

Use of Transformational Leadership to Influence Employees and Followers

Rachel Hojnacki

February 27, 2013

PUR 6607: SEC 8258

Managers and leaders within organizations should always be growing and learning how they can be successful at motivating and influencing their followers and employees. The knowledge that managers and leaders use to better themselves will help the organization with whom they are employed become successful. A leadership style that managers can use to effectively influence their followers is transformational leadership, which has been practiced by leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Franklin D. Roosevelt (Bass, Avolio & Goodheim, 1987).

Literature Review

Transformational leadership is also known as charismatic leadership (Bass, 1990). This leadership style is described as one where “leaders develop creative, critical thinking in their followers, provide opportunities for them to develop, welcome positive and negative feedback, recognize the contributions of others, share information with followers and have moral standards that emphasize collective interests of the group, organization, or society” (Howell, J. & Avolio, B., 1992 p. 44). In other words, a transformational leader motivates, encourages and helps followers better themselves for the benefit of the organization as a whole. Similarly, transformational leadership is described by Pillai, Schriesheim and Williams (1999) as someone who motivates their followers, gains the trust of their followers and encourages their followers to put the organization first over their own self-interest.

According to Kendrick (2011), transformational leadership can be split into four different factors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. All of the factors mentioned relate directly to the definitions of transformational leadership previously described. The four factors of transformational

leaders are also important to managers from a public relations perspective. This is because internally the employees of an organization are the public relations departments' biggest stakeholders, and keeping relations with employees in a positive light is important for an organization to run effectively.

Idealized influence relates to the trust that an employee has in their follower; this factor also includes the charismatic nature of the leader (Kendrick 2011, Bass & Steidlmeier 1999). As in most relationships, if there is not trust between the two parties the relationship will not be as effective or as successful as it can be. A leader who is charismatic is more likely to be confident, as well as set high standards for their employees and followers to emulate them (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999). The confidence and standards that are set by these leaders, is influential in the future actions and successes of their followers and employees.

Inspirational motivation is seen when managers direct their followers to do the right thing (Kendrick 2011). This influence specifically relates to the organizations shared goals and visions, which are supported by the management team. Managers and leaders who practice inspirational motivation tend to see the best in people and because of this believe they will do the right thing when they are empowered by their leaders (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999).

Intellectual stimulation is when a manager challenges their followers to think critically and creatively about their work (Kendrick, 2011). Howell and Avolio (1992) state that a transformational leader "asks their followers to question the 'tried and true' ways to solving problems by re-evaluating the assumptions they used to understand and analyze

the problem” (p. 47). By encouraging this type of creative and critical thinking of employees managers are more likely to receive the best work that an employee has to offer.

Individual consideration is seen in transformational leadership when leaders help their employees to grow within their position and provide feedback (Kendrick 2011). Many employees, after receiving personal attention and being challenged by their managers, advance their careers, and become transformational leaders themselves (Bass, 1990). As a result, employees are satisfied with their relationship with their organization because of their advancing career. The employee will always remember the manager who showed concern of them as an individual and helped them grow into a leader. This also speaks to the idea that managers can be trained to be transformational leaders, meaning that all organizations can incorporate transformational leadership into their management and leadership styles (Bass, 1990).

As social media becomes popular among business organizations many CEOs are starting to use Twitter to communicate with their followers. The use of Twitter is something that the public relations department should be aware of because it directly affects the image of an organization. Interestingly, Hwang (2012) found that a CEOs use of Twitter positively influenced their followers’ perception of transformational leadership in relation to the CEO who was tweeting. This positive outlook of transformational leadership also influenced the followers’ perception of the organization (Hwang 2012). As social media use starts becoming popular among CEOs of organizations, public relations departments need to recognize that if their CEO is using this tool in a positive way, the followers and employees’ opinion of an organization can also be positively affected.

A manager who practices transformational leadership is likely to be seen as a more effective leader by their colleagues and employees (Bass, 1990). As a leader it is beneficial for your colleagues to view you as effective as the employees whom you are influencing do. Although your colleagues are not necessarily considered your followers, your reputation can be perpetuated through them. In turn, an effective leader can influence followers to join or apply to be a part of their organization if they are known to be charismatic, or practicing transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). An organizations reputation among prospective employees is of concern to the public relations department because all organizations wish to recruit and retain the best and brightest within their fields.

As there has been much literature and research on transformational leadership in the academic world, public relations practitioners also speak to transformational leadership as a way of managing their followers and it's positive effects. The difference found in the literature is that the leadership style is not called transformational leadership specifically; instead they describe it as managers being a better leader to their followers. For example Grossman (2013) describes thirteen different ways to be a better leader, nine of which directly correlate with the transformational leadership style previously described in this paper. Specifically, Grossman (2013) expresses that leaders should share feedback with others, talk to people face to face, and show employees that you care; he ends his article encouraging leaders to "lead in a compassionate, productive and healthy way."

Current Practices

An example of transformational leadership currently being practiced within our society is that of Dr. Glenn Feltham of Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT). He began as President of NAIT in March of 2011. After Feltham started as President students

and professors of NAIT began noticing his leadership style as it was completely different from what they had been used to. Upon starting as president, Feltham toured all of the university's programs, held meetings with students and staff, as well as walked around campus to speak with staff and students unexpectedly. (Messenger, 2011) From this short explanation of Feltham's actions one can see that he was practicing transformational leadership. Through his meetings with students and staff, as well as walking around campus and engaging in conversation unexpectedly with students and staff, Feltham was enacting what is described above as idealized influence or the charismatic factor of transformational leadership. Messenger (2011) also mentions that Feltham demonstrated many examples of transformational leadership including: gaining followers trust, inspiring a vision and setting an example for his followers. As a new leader to NAIT, Feltham came in and immediately shook things up within a large post-secondary organization that is used to a more conservative type of leadership and because of this some are worried that Feltham's leadership style will not be able to survive. Although there is concern that Feltham's leadership style may be forced to change, there is also strong support and hope that it will not because most enjoy and appreciate his use of the transformational leadership style (Messenger 2011).

The transformational leadership style can also be shown through the way that Steve Jobs ran Apple. This industry seems to fit well because transformational leadership is most effective when an organization works within a turbulent marketplace. The technology industry is always changing and advancing at a rapid pace so naturally transformational leadership finds itself being practiced by top managers within the technology industry (Bass, 1990).

Jobs frequently demonstrated intellectual stimulation by challenging his followers to think critically. According to Isaacson (2012), Jobs challenged his employees to cut clutter within their products and make the consumers interactions simpler. Inspirational motivation can also be seen in Jobs leadership style as he encouraged his employees to focus on the product and not the profit, thus giving the consumer the best possible product without compromising the organizations integrity. (Isaacson 2012). By incorporating the use of transformational leadership into his management style Jobs led Apple to become the innovative and successful organization that it is known as today.

Through these two leaders, Dr. Glenn Feltham and Steve Jobs, one can see that transformational leadership can be practiced within different industries, education and technology, and still gain similar results. Both Jobs and Feltham motivated their employees and followers to better themselves and their organization. This was achieved through their charismatic leadership styles, as well as challenging their employees to see things in a different light, among other things. Managers and leaders in all types of organizations can learn from Jobs and Feltham, on how to treat and influence their followers when using transformational leadership.

Recommendations and Conclusion

To produce a successful organization, public relations executives should work with the management team to promote transformational leadership among managers at all levels. A transformational leader is beneficial to the public relations leader in keeping their employees satisfied within their positions, as well as making them feel successful as they move up within the organization. Although transformational leadership is extremely beneficial to an organization as this analysis continually highlights, it can also be beneficial

as a supplement to other popular management and leadership styles. Organizations who do not practice any form of transformational leadership could see themselves in an unfortunate situation in the future, with employees who do not enjoy where they work and have no positive affiliation with their organization. The way a manager leads an organization either positively or negatively affects the morale of their employees and followers. Managers and leaders in larger organizations should also look to social media for new and innovative ways to influence followers whom they are not able to interact with on a regular basis.

For the reasons outlined here and many more, public relations practitioners should both practice and encourage the managers with whom they associate to practice transformational leadership, even if it is only as a supplement to a leadership style that is already being practiced. An organizations reputation, which above all else is the main concern of a public relations practitioner, can be directly affected by whether or not managers are practicing positive leadership styles. Transformational leadership has been proven to not only be effective within an organization but to impact the organizations reputation positively by influencing a managers leaders and followers in a way that other leadership styles cannot.

References

- Bass, B. M., (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: learning to share the vision, *Organizational Dynamics*, 18, 19-31. In J. A. Sonnenfeld, *Concepts of Leadership*, (pp. 119-131). Brookfield: Dartmouth.
- Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., & Goodheim, L., (1987), Biography and the assessment of transformational leadership at the world-class level, *Journal of Management*, 13, 7-19. In J. A. Sonnenfeld, *Concepts of Leadership*, (pp. 69-82). Brookfield: Dartmouth.
- Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeier, P., (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 181-217.
- Grossman, D., (2012, January 4). 13 Ways to become a better leader. *The Public Relations Strategist*. Retrieved on February 17, 2013 from http://www.prsa.org/Intelligence/TheStrategist/Articles/view/10031/1072/13_Ways_to_Become_a_Better_Leader
- Howell, J. M., & Avolio, B. J., (1992). The ethics of charismatic leadership: submission or liberation?. *Academy of Management Executive*, 6(2), 43-54.
- Hwang, S., (2012). The strategic use of Twitter to manage personal public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 38(1), 159-161.
- Isaacson, W., (2012, April). The real leadership lesson of Steve Jobs. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved February 25, 2013 from <http://hbr.org/2012/04/the-real-leadership-lessons-of-steve-jobs/ar/2>.
- Jiang, H., (2012). A model of work-life conflict and quality of employee-organization relationships (EORs): Transformational leadership, procedural justice, and family-supportive workplace initiatives. *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), 231-245.

Kendrick, J., (2011). Transformational leadership changing individuals and social systems. *Professional Safety*, 56(11), 14.

Messenger, S., (2011). A case study in transformational leadership: Glenn Feltham. *Techlife*, 5(1). Retrieved February 25, 2013 from <http://www.techlifemag.ca/transformational-leadership.htm>.

Pillai, R., Schriesheim, C. A., & Williams, E. S., (1999). Fairness perceptions and trust as mediators for transformational and transactional leadership: A two-sample study. *Journal of Management*, 25(6), 897-933.