

2003

Transformational leadership in higher education : From politics to porcelain

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Recommended Citation

Brandis, Bunny, "Transformational leadership in higher education : From politics to porcelain" (2003). *Graduate Research Papers*. 417.
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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to make a case for transformational leadership as an effective and necessary tool to be accepted and practiced by institutions of higher education. Today's universities are under tremendous pressure to be more responsive to the changing environment and needs of society. The question is; can new leadership function within the traditionally hierarchical management and help transform the transactional university organization?

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
FROM POLITICS TO PORCELAIN

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,
and Postsecondary Education
University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

by

Bunny Brandis

May 2003

This Research Paper by: Bunny Brandis

Entitled: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
FROM POLITICS TO PORCELAIN

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Education.

6/27/03
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The purpose of this paper is to make a case for transformational leadership as an effective and necessary tool to be accepted and practiced by institutions of higher education. Today's universities are under tremendous pressure to be more responsive to the changing environment and needs of society. The question is; can new leadership function within the traditionally hierarchical management and help transform the transactional university organization?

Introduction

James MacGregor Burns was the first person to identify transformational leadership. He used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to demonstrate the difference between a transactional and a transformational leader. A transactional leader is more interested in satisfying the physiological needs as belonging and safety, where the transformational leader needs to incorporate the whole person and struggles to please the higher level needs of self-esteem and self-actualization (Hackman, 2000).

Transformational Leaders Behaviors

Transformational leaders are *idealized*. The leader exhibits high moral and ethical values. He or she can be trusted by their followers and avoid using power for personal gain. Transformational leaders are willing to share risks and remain connected to the mission.

At the same time transformational leaders possess *inspirational motivation*. He or she motivates their followers and challenges followers to

exceed his or her expectations. The leader demonstrates commitment and shares vision (Avolio, 2002). According to John Kotter, professor at Harvard Business School, “an effective vision is specific enough to provide real guidance to people, yet vague enough to encourage initiative and remain relevant under a variety of conditions” (Hackman, 2000).

The third behavior is *intellectual stimulation*. Transformational leaders reinforce creativity and innovation, when addressing old problems with new solutions. Followers are not reprimanded for disagreeing with leader’s view.

In addition, *individual consideration* is practiced by transformational leaders. He or she listens to his followers and is mindful to the individual needs and growth of every follower. Communication is an all important component. The transformational leader sees the individual follower as a person and an equal partner in the success or failure of the goal (Avolio, 2002).

Transactional Leaders Behaviors

The transactional leader uses *contingent reward* working with rewards or disciplines depending on the circumstances. He or she can motivate followers to perform adequately, but usually not at as high levels as the transformational leader.

In addition, the transactional leader uses *management by exception*. The leader can actively monitor his or her follower’s deviances, or wait for mistakes and then take necessary conduct (Avolio, 2002).

The two leadership styles function within completely different paradigms. Transformational leadership does not totally replace transactional leadership, but transactional leadership does require more effort. Performance of followers may be limited unless associated with transformational leadership (Avolio, 2002). In the past university leaders were primarily considered as transactional leaders. Due to the present diverse student populations and external environmental pressures, new and exciting changes are enviable for all leaders (Birnbaum, 1999).

Summary

Looking at the history of higher education, a definite pattern immerges. The Morrill Act, post World War II, and the activism of the 1960's all created tremendous change on campuses across the nation. If it takes a national crisis to cause dramatic changes at universities; the present economical and political unrest may be the next crisis. The universities want to maintain tradition, and protect the status quo; until everything can get back to normal. Leadership finds it hard to think about transformation, when it takes all the universities resources just to stay afloat.

The future is unpredictable and history may be the best narrative. The past may help guide leaders around present pitfalls, and strengthen the skills needed for success. Leadership is not granted it is a process that is learned. Perhaps the most important lesson is that leadership is a relationship. The relationship could

be one-on-one or a large group, between the one who leads, the followers, and roles change as leadership develops. Communication is the most important part of any relationship. No leader can honestly believe he or she can do it all by themselves. The leader may never know what his or her followers could achieve, and his or her followers may never realize what their total potential is as leaders. Leadership also requires action or participation. This is the vision and creativity that the leader uses to inspire his or her followers. Without creative vision the world would not evolve. Vision inspires an overwhelming drive to achieve, a strong sense of commitment, and drive to complete the task. Leaders become followers and followers become leaders. In addition, self development is essential. Dan Kaplan, president of Hertz Equipment Rental Corporation, stated: "I know who I was, who I am, and where I want to be." Warren Bennis called the "management of self" (knowing your skills and deploying them effectively) a leadership commandment (Bennis, 2001).

Resistant to Change

The history of higher education has demonstrated their resistance to change. Alexander Astin describes three particular areas of resistance in higher education (Astin, 1985).

1. Resistance from the Institutional Hierarchy.
 - accepting the status quo
 - traditional policies, considered untouchable

- alumni influence and money
- hierarchical systems can only change from the top down

2. Resistance from Institutional Structure and Operation

- routine operation cycle is very predictable and resistant to change
- decision making power is diffused among many review committees

3. Resistance from Faculty and Administrator

- faculty autonomy
- administration protect authoritarian practices
- pessimism, change is impossible or difficult, so why try
- faculty defensive about change
- faculty's mistrust of administrators
- external pressures, symbolic and not controlling

Leadership in universities is problematic because of the dual control system. This includes power and conflict between faculty and administrator's authority. Presidents accept the traditional leadership role, and do not incorporate an open two-way communication network. The possibility of transformational leadership versus transactional leadership is most likely never considered as an alternative option.

It is also suggested that leaders of a university that adopt portions of the four organizational models, bureaucracy, collegium, political system, or organized anarchy, are able to be more responsive to the administration, understand the

complexities of the organization, and are more open minded and responsive to the issues. He or she can more skillfully handle the conflicts and adapt to the situational requirements using all four of the organizational models (Bensimon, 1989).

Analysis

The pressure for institutions of higher education to change over the next decade will only become more intense. Can university leaders transform their institutes of higher education to be more responsive to the environmental and society needs? The following chart helps describe the advantages for adopting transformational leadership as an effective and necessary tool to be practiced by institutions of higher education.

Transformational Leadership

Transactional Leadership

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Results</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Results</u>
▪ Creative	▪ Innovative	▪ Impose Limitations	▪ Separate Goals
▪ Interactive	▪ Joint Effort	▪ Passive	▪ Bargain
▪ Visionary	▪ Shared Goals	▪ Authoritarian	▪ Individual Interests
▪ Empowering	▪ Converts Followers into Leaders	▪ Rewards Followers	▪ Impose Limitations
▪ Passionate	▪ Committed & Motivates	▪ Maintains Status Quo	▪ Moves Slowly

Leadership must make the change. An observer quoted; “You don’t seem to understand . . . let me explain hierarchy to you.” & “One of the problems

working with Department Heads is that they don't know they need help' (Huber, 2003)." Change is inevitable, but how does an institution of higher education get started? What mistakes does he or she avoid?

- (1) Establishing a sense of urgency. Transformations may not take place if complacencies are too high.
- (2) Must have a powerful coalition. Change is difficult to obtain unless the head of the department is an active player in the transformation. Do not underestimate the difficulties of change and the need for a strong leader.
- (3) The importance of vision. Vision directs action and inspires participation. Most followers must help in the transformation and believe that it will be a success. Avoid blockers by confronting all obstacles.
- (4) Create short-term wins. Transformation takes a considerable amount of time to change strategies and restructure. Successful leaders look for improvement, and achievement of goals, so he or she can show recognition to the followers.
- (5) Do not declare success too soon. Changes need time to establish themselves into the culture of the organization. New changes can have a short shelf life.

- (6) Secure changes into the institutions culture. When behaviors become part of the social norm at the organization they are more difficult to be removed (Kotter, 1996).

The one skill, in my opinion, that develops strong and effective leaders and followers is communication. The act of communication involves listening. Listening helps the leader or follower understand the new ideas and a new perspective. Understanding another person can be difficult. Communication can take form in groups of two or much larger groups.

Teamwork is essential for both the leader and the follower to be interactive. The leader must be able to communicate his or her innovation and vision, so the message is shared. Communication motivates the leader and the followers. The leader can empower the followers to become better leaders and the leaders to become more successful followers. Without communication skills the transformational leadership characteristics could not be used effectively (Lucus, 1994).

Leaders and followers are not born to be leaders. Participation in transformational leadership classes or workshops may be necessary to implement that first step into a whole new world of learning. Another noteworthy attribute of a transformational leader is that they have high moral and ethical standards. The successes they have are for the good of the public and not for self-interest.

John Adams, an American patriot, suggested that education went through three stages. He said, "I must study politics and war that my sons may have

liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.” We have had success developing the second stage, but not politics to porcelain (Birnbaum, 1999).

Transformational leadership will help student affairs professionals close the fractured learning community. Faculty/administration does not release knowledge to students, the students are passive receivers of knowledge. Fractured learning does not facilitate communication between the learning community. The three divisions are faculty/administration, students, and student affairs. The lack of feedback restricts learning to an individual level.

Student affairs professionals can use integrated learning by bringing faculty, staff, and students together to discuss goals and make learning connections. Transformational change starts in little corners of the institutions before it penetrates the organization as a whole. It could represent self-directed learning, which allows for learning without one-on-one contact with faculty. Student affairs professionals need to take creative steps forward, take responsibility, and provide leadership in helping institutions respond to the needs of students. Student affairs professionals must encourage steady transformational leadership development (Allen, 2000).

This is a quote by Tom Peters, on what motivates him forward and accounts for his remarkable staying power in the field of leadership (Bennis, 2001).

Psychologists and psychiatrists piss me off, mostly. They want me (and others) to be normal. And cheerful. But I hate “normal.” And “cheerful.” I like the screwed-up folks. Adjustment? What an awful idea. I love maladjusted folks who have monster egos—who think they can change the world, and occasionally do. And occasionally for the better. *Maladjustment interests me far more than adjustment.* And I think that “competent” is the worst thing you can accuse a fellow human of being!

I think exciting changes are imminent in higher education. Universities criticized for being self-absorbed and conservative will need excellent leaders to maintain quality institutions of higher education, and provide the necessary changes needed to ensure innovative social, academic, and cultural leadership during the next decade. The institutions of higher education must reform their goals and missions, and most importantly become more responsive to the external needs of society. Transformational leadership will be the norm and respected throughout the universities and the external business community.

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