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Personal Relationships and Professional Results: The Positive Impact of Transformational Leaders on Academic Librarians

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ABSTRACT

Transformational leaders use the “Four Is” – individualized consideration, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation – to excite, challenge, and build deep relationships in an organization. This study investigated the benefits of transformational leaders, and how they impact the lives of academic librarians. Interviews with three academic librarians who worked with transformational leaders revealed the interviewees valued the mentoring, visioning, and generosity those leaders provided. The overarching theme of three participants' stories was the personal relationships these transformational leaders were able to build and the lasting impact those relationships had on the participants' careers.

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INTRODUCTION

Transformational leaders use idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation – the “Four Is” – to build relationships, model values, and share a vision. Followers of transformational leaders are challenged to think, lead, and achieve in ways and areas well-beyond what they ever thought possible. Transformational leadership has a positive effect on organizations, but it also affects those in the organization on a personal level. Transformational leaders motivate, care about, inspire, and empower those in the organization. This personal approach may be the most important thing transformational leaders do as it is the foundation of everything they accomplish in an organization. The purpose of this study was to investigate the positive impact transformational library leaders have on the lives of academic librarians. The study found followers of transformational leaders benefited from the leader's mentoring, ability to share and achieve a vision, and generosity. The theme that weaves through these three concepts and the participants' stories is the personal relationships these transformational leaders were so good at building, and how those relationships had an enduring and profound effect on their professional lives.

TRANSACTIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

James MacGregor Burns was the first to use the terms transactional and transformational leaders. Burns stated transactional leaders busied themselves with “exchanges” between leader and follower, while

transformational leaders developed personal relationships with those they led in order to create a real difference in an organization.¹ Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass built on his theories and developed the Full Range of Leadership, which encompasses laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership. Transactional leaders focus on meeting organizational goals and objectives by setting standards and outcomes for organizational members and monitoring their progress and work. Transactional leaders are positive for organizations in many ways, not the least of which is they help organizations meet their performance goals.² Transactional leaders use management-by-exception to encourage positive and discourage negative behavior, and they use contingent reward as a way to recognize and honor meeting predetermined goals.³ Transactional leaders appeal to the self-interest of those they supervise and are trusted as long as they reward positive performance.⁴

Transactional leadership is not a bad form of leadership. A transformational must possess and use many transactional traits; in fact, positive transactional traits are the basis for all successful leaders. Transformational leaders rely on transactional leaders to plan, implement, and carry out their vision, and transactional leaders are crucial for carrying out the day-to-day functioning of an organization, developing and assessing processes, and moving the organization towards its strategic goals and objectives. Without transactional leaders, an organization would struggle to meet its most basic of functions.

Transactional leaders, however, are limited in what they can do. If an organization's external environment is stable, then a transactional

¹ James Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

² Bruce Avolio, *Full Range Leadership Development* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

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leader will serve an organization well. But when the environment, and eventually the organization itself, undergoes significant change, a transactional leader may prove harmful.⁵ Transactional leaders are ill-equipped to lead substantive change. They do not take risks, do not innovate, and do not inspire those in the organization to take action, nor do they develop leaders within the organization.⁶ Transactional leaders do not have the vision, confidence, and enthusiasm to boldly move an organization forward.⁷

When an organization needs to undergo significant change, when it needs to be re-visioned, and when those in the organization need to be motivated, challenged, and inspired, a transformational leader is needed. Transformational and transactional leaders have different “mindsets”. Transactional leaders improve the “quantitative performance” of an organization, and transformational leaders improve its “qualitative performance”.⁸ Transformational leaders are trustworthy, moral, and their actions are always guided by their values. They model organizational behavior, encourage new ways of doing business, and develop leaders throughout the organization.⁹ Transformational leaders consider the needs of those in the organization, mentor and build relationships with them, and increase commitment to the organization.¹⁰ Transformational leaders improve all aspects of an organization including image, recruitment and retention of talent, and organizational learning and development. The great organizations of today are led by transformational leaders.¹¹

Transformational leaders make use of the “Four Is”: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration. The use of the Four Is empowers followers to work autonomously and strengthens dedication to the organization. Followers of transformational leaders feel less stress, even during times of change, and achieve more ambitious goals than they thought possible.¹² When using idealized influence, a leader’s actions follow from her values and the values of the organization. Transformational leaders are viewed in an “idealized way” by followers who strongly identify with the leader. This identification, however, gives great power to the organizational leader who must curtail the use of this power and instead develop autonomy and long-term performance improvements in followers and the organization.¹³ The leader is a role model who earns the trust of those in the organization and uses that trust to build commitment to organizational values. Leaders also use idealized influence to demonstrate their confidence in themselves and their concern for both the organization and its members.¹⁴

Transformational leaders use intellectual stimulation to question the deepest held assumptions of an organization. Organizational members are encouraged to find new and creative solutions to problems. By using intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders make their organizations more innovative, ensure learning happens at all levels, and challenge employees with tasks that reflect their interests and expand their abilities.¹⁵ Followers become more self-aware and self-reflective and in the process clarify and strengthen their personal values.¹⁶ Inspirational motivation is seen through a shared vision of the organization. Transformational leaders help followers understand the value of the organization’s goals and create a belief in a better future. Inspirational motivation creates an organization filled with people who are willing

to take risks, are excited about the future of the organization, and are allowed to take action to make the organization better.¹⁷

Transformational leaders treat individuals like individuals and not stereotypes or replaceable parts.¹⁸ Through individualized consideration, a transformational leader builds relationships with those in the organization, understands their personal goals and needs, and helps them meet their career objectives. Transformational leaders are able to get followers to set large goals of personal improvement and merge their interests with those of the organization. Individualized consideration by a leader builds greater confidence in followers, which in turn leads to extra effort and high achievement on their part.

Supportive leadership – emotional care and support – and developmental leadership – professional and career support – positively influence a follower’s job satisfaction, feeling of job security, and self-efficacy.¹⁹ Leadership is an emotional process, and transformational leaders connect with those in the organization in deep and meaningful ways. Transformational leadership is a relationship-based leadership style with the ultimate goal of transforming followers to exceed expectations and become leaders themselves. In order to be successful, the transformational leader must know and understand their followers as individuals, set goals that ultimately lead to transformation, and have the commitment of the follower.²⁰ A meta-analysis correlating the “big five” personality traits and transformational leadership found that leaders who demonstrated high levels of “openness to experience” – recognizing individual differences, accepting of change, imaginative, and curious – and leaders with high “agreeableness” – amiable, pleasant, and open – showed higher aptitude for using individualized consideration.²¹ Followers of leaders who use individualized consideration are better able to express their emotions. If a person thinks another truly cares about their feelings, then they are more likely to express them. Expressing emotions is how humans express needs, and emotional expression starts, builds, and maintains relationships.²² A leader’s ability to develop interpersonal relationships with followers is highly correlated with intra-organizational interpersonal relationships. In other words, the better a leader is at building and maintaining relationships, the better everyone else in the organization is at building and maintaining relationships.²³

Individualized consideration is positively correlated with good psychological health in organizational members, which increases affective commitment.²⁴ Higher levels of affective commitment lead to less turnover and less resistance to change.²⁵ Further, the stronger the relationships between leader and follower, the more likely both are to display authenticity – “self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective” – in their relationship with each other.²⁶ Authentic leadership leads to better relationships

¹⁷ Bass & Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

¹⁸ Avolio and Bass, *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*.

¹⁹ Alannah Rafferty and Mark Griffin, “Refining individualized consideration: Distinguishing developmental leadership and supportive leadership,” *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology* 79, no. 1 (2006): 37–61.

²⁰ Stewart Gabel, “Psychotherapy and relationship based change: It’s about leadership,” *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration* 23, no. 4 (2013): 345–58.

²¹ Anika Deinert, Astrid Homan, Diana Boer, Sven Voelpel, and Daniela Gutermann, “Transformational leadership subdimensions and their link to leaders’ personality and performance,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2015): 1095–1120.

²² Jochen Menges, Martin Kilduff, Sarah Kern, and Heike Bruch, “The awestruck effect: Followers suppress emotion expression in response to charismatic but not individually considerate leadership,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2015): 626–40.

²³ Andrzej Lis, Aldona Glińska-Noweś, and Magdalena Kalińska, “The role of leadership in shaping interpersonal relationships in the context of positive organizational potential,” *Journal of Positive Management* 5, no. 4 (2014): 28–49.

²⁴ Franziska Franke Jorg Felfe, “How does transformational leadership impact employees’ psychological strain? Examining differentiated effects and the moderating role of affective organizational commitment,” *Leadership* 7, no. 3 (2011): 295–16.

²⁵ Bass & Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

²⁶ Hinojosa, Amanda, Kelly McCauley, Brandon Randolph-Seng, and William Gardner, “Leader and follower attachment styles: Implications for authentic leader–follower relationships,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2014): 595–610.

⁵ Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio, *Transformational Leadership* (New York: Psychology Press, 2006).

⁶ Avolio, *Full Range Leadership Development*.

⁷ Bass & Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁹ Avolio, *Full Range Leadership Development*.

¹⁰ Avolio, *Full Range Leadership Development*; Bass & Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

¹¹ Bass & Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass, *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (Menlo Park, CA: Mind Garden, 2004).

¹⁴ Bass & Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

¹⁵ Bass & Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*.

¹⁶ Avolio and Bass, *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*.

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