# THE DYNAMICS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: CHARACTERISTICS AND PRACTICAL USES

**Jeremiah Barasa, Durban university of Technology**
**Akanni Olanrewaju, Durban university of Technology**

## ABSTRACT

*The operating environment remains dynamic, and organizations often need to transform or change themselves to cope with the changes that must be overcome to survive and remain competitive. During these circumstances, transformational leaders are necessary. Transformational leaders prepare their followers for leadership duties and responsibilities through the power of influence and not by persuasion, pressure or force making them greatly admired and emulated by followers. These leaders should be ethical, and risk takers but make well informed and researched decisions not guesswork and are future and sustainability oriented in their decisions. Transformational leaders are keen on developmental needs of their organizations and followers and so they invest significantly in staff training and retention. In their leadership style, they perform five distinct dimensions namely, vision, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration of their followers. Transformational leadership style is best applied by organizations facing turmoil, challenges or are keen at market leadership and those that are keen in strategically positioning themselves for the future. The success of the transformational leaders is however dependent on the goodwill of their followers.*

**Keywords:** characteristics of leadership; dimensions of transformational leadership; transformational leaders; Leadership styles; principles of transformational leadership.

## INTRODUCTION

Transformational leaders are generally referred to as visionaries, motivators, catalysts, futuristic and goal-oriented who work by invoking group respect, improved culture and shared vision by the group (Rolfe, 2011). Transformational leaders have got eight attributes which make them successful in their role. These attributes are self-knowledge, flexibility, expertise, vision, authenticity, charisma, ability to inspire the group members, shared leadership, and ability to motivate followers (Rolfe, 2011). All types of leadership have the core objective of making followers perform their duties and tasks beyond expectations All leaders are expected to create a common vision, inspire followers, and provide a stable and reliable point of reference whenever need for change and challenges are encountered. Leaders usually adopt different leadership styles as they drive followers through situations, challenges, and routine practices. Leadership styles like transformational leadership focus on the relationship between the leaders and followers or workers and the influence on organizational performance and progress. The present corporate environment has become globalized and highly competitive, placing a lot of pressure on the leaders to perform and remain competitive. Transformational leaders work by stimulating and inspiring their followers to achieve the organization's desired success unlike transactional leaders who use

rewards and penalties. Transformational leaders achieve this by paying attention to the needs and concerns of their followers in pursuit of current and future strategies in a way that challenges them to be innovative and thus challenging them to seek for new and better ways of doing things while remaining competitive.

Transformational leaders use the power of knowledge, expertise, and vision to influence and change their followers to become and do what they want (Gabbar,2014). Therefore, transformational leaders seek to change their followers through different strategies and tools which include persuasion, mentoring and training for sustainable transformation. In their strategies, transformational leaders rarely use force of personality upon followers which is typical of charismatic leadership or the influence of rewards which is characteristic of transactional leadership in addition to the bargaining and negotiation strategies often adopted by transactional leaders (Gabbar,2014).

Transformational leaders usually endear themselves with their followers, because they are often admired and emulated by their followers. Transformational leadership presents the most valuable form of leadership because followers are given an opportunity to change, transform and, in the process, develop themselves not just as blind followers, but participants and contributors at work who are duly prepared for that role. This adds value to followers and the organization as followers are developed leading to increased productivity (Germano,2010). Therefore to succeed in their transformational role, transformational leaders prepare followers for leadership roles to the point where followers are able to take on leadership roles and perform beyond established standards or goals of an organization. This implies that transformational leaders attempt and often succeed in uplifting capability of colleagues, subordinates, followers, and clients to a greater level of awareness and self-esteem. This brings about sustainable change in an organization, and that means such organizations will continue with their systems of performance and structures even when the leader leaves the organization. Transformational leadership is the most preferred leadership style whenever organizations undergo tremendous or complex changes like mergers and acquisitions, entry into new markets and environments, rapid change in business environment like entry of new and stiff competition that calls for new way of thinking and doing things.

The purpose of this study is to examine and review the transformational leadership style, identify leaders regarded as transformational both in business and politics and identify practical characteristics, applications and challenges encountered by these leaders, followers, and organizations under transformational leadership style. This paper presents an extensive literature review and case studies for transformational leadership (Givens,2008).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Transformational leadership concept emerged 1970s and may be associated with the work of Downton (1973) and Burns (1978) who discussed the mechanism of influencing in leadership in contrast to the traditional transactional methods which were aligned with management (Kabeyi,2018). The leadership focused on gaining followership and encouraging them to achieve the organizational common purpose. In his leadership model, James McGregor Burns proposed in his book called "Leadership" in 1978 that effectively market the origin of transformational leadership. The theory of transformational leadership was developed in the late 20th century by the work of Burns through his work in the field of political leadership. Before Burns' development, more attention was usually made on leadership approaches to successful organizational transformation. Through Burns' development, transformational leadership was identified as a leadership in which leaders and

followers uplift one another to higher levels of motivation and morality for a given time in space. Therefore, transformational leaders raise followers from a lower level to a higher level of needs in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Kabeyi,2018).

The work of James McGregor Burns was further improved by Bernard M. Bass in 1985 in the book entitled "leadership and performance beyond expectations" (Kabeyi,2019). In this book, Bass explained how the transformational leaders psychologically affect the motivation and performance of workers. Therefore, transformational leaders can achieve organizational goals by motivating followers through raising their awareness about the importance of the expected results and by defining clearly how these results can be achieved. Bass recommended that leaders should encourage followers to go beyond self-interest for the good of the team or the organization they are serving (Khan,2015). By so doing, transformational leadership creates corporate citizenship by promoting a sense of belonging to the organization by followers. Therefore, transformational leadership should inspire team spirit and respect for one another in a team or organization while placing the interests of the organization above their individual or personal interests. Bass was the first person to officially use the word "transformational leadership" in the place of transforming leadership (Khan,2015).

In transformational leadership, followers are challenged to take greater ownership of assignments, as the leaders take time to understand their abilities which are then aligned with available tasks to improve the employee as well as organizational performance (Morton,2011). These create a positive learning environment and culture at the workplace. Transformational leadership requires the leader and the entire team to identify challenges, available resources and develop a long-term vision for the team and to constantly engage all team members in the work process so as to perform to the best of their abilities and grow professionally and personally.

The transformational leadership theory has four main elements namely, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence together define a transformational leader whose main focus is to drive the organization towards a specific vision or future position.

## Dimensions of Tranformational Leaders

This changes the follower's attitude from negative to positive by making them believe in themselves and their organizations. Transformational leadership style is associated with four distinct behaviors, also known as the four I's of transformational leadership. For success in transforming organizations, a fifth dimension of vision is included as a requirement for transformational leadership. These 4I's are discussed in sub-sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 below as follows (Northouse,2021).

## Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation of a transformational leader is used to promote the role of the leader in provision of challenge and meaning to followers in a way that motivates and inspires them in their work. In transformational leadership, the leader should carefully articulate the future state and vision of the organization to followers in a meaningful way (Odumeru,2013).

This is an inspirational communication of messages that build confidence by delivering information that encourages workers to believe in the organization and its future

outlook. Inspirational motivation refers to the leader's ability to inspire confidence, motivation, and a sense of purpose in the followers. It is the degree to which leaders articulate a vision that is appealing and inspiring to followers. The transformational leader must clearly articulate a clear vision for the future, communicate the expectations of the organization and show commitment to the laid down goals of the organization and the team. Other desirable behaviors of the transformational leader are continued optimism, enthusiasm, and ability to point out the positives and negatives without bias.  Therefore, a transformational leader is a source of authority and motivation to achieve the desired organizational goals and acts as a reference point for followers in a transformation mission or undertaking by a team (Rolfe,2011).

Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge followers with high standards of morality, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide meaning and sense to the tasks at hand or problems being addressed. However, to succeed, a transformational leader needs to have followers who have a strong sense of purpose. There is need for the transformational leader to motivate followers to action for what they believe in.  It is this purpose and meaning that provides the energy that drives a group forward. The followers should also be willing to invest more effort in their tasks, be positive, be willing to be motivated and be optimistic about the outlook and believe in their own abilities and that of leadership to deliver the desired results (Kabeyi,2020).

Transformational leadership should articulate an organizational vision in a manner that is appealing to the subordinates or followers. They do so to improve organizational effectiveness, by presenting optimism about the outlook because of the impending changes. Transformational leaders appreciate that change usually threatens workers and so should make effort to address their concerns by accepting feedback and addressing their concerns. Effective transformational leaders use various strategies like citing success stories on organizational transformation. These leaders address subordinates' concerns by inspiring them to see things differently which facilitates creativity and innovation (Sainidis,2020).

## Idealized Influence

Idealized influence calls for strong sense of ethical practice by leaders and a leadership e driven by the commitment to do what is right and just. Through idealized influence, transformational leaders should articulate their values and beliefs in whatever they do and should carefully evaluate the  moral and ethical implications of their decisions and actions which should be admirable, respected , and trusted by the followers. In their leadership role, transformational leaders work as role models for high degree of   ethical behavior and display a charismatic personality that influences other followers to want to be more like them. This implies that transformational leaders should be admired and emulated by their followers. Through idealized influence, transformational leaders should show willingness to take risks and adhere to a core set of values, convictions and ethical principles in their actions and conduct that are worth emulating by followers. It is through this concept of idealized influence that the leader builds trust with followers and the followers, in turn, develop confidence in their leadership. Transformational leadership provides role modelling for high ethical behavior, instills pride, gains respect and trust in the followers. As a development tool, transformational leadership has spread already in all sectors of western societies, including governmental organizations (Savovic,2017).

## Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation, is ability to stimulate follower's efforts to be innovative and creative through questioning assumptions, doing things in a new way and reframing problems. Transformational leaders encourage creativity, shared learning and innovation. Transformational leadership encourages both leaders and followers to pursue their intellectual curiosity and apply their imaginations to come up with new ideas and solutions to problems (Savovic,2017).

The purpose of intellectual simulation is to increase the workers' interest in assignments and create awareness of the various challenges at work and increase their ability to solve problems and encourage them to be creative and develop new ways of doing things. Intellectual stimulation refers to the degree to which a leader challenges prevailing assumption, takes risks and solicits followers' ideas about a task or challenge at hand. Unlike transactional leaders, transformational leaders value creativity and autonomy by their followers. Transformational leadership supports its followers by involving them in the decision-making process and stimulating their efforts to be as creative and innovative as possible to identify solutions to prevailing business challenges or institutional problems and situations. To this end, the transformational leader challenges assumptions and solicits ideas from followers without criticizing. The leader helps change the way followers think about an issue and frame problems and obstacles. The vision the leader conveys helps followers see the bigger picture and succeed in their effort. Transformational leaders stimulate and elicit creativity in the followers so that they can become independent thinkers. In this leadership style, learning is taken as a value while unexpected or emergency situations are taken as opportunities to learn and develop the team and leadership. Transformational leaders allow followers to question, think about issues, problems, and opportunities, and develop better ways to perform their tasks. Intellectual stimulation from this discussion suggests that a transformational leader must be innovative, risk taker and remains positive about all situations and should not buckle on trial and encourages followers to remain focused, innovative, and creative.

## Individualized Consideration/ Personal Recognition

Individualized consideration appreciates the need for a leader to recognize the follower's individual needs and facilitate developmental support through interventions like coaching and mentoring. This makes a transformational leadership a supportive leadership which demonstrates consideration, acceptance, and concern for the needs and feelings of the followers. The behaviors of a supportive leader are effective management of emotions, listening carefully, showing concern for the follower's welfare and demonstrate evidence of caring, and demonstrate consideration for the feelings followers including providing sympathy.

Personal recognition involves giving employees direct incentives like praises and acknowledgement of their specific effort and input at work in realizing specific targets in a way that encourages learning and collaboration at work with colleagues. Individualized consideration also refers to the degree to which the leader personally attends to each follower's needs, acts as the mentor or coach to individual followers in a manner specific to their situations. As human beings, each follower or member of a given group has specific personal needs, personal interests, and group desires and expectations. Some followers are motivated by money, while others are motivated by change as others just excitement while in some cases, a combination of factors.

Vision refers to shared values that are ideological in nature and that lead to internalization of organizational goals and objectives. Therefore, a vision is an idealized picture of the organizational future that is based on the organizational values and aspirations. Vision refers to the ability to clearly express and define the picture of the future position of the organization. The transformational leader should have ability to clearly present the future of the organization to all stakeholders.

## Principles of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders come in different forms and personalities e.g., civil rights activists like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., political leaders like Nelson Mandela and John F. Kennedy, public and private companies like Michael Joseph, business owners and managers. To be successful as transformational leaders, various guiding principles for successful execution of transformational leadership relies on several principles and guidelines which must be followed. These principles include simplification, mobilization, purpose, facilitation, and innovation etc..

## CHALLENGES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP SUCCESS FACTORS

Transformational leadership is capable of inspiring employees to transform and sustain small and growing organizations. This is done by showing and helping workers on how to fit into the organizational vision and strategies for future survival in a human and motivating manner. Transformational leaders empower their employees through training, increased responsibility, and role modeling. Whenever businesses encounter hardship and encounter turbulent times, quite often it is transformational leaders who can assist by use of high energy, enthusiasm, and passion to inspire and motivate employees through prevailing hardships. The transformational leaders must undertake the following to be successful.

## Limitations of Transformational Leadership

Several negative consequences are associated with transformational leadership style. Though transformational in the outlook, some leaders have used their qualities to bring about negative change[4]. As examples, Adolf Hitler of Germany and Sadam Hussein of Iraq are key transformational political leaders who ended up bringing a lot of death and destruction to their followers by plunging their followers into avoidable wars. This leadership is personalized leadership, which though transforming often focuses on personal interests rather than the interests of followers as opposed to authentic leadership which is more focused on collective good of followers. The leader's dependence syndrome is another shortcoming of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders may change the organizational environment such that they are relied on for everything in the organization. Therefore, transformational leaders should work hard to ensure sustainability even long after they exit the organizations through mentoring, training, and staff development through institutional and individualized capacity building.

## Disadvantages of Transformational Leadership

The most important attribute of a transformational leader influence is charisma which is very effective if used appropriately , but can at the same time cause destruction if inappropriately used. Therefore, like all other leadership styles, transformational leadership

has some drawbacks or challenges.  This however does not imply that transformational leadership is worse compared to others.

## Doing Things by Committee

The transformational approach in decision making makes employees feel that everything needs to be decided by a large group of people. This leads to some withdrawing and refusing to take part, while others get involved in constant conflict. In a small business, transformational leadership can work well because of the limited number of people, but in a large corporation, it works better when selected employees represent the others rather than trying to have everyone involved equally.

Transformational leadership is a complex idea arising from several different leadership theories making it difficult to learn or to teach. True transformational leadership is more of a personality trait than a leadership style. There is a great risk of transformational leaders abusing their position since often, these leaders are unchallenged by followers like the way Adolf Hitler worked and so is  Osama bi Laden. These leaders can stridently execute a vision that is self-seeking and is not for the good of all or the organization. Therefore, the decision to adopt transformational leadership style needs wider consideration of the operating environment and prevailing circumstances , and the specific  leader.

## ADVANTAGES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transformational leadership is associated with significant benefits or advantages over other leadership styles.  These benefits include.

Workers or employees always come and go, and when this happens, staff costs are involved in terms of hiring, training, and deployment. For this reason, transformational leadership seeks to retain staff and talent by creating a more engaged and free environment. Employee retention is significantly enhanced in organizations practicing transformational leadership. The same applies to valued customers and other stakeholders which is key to a successful business transformation. Since transformational leaders satisfy both the company and own needs simultaneously, workers feel at home and hold on longer. This keeps staff turnover and related costs low for the organization.

Passion is inner self drive of an individual or rather self-motivation. Transformational leaders create excitement which is catchy to followers as they are seen by followers being happy and having a good time.

Transformational leadership creates an environment which encourages creativity and a culture of trying new ways of doing things. This makes workers more creative and innovative as they seek solutions to various organizational problems and challenges. Compared to transactional leadership which loads workers with already made decisions with the leaders solving all problems, it is easier for transformational leadership to promote collaboration between workers themselves and their leaders.

Transformational leadership aims to change a company's values to include high levels of fairness and justice. This leadership encourages good values and morals in conduct of business and work. This is about doing the right thing in the right way all the time whether one is under watch or not. Transformational leadership creates an open and ethical environment because the transformational leader who is also a role model is morally driven.

## Impact of Transformational Leadership

Several studies have shown that there is significant relationship between the leadership that is exercised and organizational effectiveness. Similarly, there is significant relationship between leadership effectiveness and leadership behavior. This implies that with other factors held constant, the success of an organization is a function of the type of leadership in place.

Managers use different leadership behavior in performance of their roles which directly affects employees and thus their performance. Adequate use of leadership behavior often leads to higher employee satisfaction, employee commitment to work and organizational objectives, and improvement of their overall productivity. Therefore, effective use of leadership behavior improves the effectiveness of the leader and the organization.

In this context leadership outcomes refer to factors like group performance, realization of group goals, survival of the group, preparedness of the group, ability of the group to manage crises, satisfaction of subordinates with the leader, commitment to group goals by followers, psychological wellbeing, group members individual and group development, and retention of status of the leader in the group. On the other hand, organizational performance refers to the attainment of expected or desirable performance in terms of performance objectives and indicators. They include gross sales, profit margins, sales growth versus sales targets, net profits, productivity, unit production costs and many other quantitative and qualitative performance parameters.

Transformational leaders in business, are often experienced professionals and their leadership style is visible for all to see since the organizations and followers are made visible to the public. They are often remembered for turning around loss making organizations to profitability or transforming ideas and concepts to successful business enterprises. They are also adored by the people they interact with, i.e., followers, subordinates, and other company stakeholders. Through innovations and positive impact on followers and stakeholders, Michael Joseph is remembered and admired, and in fact at the end of his contract with Safaricom, he still retained as a non-executive director. In South Africa, Mandela remains an icon who ruled for just one term and left unlike other African leaders who have been clinging to power for many years. Mandela is fondly remembered as Madiba, by South Africans. For Michael Joseph, his success at Safaricom made him highly sought by his own organization and the public. For this reason, President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya saw him as the ultimate choice for leadership of Kenya Airways which was experiencing turbulence in operations making huge losses. In Kenya, his name features in social circles when people are talking about Safaricom, and Mpesa mobile money service. Therefore, successful transformational leaders tend to continue to influence their former organizations both directly and indirectly many years after they exit.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A transformational leader is keen on developmental needs of the organization and of the followers or subordinates. Organizations with transformational leadership in place invest significantly in staff training and retention. This can be realized by putting in place trainee development programs and retention-based incentives that do not amount to short term transactional incentives.

- Transformational leadership has four dimensions which must be demonstrated as distinct behaviors, also known as the four I's. These are inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.
- Transforming leaders are needed whenever an organization needs to undergo change or is facing hard times that need change in strategies, attitude, and established way of doing things.

- Like other leadership styles, transformational leadership has got both weaknesses and strengths and hence appropriate for specific operating environment. Organizations and leaders should be selective on circumstances where transformation leadership is desirable.
- In transformational leadership, the follower is empowered by the leader through training and mentorship to make own decisions unlike in transactional leadership where the leader prescribes almost everything to followers to execute.
- The main challenges which must be overcome by transformational leaders is to show or convince workers on the need for change. Inspire them, implement the desired changes, and ensure that change is permanent not temporary in nature.
- There is significant relationship between the leadership behavior and organizational effectiveness, therefore organizational success is a function of leadership behavior if other factors are held constant. It is therefore necessary to align leadership style and role with organizational objectives, both in the short term and long term.
- There is significant relationship between leadership effectiveness and leadership behavior. Therefore, success of a leader is a function of the leadership behavior.
- Transformational leadership has got wide practical application which includes parenting, staff training and development, change management and strategic planning.
- The challenge of transformational leadership is that it depends on the cooperation and support from followers or subordinates meaning the leader loses power if the support is not forthcoming from the followers.

## CONCLUSION

Transformational leaders are regarded as visionaries, catalysts, motivators, goal oriented and futuristic leaders who work by invoking improved culture, shared vision and group respect, by the followers. The eight attributes which make transformational leaders successful are self-knowledge, flexibility, vision, charisma, expertise, authenticity, and ability to inspire others   and ability to motivate followers. This implies that transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms followers and treats   them as full human beings. A transformational leader influences followers and moves them to accomplish beyond expectation.

Transformational leadership is the most preferred leadership style whenever organizations undergo tremendous or complex changes. Such changes include mergers and acquisitions, entry into new markets and environments, rapid change in business environment like entry of new and stiff competition that calls for new way of thinking and doing things. Transformational leadership has proved to be effective in delivering better outcomes by helping to enhance the work of followers and can be adequately described along five dimensions of vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, and personal recognition. For successful transformational leadership, the leader must have a clear and inspirational vision for the organization and the team's future which should define the purpose of the organization and team members because it is relevant to the business and its mission. It may be necessary to incorporate the core values for followers and their capabilities and due regard to the limitations and weaknesses facing individual team members and the organization as a whole. Based on this, the transformational leaders will help followers to effectively contribute to the set vision for the organization through various support tools and systems like training, technology, and general empowerment. In the performance of the duty, a successful transformational leader has to motivate followers, set and work towards clear goals with high standards of performance and expectations, should be fair, honest , appreciate the team, for their individual,  joint and team effort, encourage the employees to look at the greater good of the company and avoid self-interests to make

followers challenge themselves and realize their best potential for the good of the team and organization.

Transformational leadership is said to be realized whenever a leader performs the duties effectively in a way that earns trust, respect, loyalty and appreciation from followers and stakeholders. Transformational leadership is leadership that causes change in individuals and social systems. Through their actions and behavior, transformational leaders create valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders themselves through influence and role modelling. Strategies used in the transformation include connection of the follower's sense of identity and self, to the vision, mission and the collective duty and aspirations of the organization; role modelling; challenging followers to take greater ownership for their work, and proper understanding the abilities and limitations of the followers as individuals and team and aligning them with tasks for optimal performance. By so doing, transformational leaders lead followers to levels they may never reach on their own.

Transformational leadership seems to be the most dynamic under various circumstances, as demonstrated by identified transformational leaders like Michael Joseph, Bill Gates, and others in private and public business, politics, and social life.A transformational leader is a coach, mentor, innovator, enterprising, and visionary and motivator and can be found in private and public sectors as entrepreneurs or executives as well as politicians. To perform their role successfully, transformational leaders should be ethical in conduct, be risk takers but make well informed and researched decisions not mere guesswork and are future and sustainability oriented in their decisions.  The study concludes that, transformational leadership style has weaknesses and strengths, but recommends it as the best style for organizations to realize desired change while maintaining an outlook and sustainable progress and existence as opposed to short term intentions as in project management and transactional leadership whose goals are quick and externally imposed of influence by the leader through measures like rewards, force, and fixed targets. The success of a transformational leadership however depends on goodwill and cooperation between followers and leaders which may not be the case in all circumstances or prevailing internal and external environmental factors, thus the need to pursue other leadership styles or a combination.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Since success of an organization is a function of leadership behavior, transformational leadership should only be applied under circumstances where it is effective like changed management. Organizations with the desire to undergo change from the normal way of doing things should only recruit transformational leaders. However, it should be noted that employees and circumstances are dynamic, and this calls for the need for all leaders to be adaptive to changing conditions and circumstances. Therefore, leaders may be forced to change their leadership behavior when circumstances demand.On the other hand, organizations should only hire leaders whose behavior is in line with desirable current or future circumstances and organizational goals.

Since the success of a transformational leader depends on the goodwill of followers or subordinates, the behavior of followers should also be taken into consideration by leaders since not all workers are in favor of transformational leadership. The leader and followers need to support one another for organizational and individual success. Therefore, hiring

correct workers and managers in line with organizational vision is critical for personal, group and organizational success.

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