Burns, *Leadership*, p. 425). While an important and successful leadership event may indeed have taken place, it did not require or produce the kind of partnership that binds leader and follower together in pursuit of a higher purpose that transcends the task itself.

In transactional leadership, at the end of the day leaders and followers go home. In transformational leadership at the end of the day the leader and follower may indeed technically go home, but they stay engaged in enduring partnership nourished by the community ethos. Leaders and followers are conscious that they are part of a larger community born of a common vision, connected by shared values and united in a common commitment to live out the vision and values in ever increasing circles of transformational influence.

A Legacy of Transformation. Transformational leaders build communities that *lean toward the future*. Such communities look beyond the tasks of today to the opportunities of tomorrow. Ultimately, this means that transformational leaders focus considerable attention on issues of legacy, which is always about the work of intentionally raising up future community leaders.

For, the vision demands that the community not only endure but flourish in years, decades, and centuries to come. It is incumbent on each generation of transformational servants to identify and develop the next generation of transformational servants. Enduring partnerships must be initiated and sustained because the vision, by definition is never completed and leaders and followers are not yet the whole people their values ask them to be and that they themselves aspire to be.

In transactional theory, at the end of the day, the follower is still a follower and the leader remains only a transactional leader, a leader of followers in pursuit of a mutually beneficial exchange of valued commodities. The follower may indeed be a better trained, more efficient, experienced and effective follower, but by definition, the follower will not operate beyond the role of follower or beyond the range of the prescribed tasks associated with the follower role.

In transformational theory, at the end of the day tasks are indeed achieved and followers indeed become more experienced and effective followers. But at the end of the day in transformational theory, something of greater consequence has occurred. In the process of transformational engagement, leaders and followers inspire and elevate one another to deeper levels of motivation and higher levels of aspiration. In deeper pursuit of higher aspirations, both leaders and followers are lifted out of their prescribed roles as “leader” and “follower.” At the end of the day no scripted task or specific role can contain the contribution of leader or follower to the community.

New concerns are identified, new capacities are developed and new competencies are released in the community and beyond its borders in ever widening circles of partnership and service. Emerging from this transformational process are the next-generation of transformational leaders, owners of the vision, purveyors of the values and passionately determined to sustain and enlarge the chain reaction of transformation in their generation and ready to similarly engage the next.