

## **Transformational Leadership: An Evolving Concept Examined through the Works of Burns, Bass, Avolio, and Leithwood**

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### **Abstract**

Over the past four decades, the concept of leadership has become increasingly more complex and elaborate. Considerable debate has emerged over the most suitable model for educational leadership. Dominating the literature are two conceptual models: instructional leadership and transformational leadership. This paper will review the conceptual and empirical development of transformational leadership as it evolved through the work of James MacGregor Burns, Bernard M. Bass, Bruce J. Avolio, and Kenneth Leithwood. Moreover, the paper will discuss some of the conflicting opinions and diverging perspectives from many of the critics of transformational leadership. The author argues that transformational leadership will continue to evolve in order to adequately respond to the changing needs of schools in the context of educational accountability and school reform.

## Introduction

Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? Although these three simple questions originally posed by Paul Gauguin in the late 1800s were intended to provide meaning to human existence, they do offer a simple analogy to delve into the mysteries and ambiguities of leadership. The following discussion of leadership involves an examination of emerging themes, evolving models and empirical research from some of the most well-known leadership scholars. So as not to develop a myopic view of leadership, theorists from outside of the field of educational administration are discussed and numerous similarities are drawn. The paper will examine some of the conflicting opinions and diverging perspectives of leadership and discuss the overriding debate concerning the most suitable educational leadership model. Who are educational leaders? Are they celebrity CEOs who focus on soliciting public support instead of increasing profits? Are they altruistic individuals committed to the overall organization and the betterment of our children? In what direction are schools going? How will educational leaders navigate others within a culture that fully embraces systemic change?

Robert Wright (2004), author of bestselling book, *A Short History of Progress*, asserts that we have progressed so rapidly as a society that the skills and customs we learned as children are outdated by the time we are thirty. In a sense, we struggle to keep up with our own culture. In hunter-gatherer societies the social structure was, for the most part, egalitarian. "Leadership was diffuse, a matter of consensus, or something earned by merit or example" (Wright, p. 48). When the hunter was successful he shared his meat and thus gained power and prestige from his followers. Leadership is a universal phenomenon. The roles of both leaders and followers have become more complex and elaborate and multiple perspectives exist on how leadership is conceptualized.

Leithwood and Duke (1999) conducted a review of the concepts of leadership in educational literature from 1988 to 1995. In this review they found a total of 121 articles on leadership, out of a total number of 716 articles. Based on a review of ten years of leadership research, by top scholars in educational administration, Heck and Hallinger (1999) concluded that there was a clear trend toward the accumulation of knowledge regarding school leadership and its effects. Leadership has been, and will continue to be, a major focus in the era of school accountability and school restructuring. They also suggest that the study of school leadership will become increasingly more eclectic, both philosophically and methodologically. In addition,

leading and managing effective schools to respond to the increasingly complex demands of society will require the knowledge and technical skills of committed and competent leaders. With the plethora of research on the topic of leadership, we continue to see ambiguous and ill-defined concepts and theories on the topic of leadership. The all encompassing topic of “leadership” has subsumed such a diversity of perspectives and topics, that hardly anyone can determine what leadership actually is, nor how it should be defined. Furthermore, as the demographics shift, there is considerable debate on how to best prepare the next generation of leaders. The eclecticism reflected in the study of educational leadership has rendered the field unfocused and without a guiding purpose. Moreover, this has left scholars and practitioners searching to make sense of the field within a rapidly changing and diverse world.

There is no doubt that there will continue to be a focus on leadership throughout the succeeding decades. Michael Fullan (2001) claims that effective leadership is in short supply. He further adds that we should expect to see “leadership development initiatives dominating the scene over the next decade” (p. xii). What is the image of leadership that will take us through this period of organizational change and school reform? Moreover, what kind of leadership is needed at all levels of the school system to effectively lead us through change and advance us even further than we ever thought possible?

The media inundate us with stories of top leaders in business, government, and education. *Harvard Business Review* and *Educational Administration Quarterly*, two of the most scholarly journals representing their respective fields, devote considerable space to the study of leadership. Bestselling national book lists include books that examine all facets of leadership by well-known business writers such as: Jim Collins, Jack Welch, and Peter Drucker. Our society has a growing desire to look more critically at our leaders as we search for more effective and efficient ways to run our organizations. Foster and Young (2004) note, “When goals are not met, people lose confidence in, and tend to blame those people believed to be responsible for leadership” (p. 29). School systems have become a source of blame for the many ills that affect our current society. The trend, as Young and Foster outline, is to “blame those people believed to be responsible for leadership when solutions are not readily forthcoming” (p. 29). Rarely does a day pass without newspapers reporting stories about both effective and ineffective leadership. Society celebrates and often immortalizes outstanding leaders. Some people spend their lives trying to emulate and master the behaviours of these well-known leaders. The media regales in delight to share with us

the demise of someone we thought was an infallible leader. Sometimes we hear of stories about ordinary people in a community who possess outstanding leadership qualities that mobilize others to work collaboratively towards achieving a common goal. Articles and books centre around helping people become more effective leaders: to be more innovative; to connect with their staff; and to develop and focus on a shared vision. Collectively, this abundance of literature attempts to explore the multidimensional and complex meaning of the term “leadership.”

Despite the copious amount of literature on leadership, an agreed upon definition of leadership does not exist. It is difficult to engage in conversation without a clear definition of what you are talking about; similarly, it is difficult to follow a concise definition of a concept that is so subjective. In addition to the ambiguity surrounding the definition of leadership, researchers have found relatively limited correlations between student learning and leadership practices. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) stated, “Although leadership explains only about three to five percent of the variation in student learning across schools, this effect is actually nearly one-quarter of the total effect of all school factors” (p. 3). Despite the seemingly limited correlation, the effect of leadership when compared to all of the other school factors proves to be substantial and therefore warrants consideration. Having said this, the discourse on leadership might best be understood through the careful examination of the series of phases in which it has evolved.

### **The Progression of Transformational Leadership: Where do we come from?**

Instructional leadership and transformational leadership have emerged as two of the most frequently studied models of school leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 1999). What distinguishes these models from others is the focus on how administrators and teachers improve teaching and learning. Instructional leaders focus on school goals, the curriculum, instruction, and the school environment. Transformational leaders focus on restructuring the school by improving school conditions. Huber and West (2002) delineate the following stages of leadership into four broadly defined phases. The first phase is the personality or trait theory of leadership, whereby successful leaders are seen as possessing particular qualities and characteristics typical of good leaders. The personality theory focuses on great men and women leaders in history, for example: Gandhi, Mandela, Churchill, and Thatcher. Leaders are expected to study the lives of these leaders and then attempt to emulate their behaviours and attitudes. Many of these great leaders vary tremendously and copying their behaviours is an almost impossible task. The second phase includes examining what good leaders actually do. In this phase, certain traits are believed to

relate to successful leadership; however, empirical studies have not established a definite link between particular traits, or groups of traits, and effective leadership.

Following these two phases is a situational approach to leadership. Researchers turn their attention to the context in which leadership is exercised. Task-related and people-centred behaviours are interpreted differently by groups in different contexts. Researchers attempt to isolate specific properties of leadership situations that relate to the leader's behaviour and performance. The fourth phase that includes linking the culture of the organization to the leader is encompassed in the transformational model of leadership. Instructional leadership and transformational leadership have been a topic of conversation and debate among scholars for the past decade. The current focus is linking leader behaviour with the organizational culture (Murphy, 2002).

### ***Instructional Leadership***

The Instructional leadership model emerged in the early 1980s in the research on effective schools. In contrast to the earlier models, this model focused on the manner in which leadership improved educational outcomes. Essentially, the principal's role was to focus on the teachers as the teachers focused on helping students learn. The leadership of the school principal is instrumental in providing an explanation for school effectiveness. School leaders are intended to focus on the behaviours of teachers as they help teachers engage their students in learning activities. Hallinger's (2003) most frequently used conceptualization of instructional leadership proposes three dimensions: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. Hallinger further outlines ten functions of an instructional leader.

Dimmock (1995) asserts that instructional leadership is too prescriptive and relies on a top down process of management. This type of structure supports the notion that when principals execute essential tasks, teaching and learning improve. He suggests that schools are characterized by "loose coupling and autonomy" and a better strategy would be a bottom-up approach. The proposed "backward mapping" would begin with student outcomes and then progress up through the following: learning styles and processes; teaching strategies; school organization and structure; and leadership, management, resources and culture/climate. Dimmock suggests that this framework and strategy would help schools and communities address the challenge of providing leadership and management for quality teaching and learning.

Essentially, the student is the centre of these quality schools and principals and teachers must focus on improving student learning and performance. Leadership within this paradigm is based primarily on a strong technical knowledge of teaching and learning and secondly, on curriculum design, development and evaluation. Dimmock states, “The traditional top down linear conceptions of leadership and management and their influence on teaching and learning have become inappropriate” (p. 295). He also suggests that research findings indicate that only a minority of principals would find instructional leadership a reality.

The problem with instructional leadership is that in many schools the principal is not the educational expert. Moreover, there are some principals who perceive their role to be administrative and, as such, they purposely distance themselves from the classroom environment. Hallinger (2003) suggests that in many instances principals have less expertise than the teachers they supervise. This notion is further complicated by the fact that the principal’s authority is severely limited as he/she occupies a middle management position. In many school systems, the ultimate authority exists with the senior administrators in the district or divisional office. The reality of current school systems is that principals are politically wedged between the expectations of classroom teachers, parents, the senior management team, and the members of the community. A challenge for many principals is to work with the various educational stakeholders to maintain some sense of balance between the competing and often conflicting demands from various interest groups.

Devolution and decentralization also divert the principal’s attention from the technical core of the school. Many school principals are so engrossed in the managerial and administrative tasks of daily school life, that they rarely have time to lead others in the areas of teaching and learning.

Elaborated and more contemporary versions of instructional leadership have been developed in order to respond to the numerous dimensions and ever-changing study of leadership. Heck and Hallinger’s (1999) conceptualization of instructional leadership focuses on the principal’s effort to define the school’s mission and goals, manage the instructional program, and promote a safe school environment. These dimensions are elaborated further to include ten functions of an instructional leader. Marks and Printy (2003) reconceptualized the term “instructional leadership” to replace the hierarchical and procedural notion with the concept of “shared” instructional leadership. In this model, the principal is the “leader of instructional

leaders” not the person who is independently responsible for leadership initiatives within the school. ***Transformational Leadership***

Starting around the mid-1980s the public became increasingly more demanding on the school system to raise standards and improve students’ academic performance. Along with this emerged the critical observation of school leadership and the link between leadership and school effectiveness. Adams and Kirst (1999) stated, “The ‘excellence movement’ was launched, and in its wake followed an evolution in the notion of educational accountability commensurate with the movement’s challenge to obtain better student performance” (p. 463). Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach (2002) refer to these initiatives as large-scale school reform. Several other initiatives were implemented as a means of providing more accountability. Adams and Kirst state, “Policy makers, educational leaders, practitioners, and parents also continued to seek better student performance and accountability through management practices, professional standards, teacher commitment, democratic processes, and parent choice” (p. 466). School reform and accountability movements pressure school principals to improve student achievement, yet little information is provided on best practices for achieving this. Numerous accountability schemes are exclusively based on high-stakes standardized testing, which is typically incongruent with what most educators recognize as effective ways of measuring quality teaching and learning. Educational accountability schemes are complex and they are often accompanied by both internal and external turbulence that must be mediated by the school principal. The new focus for schools has created a cohort of “old school” principals who must now embrace a conceptually new form of leadership.

Along with this movement toward greater accountability was the increasing number of research studies attempting to measure the impact of school leadership. New terms began to emerge in literature such as: shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership and transformational leadership. “The emergence of these models indicated a broader dissatisfaction with the instructional leadership model, which many believed focused too much on the principal as the centre of expertise, power, and authority” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330).

Leithwood, Begley and Cousins (1994), in their book *Developing Expert Leadership*, discuss several questions related to the impact and influences on the practices of current school leaders. In their discussion they review studies conducted from 1974 to 1988 and attempt to find out what the studies contributed to knowledge about the impact of school leaders. They state the

following: “First, we must acknowledge significant limitations in the research-based knowledge about the nature of current school-leaders’ impact. But, based on the number of studies alone, one can reasonably conclude that current school-leaders are capable of having a significant influence on the basic skills’ achievement of students” (p.14). They further state that evidence concerning other types of impact was extremely thin.

Hallinger (2003) stated that by 1990, researchers shifted their attention to leadership models that were “more consistent with evolving trends in educational reform such as empowerment, shared leadership, and organizational learning. This evolution of the educational leadership role has been labelled as reflecting ‘second order’ changes (Leithwood et al., 1994) as it is aimed primarily at changing the organization’s normative structure” (p. 330). Transformational leadership is the primary model reflecting the aforementioned characteristics (e.g., Avolio 1999; Bass 1997, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi 2000; Silins & Mulford, 2002). To fully conceptualize the notion of transformational leadership, a reflective examination of its inception and development is prudent. In addition, a thorough investigation into the research and literature provided by leading scholars of this model is imperative to our understanding of the term. The scholars most closely associated with transformational leadership are: James MacGregor Burns, Bernard M. Bass, Bruce J. Avolio, and Kenneth Leithwood. The contributions that each of these scholars made, to the concept of transformational leadership, will be discussed in the following section. ***James MacGregor Burns***

Burns (1978) notes that although leadership is in rich abundance in literature, no central concept of leadership has emerged, because scholars are working in separate disciplines to answer specific questions unique to their specialty. Because of the work conducted in the field of humanistic psychology, Burns states that it made it possible to make generalizations about leadership across cultures and time. In his groundbreaking book “*Leadership*,” Burns sets the stage for the evolution of the concept of transformational leadership.

According to Burns (1978), leadership must be aligned with a collective purpose and effective leaders must be judged by their ability to make social changes. He suggests that the role of the leader and follower be united conceptually and that the process of leadership is the interplay of conflict and power. Burns delineates two basic types of leadership: transactional and transformational. Transactional leaders approach followers with the intent to exchange one thing for another, for example, the leaders may reward the hard-working teacher with an increase in



budget allowance. On the other hand, “The Transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower” (p. 4). The result of this leadership is a mutual relationship that converts followers to leaders and leaders into moral agents. The concept of moral leadership is proposed as a means for leaders to take responsibility for their leadership and to aspire to satisfy the needs of the followers. Burns’ position is that leaders are neither born nor made; instead, leaders evolve from a structure of motivation, values, and goals.

Burns argues that we have relied on a faulty and overemphasized role of power. As such, we have paid the price for our preoccupation with power and we must now see power and leadership not as things but as relationships. “It lies in seeing that most powerful influences consist of deeply human relationships in which two or more persons engage with one another. It lies in a more realistic, a more sophisticated understanding of power, and of the often far more consequential exercise of mutual persuasion, exchange, elevation, and transformation – in short, of leadership” (p. 11). Burns defines 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*” (Burns, 1978, p.19). Transactional leadership occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with other for the purpose of an exchange of valued things. Both parties acknowledge the power relationships of the other and together they continue to pursue their respective purposes. The people are not bound together by a mutually similar purpose. In contrast, transforming leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with one another and they increase their levels of motivation and morality. The power base, in this instance, mutually supports a common purpose. This latter form of leadership seeks to “raise the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both” (Burns, 1978, p.20). Transformational leadership encompasses a change to benefit both the relationship and the resources of those involved. The result is a change in the level of commitment and the increased capacity for achieving the mutual purposes.

Burns’ earlier work was instrumental in defining two solid conceptualizations of the terms “transactional leadership” and “transformational leadership.” The work of Avolio & Bass, 2002, and Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1997, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1993) was a response to some of the

limitations and omissions evident in Burns' work, in particular, the lack of empirical evidence to support Burns' theory.

Burns' latest book entitled *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness* (2003) offers an expansion of his earlier book. While illuminating the work of world leaders, he suggests ways that transactional leaders can learn to become transformational. Burns examines people whom he considers to be breakthroughs in leadership, for example: Gandhi, Gorbachev, Eleanor Roosevelt, Washington, and Jefferson. Burns further suggests that what was lacking in his original work was a focus on psychology. He believes that to understand leadership and change, we must examine human needs and social change. His exploration also includes looking at leadership as a form of power based on "the possession of resources by those that hold power, as well as the interplay of the wants and needs, motives, values, and capacities of both would-be leaders and their potential followers" (p. 16). Burns contends that leadership is a moral undertaking and a response to human wants as they are expressed in human values. He believes that the biggest and boldest task of global leadership should be to respond to world poverty. Burns suggests that, "transforming leadership begins on people's terms, driven by their wants and needs, and must culminate in expanding opportunities for happiness" (p. 230). While examining world-renowned great leaders, Burns focuses on ways that leaders emerge from being ordinary "deal makers" to become dynamic agents of major social change.

Similar to Burns' (2003) investigation into world-renowned leaders, Jim Collins (2001a), a well-known author and management researcher, shared a similar orientation when he attempted to uncover what transformed a company from good to great. His research revealed that great companies had what he defined as a Level 5 Leader. His argument is based on a five-year study he and a group of 22 research associates conducted with 1,435 Fortune 500 companies. Through both qualitative and quantitative analysis they set out to answer two research questions: Can a good company become a great company, and, if so, how? Collins' concludes that only 11 companies met the criteria of a "great company" and at the helm of these companies was a unique person with specific characteristics.

Collins (2001b) developed a hierarchical diagram that outlines the progression of a Level 5 Leader and the subsequent increase in personal power. Level 5 Leaders are humble and unpretentious; they often credit "luck" or others for their accomplishments. They are mild-mannered and shy, and they do not want to receive any public acknowledgement for their

greatness. These leaders push themselves to do whatever it takes to produce great results and they pursue successors that will continue on in their success. When a Level 5 Leader recognizes adversity or when the company struggles, they blame themselves and maintain their faith that they will prevail with commitment and perseverance. Despite feelings of inadequacy, these great leaders focus on the company, and make decisions for the benefit and longevity of the organization, as opposed to their personal wealth or benefit.

Burns and Collins both revert to looking at the great leaders of all time in an effort to isolate what makes these people so extraordinary. Both conclude that these exceptional leaders possess something unique. Burns suggests that transforming leaders “define public values that embrace the supreme and enduring principles of a people” (p. 29). Collins (2001b) states that Level 5 leaders “build enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will” (p. 20). Despite the differences in the above statements, Level 5 leaders and transforming leaders both focus on the collective organization, or group of people. Moreover, these exceptional and committed leaders possess unique personal values that empower others to transform the organization.

### ***Bernard M. Bass & Bruce J. Avolio***

Bass (1998) concentrated his research on military, business, and educational organizations. He delved into, what was considered at the time, the new paradigm of transformational leadership. Most of his research stems from the inadequacies and deficiencies that were documented from Burns’ earlier work. He has found evidence that transformational leadership was particularly powerful and had the foundation to move followers beyond what was expected. He believes that transformational leaders did more than set up exchanges and agreements. Bass believes that leaders behave in certain ways in order to raise the level of commitment from followers. Transformational leadership is classified as the Full Range of Leadership (FRL) and this permits further exploration into the effects of its application to specific conditions (Bass, 1998). The identification and training of potential leaders is also investigated more systematically.

Previous research relied heavily on the use of survey instruments and many studies tested the same hypotheses. This has resulted in a paucity of theory and a lack of practical application of these limited findings (Bass 1998). Bass’ intent is to develop new ways to identify successful and effective leaders. His work uses an empirically

confirmed and logically supported factor analytic framework of transformational and transactional leadership.

#### *Development of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)*

Bass and his colleagues identify components of transformational leadership which are further measured with the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). A total of 141 statements were classified by trained judges as either transformational or transactional leadership. The questionnaire was then administered to U.S. Army officers and they were told to rate their superior officers on a scale from 0 (not observed) to 4 (behaviour observed frequently). Numerous other studies have been completed following this original research to analyze frequencies of behaviours observed by subordinates in business, agencies, and the military. The following four components of transformational leadership were developed:

##### *1. Charismatic Leadership, or Idealized Influence.*

Transformational leaders are role models; they are respected and admired by their followers. Followers identify with leaders and they want to emulate them. Leaders have a clear vision and sense of purpose and they are willing to take risks.

*2. Inspirational Motivation.* Transformational leaders behave in ways that motivate others, generate enthusiasm and challenge people. These leaders clearly communicate expectations and they demonstrate a commitment to goals and a shared vision.

*3. Intellectual Stimulation.* Transformational leaders actively solicit new ideas and new ways of doing things. They stimulate others to be creative and they never publicly correct or criticize others.

*4. Individualized Consideration.* Transformational leaders pay attention to the needs and the potential for developing others. These leaders establish a supportive climate where individual differences are respected. Interactions with followers are encouraged and the leaders are aware of individual concerns (Bass, 1998).

Bass' model of leadership also includes three dimensions of transactional leadership: contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire, or non-leadership behaviour. Contingent reward relates back to earlier work conducted by Burns (1978) where the leader assigns work and then rewards the follower for carrying out the assignment. Management-by-exception (MBE) is when the leader monitors the follower, and then corrects him/her if necessary. MBE can be either passive (MBE-P) or active (MBE-A). MBE-P includes waiting

passively for errors to occur and then taking corrective action. MBE-A may be necessary when safety is an issue. For example, a leader may need to supervise a group of workers. Laissez-faire leadership is virtually an avoidance of leadership behaviours. Leadership behaviours are ignored and no transactions are carried out.

Bass believes that every leader displays each of the aforementioned styles to some extent; he calls this the “Full Range of Leadership Model” (Bass, 1998, p. 7). An optimal leader would practice the transformational components more frequently and the transactional components less frequently. Bass and Avolio (1988) embrace this “two-factor theory” of leadership and believe that the two build on one another. The transactional components deal with the basic needs of the organization, whereas the transformational practices encourage commitment and foster change. Although Bass believes that transformational and transactional leadership are at opposite ends of the leadership continuum (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), he maintains that the two can be complementary. The delineation of transactional and transformation components makes this a logical point of departure in this discussion, to provide a clear distinction between the role of a manager and a leader.

#### *Managers and Leaders*

Abraham Zaleznik (1992) wrote an article for Harvard Business Review entitled, “*Managers and leaders: Are they different?*” He argues that managers and leaders are different kinds of people. He states, “a crucial difference between managers and leaders lies in the conceptions they hold, deep in their psyches, of chaos and order” (p. 74). Zaleznik likens the role of a leader to that of an artist, scientist, and creative thinker as opposed to a manager. He further argues that both managers and leaders are needed in organizations if they are to be successful, but developing them both requires fostering an environment that cultivates creativity and imagination.

Very similar arguments are made by Zaleznik (1992) and Bass & Avolio (1992, 1998). Zaleznik suggests that managers view goals impersonally, as opposed to leaders who develop goals that reflect a deeper meaning based on beliefs (Inspirational Motivation). According to Zaleznik, “the manager’s conception of work involves a combination of people and ideas interacting to establish strategies and make decisions” (p. 76). Managers plan, negotiate, reward and coerce. Leaders, on the other hand, try to excite, inspire and support (Intellectual Stimulation). Concerning relations with other, Zaleznik states that managers maintain a low level

of emotional involvement with others. Leaders relate to people intuitively and emotionally and as a result generate stronger feelings in their followers – both negative and positive (Individualized Consideration). Zaleznik also considers the sense of self as a defining difference between leaders and managers. He states, “managers see themselves as conservators and regulators of an existing order of affairs with which they personally identify and from which they gain rewards.” Conversely, “leaders are separate from their environment” and “[they] work in organizations, but never belong to them” (p. 79). He suggests that this is why leaders seek opportunities for change. Although not as clearly aligned as the other three components of transformational leadership, Zaleznik states that leaders seek to profoundly alter human, economic, and political relationships. Leaders need to be admired by followers, serve as role models to others, and possess a certain amount of personal appeal (charisma) to generate and implement significant change.

The distinction between transactional leadership and transformational leadership is very close to the distinction made between management and leadership. One might argue that the “transactional leader” might be better termed the “transactional manager.” Moreover, do the terms “leader” and “manager” need to be dichotomous, or could we adopt a more comprehensive and eclectic model that embraces what is contextually and personally appropriate for a given situation in a particular organization? Leadership is an all encompassing, dynamic and eclectic notion and school leaders who adopt this perspective might be more prepared to deal with the current realities of current school systems.

This first section of this paper has attempted to outline how leadership as a field of study has evolved through several phases. The influential work of Burns, Bass and Avolio have provided the foundation on which to examine current conceptualizations of educational leadership. Transformational leadership, emerging from the fields of management and the military, is now a widely accepted approach for educational leadership. Although the shift from instructional leadership to transformational leadership was evident in the literature, it remains questionable as to whether these changes are evident in the practices of administrators. How many leaders are truly transformational? Moreover, when there remains such ambiguity as to what leadership means, and what effects it has, do educational leaders actually know, or even desire to know about, what kind of leader they are? Considering the systemic realities of modern day schools, many educational leaders are just doing their best to make it through any given day

by managing the diverse needs of the school community and society at large. Knowing about the evolution of the term leadership and understanding how the concept developed through the contributions of key scholars, now forces us to question what makes an educational leader and what effects these individuals have on the teaching and learning that occurs in schools.

### **Educational Leaders: What are we?**

#### ***Kenneth Leithwood***

Leithwood and his colleagues have been instrumental in bridging the work of Burns and Bass into the field of educational administration. Leithwood's conceptual model has yielded extensive empirical studies and investigation over the past decade. The knowledge base for school leadership has risen exponentially and has contributed significantly to our understanding of how leadership affects the school environment.

Leithwood, Begley and Cousins (1994) define transformational leadership as follows:

The term 'transform' implies major changes in the form, nature, function and/or potential of some phenomenon; applied to leadership, it specifies general ends to be pursued although it is largely mute with respect to means. From this beginning, we consider the central purpose of transformational leadership to be the enhancement of the individual and collective problem-solving capacities of organizational members; such capacities are exercised in the identification of goals to be achieved and practices to be used in their achievement (p. 7).

The following seven dimensions are used to describe transformational leadership: "building school vision and establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modelling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions" (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood et al., cited in Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000 p. 114). Each dimension is further described using more specific leadership practices. Leithwood believes that former models of transformational leadership neglected to include necessary transactional components which were fundamental to the stability of the organization. He further adds the following management dimensions: staffing, instructional support, monitoring school activities, and community focus.

Leithwood's model assumes that the principal shares leadership with teachers and the model is grounded not on controlling or coordinating others, but instead on providing individual

support, intellectual stimulation, and personal vision. Prawat and Peterson (1999) emphasize “the importance of encouraging members in an organization to learn and develop, realizing that the goals are apt to be met when members of the organization work together to make it happen” (p. 223). They further expand on this issue explaining that a primary administrative role is to share the responsibility with others in the organization who are committed and who play a key role in establishing the organizational agreements that enable learning. This notion of “distributed leadership” is consistent among various researchers related to organizational leadership. Hallinger (2003) finds that transformational leadership models conceptualize leadership as an organizational entity rather than the task of a single individual, accounting for multiple sources of leadership.

Leithwood et al. (1999) provides a synthesis of 34 published and unpublished empirical and formal case studies conducted in elementary and secondary schools up to about 1995. Twenty-one of the 34 studies relate to specific dimensions of transformational leadership in schools; six of these are qualitative and 15 are quantitative studies. Evidence about the effects of leadership are provided by 20 of the 34 studies and include the following: effects on students; effects on perceptions of leaders; effects on behaviour of followers; effects on followers’ psychological states; and organization-level effects.

#### *Effects on students*

Leithwood et al. (1999) suggests that there are a limited number of studies regarding student effects because the effects are likely mediated by teachers and others. The analyses of these indirect effects proved to be a complicated endeavour. Similarly, there was a lack of evidence to support other forms of leadership and their effects on students. Leithwood et al. conducted six studies on student effects. The outcome was measured on a teacher survey asking them to estimate the effects on students of various practices being implemented in their classroom. These practices were often school-wide initiatives supported by school leaders. They found substantial evidence of high correlations between student effects and a direct measure of student achievement (e.g., standardized tests). Five out of six studies also reported significant indirect effects of transformational leadership on teacher-perceived student outcomes (Leithwood et al.). Studies conducted to examine student participation were found to be weak direct and significant indirect effects of transformational school leadership on student participation in, and identification with, the school.



### *Perceptions of leaders*

Data from school leaders at the school and district level were collected using a version of Bass's MLQ (1985). "Positive relationships were reported between transformational and transactional dimensions as a whole" (Leithwood et al., 1999, p.33). The effects were primarily related to charisma/vision/inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration and contingent reward. Leithwood, et al. stated, "Non-significant relationships were reported with respect to management-by-exception. Laissez-faire leadership was negatively related to both perceptions of leader effectiveness and satisfaction with the leader" (p.33). Two subsequent studies were conducted using the MLQ and the Index of Organizational Reactions and yielded significant positive relationships among transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and satisfaction with the leader.

Based on Leithwood's studies, he concludes that transformational leaders are in a continuous pursuit of three goals: helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; fostering teacher development; and helping teachers solve problems together more effectively.

### *Effect on behaviours of followers*

Three studies investigated the effects of transformational leadership on two types of colleague behaviours: "the extent to which colleagues are prepared to engage in extra effort on behalf of their organization; and 'organizational citizenship behaviour' " (Leithwood et al., p. 34). The MLQ and an adapted version of a 16 item questionnaire developed by Smith, as cited in Leithwood et al., were used to measure altruism, compliance and non-compliance with leaders' suggestions. Leithwood reported "Transformational leadership as a composite was significantly but negatively related to non-compliance and passive management-by-exception was positively related to non-compliance" (p.34).

### *Effect on followers' psychological states*

Leithwood et al. (1999) reports, "There is evidence from five studies (four quantitative) that transformational leadership influences four psychological states of those who experience such leadership, those states being: commitment; developmental press (changes in teachers' attitudes and/or behaviour); control press (the tendency for teachers to feel that they must adhere to central demands for orderliness and structure); and satisfaction" (p.34). The outcome variables in the aforementioned studies were various forms of commitment (e.g., teacher and

organizational) as well as teacher work motivation. Leithwood also reports two of his own studies based on schools in two Canadian provinces. These two studies tested a model of transformational leadership in addition to other in-school and out-of-school independent variables. Two surveys were refined from earlier work and used to collect evidence on six dimensions of transformational leadership. Leithwood et al. reported, “Transformational leadership, as a composite, had significant direct and indirect effects on teachers’ commitment to change” (p. 35). These effects included: vision building, high performance expectations, developing consensus about group goals and intellectual stimulation. Leithwood et al. states that subsequent studies were conducted by Koh (1990) using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday et al. (1979). Bass’ MLQ continued to be the measure for research about the work motivation of principals.

#### *Organizational-level effects*

The effects of transformational leadership on organizational learning in the context of school improvement efforts were examined. Leithwood et al. (1999) concludes that “transformational leadership practices were helpful in fostering organizational learning; in particular, vision building, individual support, intellectual stimulation, modelling, culture building and holding high performance expectations” (p. 37). Furthermore, evidence about the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational improvement and effectiveness were found more than any other effects. The evidence suggested that transformational leadership stimulates improvement.

Leithwood et al. (1999) listed additional measures used to describe climate and culture: “The School Work Culture Profile (Darling 1990), the Organizational Climate Index (King 1989) and the Leader Behaviour Questionnaire (Sashkin and Sashkin 1990)” (p. 37). The numerous studies implementing these instruments support the notion that transformational leadership contributes to a more desirable school culture and climate.

The analyses of these studies provides evidence for the benefits of transformational leadership. The analyses only included studies from 1980 to 1995; however, Leithwood and his colleagues have continued to conduct subsequent studies to support the effects of transformational leadership.

Despite the abundance of research conducted by Leithwood and his colleagues, there remain many unanswered questions and undeveloped ideas. Moreover, do we know whether

educational leaders use, or even know about many of Leithwood's instruments for improving administrator effectiveness or school climate? While the studies are relevant and useful, there is little evidence that these studies actually affect the practices of school leaders, or influence how we prepare our future school leaders. As the study of school leadership is investigated through more diverse lenses and methods, new and often conflicting orientations have emerged. As more interpretive and critical models of leadership evolve and expand our epistemological views, it is imperative that we are not only aware, but also open to hearing the views of scholars from these emerging paradigms.

### ***A Critical Response***

Evers & Lakomski (1996) argue that leadership, as it is conceptualized in the literature, is not helpful in meeting the challenges of the current educational system. They suggest that Leithwood's components of effective leadership fall short of their promise. Evers and Lakomski suggest, "Schools can be thought of as being made up of intricate nets of complex interrelationships that criss-cross formal positions of authority and power and carry knowledge and expertise in all directions, not just downwards as suggested by [TF] leadership" (p. 72). They suggest that transformational (TF) models rely too heavily on the transformational skills of the leader; instead, the organization should develop feedback loops to learn from its mistakes. In this model, the school becomes less bureaucratic and it becomes its own transforming agent. Instead of empowering select individuals, the organization becomes empowered as a collective unit. The literature in educational administration has been dominated by studies that critically examine the central role that the principal assumes in a school. Heck and Hallinger (1999) state, "By way of illustration, the preoccupation with documenting *if principals make a difference* has subtly reinforced the assumption that school leadership is synonymous with the principal. Scholars have, therefore, largely ignored other sources of leadership within the school such as assistant principals and senior teachers" (p. 141). Starratt (personal communication February, 2005) also indicated that there is a paucity of research that examines the contributions of non-principal leaders in the school. For example, in many schools people such as department heads and counsellors provide invaluable leadership within the school and in the community. For the most part, research has focused on the principal as the source of power and leadership.

Evers and Lakomski (1996) argue that it is difficult to discern the difference between management and leadership tasks. It is also difficult to discriminate between transactional and

transformational leadership behaviours. Leithwood and Bass both acknowledge the difficulty they experienced in providing evidence for transformational leadership. They state, “We can really only tell the difference if we know the nature of the purposes and their effects which, of course, now depend on how people interpret what they see” (p. 77). Evers and Lakomski add, “If there is no principled way of telling one leader behaviour from another, then any claim to have empirically identified transformational leadership effects is not justified. In the absence of justification, however, claims to leadership are nothing more than personal belief or opinion, which does not carry any empirical status, no matter how many empirical studies are conducted” (p. 79). Evers and Lakomski (2000) further state, “Leadership is massively disconnected from causation” (p. 58) Although the argument presented by Evers and Lakomski holds some truth, they appear to search for “absolutes” that may never be determined in complex organizations such as schools. Instead of focusing on the shortcomings of transformational leadership, time might be better spent attempting to provide answers to questions that have already been delineated by the previous researchers.

Central to their argument is the fact that Leithwood and Bass relied too heavily on the use of questionnaires in their research. These measures, they argue, are inappropriate because substantive knowledge of transformational leadership does not exist. Furthermore, the questionnaire measures reveal the respondents implicitly held theories, not their cognitive structure. Evers and Lakomski (2000) state that these instruments are artefacts of methodology instead of scientific accounts of empirical phenomena. They further note, “the application of quantitative methodology to measure transformational leadership is inappropriate” (p. 80). They suggest that the unpredictable nature of transformational leadership makes it impossible to generate a cause and effect relationship. Furthermore, different times and situations elicit different forms of leadership and different responses which cannot be picked out by surveys and questionnaires. Evers and Lakomski also discuss the subjectivity of people’s interpretations of surveys. They suggest that people have distorted views of reality that may not be real in the world; therefore the data derived from questionnaires and surveys is inaccurate.

Evers and Lakomski (2000) assert, “From a naturalistic-coherentist perspective, there may be as many different accounts about leadership, as there are organizational contexts” (p. 58). They suggest that the epistemological framework purported by Bass, Avolio and Leithwood is too narrow to explain the phenomenon under discussion. They further add that the model used by

Bass, Avolio, and Leithwood represents a hypothetico-deductive account of theory and practice that is no longer accepted as valid. The hypothetico-deductive model suggests that researchers make up whatever variables they hypothesize are important. The model supports the construct (e.g., transformational leadership) in terms of observable behaviours gathered by the instruments (e.g., LBDQ, MLQ). In turn, the data is analyzed in terms of correlations, regularities and patterns that further confirm and support the original model. Evers and Lakomski suggest this is a “false sense of theory which guides our observations in the theory’s terminology although we know it to be false” (p. 68). They emphatically state, “conceptions of leadership, whatever the specific constructs they contain, may turn out to be massively disconnected from the world and yet we can continue to talk as if they pointed to something real in terms of leaders turning the organization around” (p.58).

Gronn (1995) charges transformational leadership with being paternalistic, gender exclusive, exaggerated, having aristocratic pretensions and social-class bias, as well as having an eccentric conception of human agency and causality. Gronn outlines numerous shortcomings of transformational leadership: a lack of empirically documented case examples of transformational leaders; a narrow methodological base; no causal connection between leadership and desired organizational outcomes; and the unresolved question as to whether leadership is learnable.

Marks and Printy (2003) state that there have been few studies that have empirically studied how transformational leadership and instructional leadership complement each other and contribute to student learning. In addition, they suggest that there is a need for more research to evaluate how leadership contributes to pedagogical quality. Marks and Printy conducted a quantitative non-experimental study that investigated the concept of school leadership and attempted to measure how leadership affected school performance. Twenty-four nationally selected restructuring schools were chosen from elementary, middle, and high school. The relationship of transformational leadership and shared instructional leadership was studied in relation to the quality of teaching and learning. It is hypothesized that transformational leadership by itself is insufficient to achieve high-quality teaching and learning. In order to improve teaching and learning, the authors suggested that instructional leadership was needed to complement the tenets of transformational leadership. Marks and Printy found that when transformational and shared instructional leadership coexist, the influence on school performance

is substantial. The notion of integrated leadership-both transformational and instructional is one possible answer to settling the discourse between the two leadership constructs.

Despite the critical response from various scholars and the acknowledgement that more research is needed to increase our understanding of leadership and its effects, we have made substantial gains to our knowledge base in this area. Having said this, we must also ensure that this knowledge transfers to the practitioners in the field of education and to the faculties of education and the various institutions that train our future leaders. Leadership has evolved and will continue to evolve to more appropriately respond to the needs of society. One of our first steps should be to decide on a collective purpose of leadership and to make informed and sustainable changes that benefit teaching and student learning. We must not assume that change is always in the direction towards improvement. With a more focused and well thought out direction for the future of school leadership, we will be more apt to make change the changes that schools need.

### **Where are we going?**

Michael Fullan (2001) in his book, *Leading for Change*” boldly states, “The more complex society gets, the more sophisticated leadership must become. Complexity means change, but specifically it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, non-linear change” (p. ix). In the current phase of organizational restructuring it is necessary to have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Change is inevitable and effective leaders are able to respond to the changing needs of their context (Hallinger, 2003). Day, Harris, and Hadfield (2001) found that effective leadership was both a highly contextualized and relational construct. Day et al. as cited in Hallinger (2003) recommended “the application of contingency leadership which takes into account the realities of successful principalship of schools in changing times, and moves beyond polarized concepts of transactional and transformational leadership” (p. 347). The contingency model is intended to provide a framework that will conceptualize leadership as a developmental process that will take into account the dynamic and fluid context of the school by linking the most appropriate leadership style to the needs of the school. Preparing leaders to successfully function within a context of change and uncertainty is paramount. Ensuring that these leaders acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to use these various models is imperative.

School systems and business have long shared similar concepts when it comes to leadership. Both embrace one basic principle, “they both must become learning organizations or

they will fail to survive. Thus, leaders in business and education face similar challenges – how to cultivate and sustain learning under conditions of complex, rapid change” (Fullan, 2001, p. xi). Schools and businesses are not foreign places. What we should be doing is taking what is good from both business and education to create a vision of leadership that guides us through the chaos of widespread systemic change.

Training and producing effective leaders cannot be limited to instilling effective traits in people. We must develop organizations and schools that support the collective form of leadership where individuals feel safe, supported and free to think and act creatively. Huber & West (2002) assert, “The school leader is most often cited as the key figure in the individual school’s development, either blocking or promoting changes, acting as the internal change agent, overseeing the processes of growth and renewal” (p. 1072). The challenge for leaders is to move from a bureaucratic system of managing people to a professional system marked by shared problem solving and decision making. Goldring and Greenfield (2002) note, “school leaders are located more prominently in the centre of discourse, educating the broader public about the importance of, and the need to support, the critical connections between schooling and the ‘good society.’ Social justice may be the overarching reference point for leadership in this case” (p. 16). School leaders are in the position to foster strong community support for public education and to provide learning opportunities for all children, despite their previous experiences.

Arthur Levine’s (2005) review of leadership preparation programs presents disappointing findings about the quality of educational administration programs. In fact, Levine states “collectively, educational administration programs are the weakest of all the programs at the nation’s education schools. This is particularly distressing considering the change in demographics and the fact that a large number of school leaders will need to be hired in the next ten years. It seems reasonable to conclude that the training and preparation of school leaders will need to be addressed if we expect to have the kind of leaders who are able to address the profound shifts in society and the complications and challenges these pose for educational systems.

## **Conclusion**

Many “blind spots” and “blank spots” continue to exist in our theoretical and empirical knowledge of leadership (Heck and Hallinger, 1999). We must, however, recognize the invaluable contributions that have been made over the past four decades by numerous scholars.

Since 1978, leadership has progressed from being the study of top down, directive behaviours focused on teaching and learning, to a bottom up collaborative process of guided change for school improvement. Political, critical, and cultural lenses have significantly expanded our leadership repertoires.

Transformational leadership, as we know it, will likely continue to evolve in the years to come and this will likely be accompanied by even greater uncertainty and ambiguity. In the forthcoming years, we will likely see even greater diversity and eclecticism both in philosophical beliefs and practical approaches to leadership. That said, it is imperative that educational leaders support their theories with empirical evidence that supports student achievement. Moreover, it is necessary to collectively determine the purpose of school leadership and to make changes in our school systems that positively impact student learning. This guiding purpose will help us determine what we are likely to do, and where we are likely to go from here.



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