Training Programs on Leadership: Do They Really Make A Difference?

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Abstract. A longitudinal study looked at the impact of a two-day leadership-training program on transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership in a large manufacturing organization in eastern India. Data was collected from 31 subordinates on the leadership behaviors of their managers before and six months after the managers attended a training program. Matched sample t-test does not reveal any significant difference in ratings between the two periods on any leadership variable. Results also show that pre-training ratings significantly predict post-training ratings in the case of idealized influence-behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, and active management-by-exception. There is no such effect in the case of idealized influence-attributed, passive management-by-exception and laissez-faire leadership. Findings suggest that sending managers for leadership training programs in an unplanned way may not make any difference. An argument is made for taking leadership training more seriously and planning it out in multiple phases, with data from earlier phases being fed into the subsequent phases of the program.

In an age of complexity, change, large enterprises, and nation states, leaders are more important than ever, since control over bureaucratic structures may not result in effectiveness (House, Spangler & Woycke, 1991). James MacGregor Burns (1978), whose still resonant "Leadership" is one of the handful of writings on leadership that seem likely to endure, wrote that leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth and that we know a lot about leaders while knowing very little about leadership. He defined leadership as inducing followers to pursue common or at least joint purposes that represent the values and motivations of both leaders and followers.

The problem of addressing the values of both leaders and followers could be handled in two ways based on the nature of leader-follower interactions. Burns (1978) termed the first one as transactional leadership and the second as transforming leadership—subsequently referred to as transformational leadership by researchers (Bass, 1985). Transactional leadership involves an exchange of valued things and is based on current values and motivations of both leaders and followers. Transformational leadership on the other hand, does not take the current values and motivations to be fixed, but rather seeks to change them.

Transactional Leadership

According to Burns (1978), transactional leadership "occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things" like a swap of goods for money or a trading of votes between candidate and citizen (page 19). The purposes of leader and follower could be separate but are related, at least insofar as the purposes stand within the exchange process and can be advanced by maintaining that process or transaction. Leaders and followers may exchange goods or services to realize independent objectives. Burns argued that the objective of transactions is not necessarily to further the collective interests of followers, but to aid the individual interests of persons going their separate ways. According to Burns, the chief monitors of transactional leadership are modal or instrumental values—values concerning means or modes of conduct like honesty, responsibility, fairness and honoring of commitments—rather than end or terminal values. Modal values pertain to how a transaction takes place—like for example, a courteous or honest transaction, while end values pertain to what a transaction aims at achieving—like for instance, national security or a peaceful world.

Bass (1985), building upon the idea of Burns (1978), defined a transactional leader as one who "(a) recognizes what it is we want to get from our work and tries to see that we get what we want if our performance warrants it, (b) exchanges rewards and promises of reward for our effort, (c) is responsive to our immediate self-interests if they can be met by our getting the work done" (page 11); the focus here is on transaction between the leader and the follower. Bass found that transactional leadership consisted of two distinct factors— contingent reward, and management-by-exception.

The first factor, contingent reward refers to rewarding subordinates for their effort, support and doing what needs to be done. Path-goal theory explains why contingent reward works and how it influences the motivation and satisfaction of subordinates (Bass, 1985). Transactional leaders clarify the roles followers must play and the task requirements followers must complete to reach their personal goals while fulfilling the mission of the organization. The second factor, management-by-exception refers to taking corrective action only when subordinates deviate from expectations or fail to meet goals. The corrective transaction may be active or passive. Active management-by-exception involves a constant vigilance for possible mistakes. The leader arranges to actively monitor deviations from standards, and to take corrective actions as necessary. Passive management-by-exception, on the other hand, involves simply waiting for deviations, mistakes, and errors to occur and then taking corrective action. Transactional leadership that relies heavily on passive management-by-exception is a prescription for mediocrity (Bass, 1998). Quite distinct from and exhibiting much less involvement than even passive management-by-exception is laissez-faire leadership. Nothing is practically transacted between the leader and follower in this case (Avolio, 1999).

There is nothing wrong with the transactional model of leadership as far as it goes, but it is incomplete. It does not address those people who are not fulfilled even when they are treated with respect, are productive, and derive achievement satisfaction from their jobs. It ignores the potential of leaders to broaden and change the interests of their followers, to generate awareness and acceptance among the followers of the purposes and mission of the group, and to move their followers to go beyond their own self-interests for the good of the group (Burns, 1978). To explain how some leaders motivate followers to do more than originally expected and why some organizations are excited and others are not, calls for a different approach to leadership—one that is provided by the transformational model of leadership.

Transformational Leadership

According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of values and motivations, and results in a transforming effect on both leaders and followers. Transformational leaders change the organizational culture while transactional leaders work within the organizational culture as it exists. Only transformational leadership is capable of motivating followers to do more than they originally expected to do. Superior performance or performance beyond normal expectations is possible only by transforming followers' values, attitudes and motives from a lower to a higher plane of arousal and maturity (Bass, 1998).

Transformational leaders engage with others to cause fundamental changes in direction, productivity, and perceptions. Studies have found significant and positive relationships between transformational leadership and the amount of effort followers are willing to exert, satisfaction with the leader, ratings of job performance, and perceived effectiveness (Bass, 1998). Transformational leadership contributes significantly to effective organizational policies and performance. The transformational leadership model adds to initiation and consideration in explaining the variance of subordinates' satisfaction and ratings of leader effectiveness. Change is the rule for transformational leaders (Burns, 1978). It is only the transformational leaders, who can recognize the need for change, create a vision and institutionalize the change. The rapidly changing environment that organizations face today make transformational leadership very essential for effective performance.

According to Burns (1978), while transactional leaders exchange benefits with their followers based on followers' values and needs, transformational leaders seek to change the existing values and needs of followers. Transformational leaders articulate a clear vision of a future condition that is in tune with the values of the organization and the values of their individual followers. Transformational leadership also involves the uncovering of contradictions among values and between values and practice, and the realigning of values in followers. The result of the change in values of followers will be to make the followers' values more similar to leaders' values (Krishnan, 1998).

Transformational model of leadership have been referred to differently by different authors—excellence in leadership, leadership as distinguished from management, transforming or transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, and visionary leadership being some of them. Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as occurring "when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (page 20). The purposes of leaders and followers that might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused. The transformational leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. Transactional leaders take the values, needs, motivations and purposes of followers as given and unchanging, but transformational leaders do not.

The chief monitors of transformational leadership are end or terminal values—values regarding end states of existence like liberty, justice and equality. Transactional leadership focuses on the transaction or the means, but transformational leadership focuses on the purposes or end-states. Transformational leadership involves the purposes of the leader and follower getting fused. Change in followers' purposes takes place through the leader exploiting conflict and tension within the followers' value structures. The change in followers' purposes brought about by transformational leadership is enduring (Burns, 1978).

According to Burns (1978), "the result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (page 4). Transformational leaders throw themselves into a dynamic relationship with followers who will feel elevated by it and become more active themselves, thereby creating new cadres of leaders. Transformational leadership raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and follower. It alters and elevates the motives, values, and goals of followers through the vital teaching role of leadership, enabling leaders and followers to be united in the pursuit of higher goals. Transformational leaders raise their followers up through levels of morality.

Bass (1985) defined a transformational leader as one who motivates followers to do more than they originally expected to do. Transformational leaders broaden and change the interests of their followers, and generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group. They stir their followers to look beyond their self-interest for the good of the group. The transformational leader articulates a realistic vision of the future that can be shared, stimulates subordinates intellectually, and pays attention to the differences among the subordinates. Transformational leadership consists of four factors—idealized influence, inspirational motivation or leadership, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Idealized Influence (Charisma)

Charisma is a form of social authority that derives its legitimacy not from rules, positions, or traditions, but rather from a faith in the leader's exemplary character. The charismatic person is seen as different from ordinary people and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least exceptional power and qualities. Only charismatic leaders, with their sense of vision and empowering behavior, could address the higher-order needs of followers. Charismatic leaders are not rare as is commonly perceived and might be found throughout complex organizations.

Charismatic leadership is characterized by followers' trust in the correctness of the leader's beliefs, unquestioning acceptance of the leader, affection for the leader, willingness to obey the leader, and emotional involvement in the mission of the organization. Charismatic leaders have an unusually high need for power. House et al. (1991), in a study of the U.S. Presidents, defined charismatic leadership in terms of the actual behavior and personal example of the leader or the attributions of behavior made to the leader by followers. Leader self-confidence, strong ideological conviction, high expectations of followers, showing confidence in subordinates, and consideration were taken as charismatic behaviors. The charismatic effects recorded were affect toward the leader, general feeling, mission involvement and extra effort, acceptance and obedience, agreement with the leader, subordinate self-confidence, and felt backup. The results of their study demonstrated that charismatic relationship between leader and followers positively affected leader and organizational performance.

Vision, emotional expressiveness, articulation skills, high activity level, and exemplary behavior characterize charismatic leaders. Charismatic leaders also have high self-confidence and self-determination, a high degree of mental involvement in the mission and the leadership role, and a high need for power. Charismatic leadership is an observable behavioral process that can be described and analyzed. It is important to strip the aura of mysticism from charisma and to deal with it strictly as a behavioral process. By presenting an idealized goal to followers, a charismatic leader provides a challenge and a motivating force for change. It is the shared perspective of the charismatic leader's idealized vision and its

potential for satisfying followers' needs that make the leader likable (Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

Bass (1985) found that charisma is not something that is exclusively the province of world-class leaders, but is something that is seen to some degree in industrial and military leaders throughout organizations. He also found charisma to be the most important component in the larger concept of transformational leadership. Followers described their charismatic leaders as those who made everyone enthusiastic about assignments, who commanded respect from everyone, who had a special gift of seeing what was important, and who had a sense of mission that they transmitted to their followers. Followers had complete faith in charismatic leaders, felt proud to be associated with them, and trusted their capacity to overcome any obstacle. Idealized influence or charisma consists of two sub-factors—attributed idealized influence and idealized influence behaviors.

Inspirational Leadership

The ability to inspire—arouse emotions, animate, enliven, or even exalt is an important aspect of charisma; Bass (1985) found that inspirational leadership is a sub-factor within charismatic leadership behavior. Inspirational leadership is however not the same as charismatic leadership. Charismatic leadership is clearly inspirational; but inspiration can be generated by several other things, and does not have to necessarily stem from charisma. A cold, intellectual discourse could provide someone with a vision worth striving for, and thereby serve as a source of inspiration. Inspirational leadership involves the arousal and heightening of motivation among followers. Inspirational influence on followers is emotional.

Envisioning a desired future state, making followers see that vision, and showing followers how to get to that state are part of the inspirational process. A vision clarifies the direction in which an organization needs to move. The inspirational leader organizes complex problems into a few central themes for discussion. The process of evolving commitment and mobilizing support for the vision requires a great deal of dialogue and exchange. Envisioning requires translating intentions into realities by communicating that vision to others to gain their support. The right vision attracts commitment, energizes people, creates meaning in followers' lives, and establishes a standard of excellence. Vision inspires people by transcending the outcome and getting people to commit voluntarily and completely to something worthwhile.

Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation arouses in followers the awareness of problems and how they may be solved, and stirs the imagination and generates thoughts and insights. The intellectual stimulation provided by a transformational leader forces followers to rethink some of their ideas that they never questioned before. Transformational leaders also enable followers to think about old problems in new ways, and provide followers with new ways of looking at things that used to puzzle followers before (Bass, 1998).

Individualized Consideration

Transformational leaders have a developmental orientation toward followers. They give personal attention to followers who seem neglected, treat each follower individually, and help each follower get what he or she wants (Bass, 1998). They have empathy or the capacity to sense intuitively the thoughts and feelings of others. Empathy is not simply a matter of

paying attention to other people. It is a capacity to receive and understand emotional signals in a relationship with an individual.

Each of these four dimensions of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational leadership, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—can be measured with high reliability (Bass, 1998). These four dimensions also help distinguish between the constructs of transformational and transactional leadership. Results of extensive surveys in both military and industrial settings very clearly established the distinct effects of transactional and transformational leadership styles. Transformational leaders were judged to have better relations with higher-ups and to make more of a contribution to the organization than were those who were described only as transactional. Subordinates said they also exerted extra effort for such transformational leaders.

Burns (1978) considered transformational and transactional leaderships to be two ends of a continuum, but Bass (1985) conceived them to be independent dimensions, each of which was composed of several empirically derived factors. Bass argued that transformational and transactional leaderships are conceptually distinct and are likely to be displayed by the same individuals in varying amounts and intensities. Transformational leadership is not negatively related to transactional leadership, and less transformational does not mean more transactional. Most authors seem to agree that transformational and transactional leaderships are not opposite ends of a continuum.

A finding that has been obtained across multiple samples supporting the claim that transformational and transactional leaderships are not opposite ends of a continuum is that of the augmentation effect of transformational leadership over transactional leadership. Transformational leadership builds on and augments transactional leadership in contributing to subordinate effort, satisfaction and effectiveness (Bass, 1985). Burns (1978) held that only some leadership is due to an exchange or transaction based on promises of reward. He introduced transforming leadership as a superior style of leadership that goes beyond what is conveyed by transactional leadership.

It is thus evident that transformational leadership can make a big difference in a firm's performance at all levels. Employees exert much extra effort on behalf of those who are transformational leaders, and are more satisfied with leaders who are transformational than with those who are not. Efforts at development of leadership capabilities need to therefore focus not merely on transactional leadership, but on transformational leadership also.

Training programs have been developed and evaluated to train individuals to be more successful leaders and how to use each of the major styles of leadership. Although specific behavioral skills can be taught, in training transformational leaders, the emphasis needs to be on education and development, not on skill training alone. Bass and his colleagues (Bass, 1998) have been developing and conducting transformational leadership training programs for individuals at several levels in various organizations. The success of these training and development programs has been repeatedly demonstrated. Besides providing theoretical inputs about transformational leadership and comments about the participants' transformational leadership qualities, these training programs aid in the formulation and implementation of individual action plans for improving transformational leadership skills in the participants.

Most short-term leadership training programs tend to focus on imparting only transactional skills. Attempts to develop transformational leadership need to go beyond skill training. They need to include multiple phases of training, with continuous feedback during every phase of training. The full range leadership program (Avolio, 1999) aims at enhancing

both transactional and transformational leadership. The prototypical program runs three basic training days and two to three advanced training days with a three‑month interval between the basic and advanced programs. A follow‑up takes place one year later. Without such a well‑planned program with multiple phases, it may not be possible to enhance transformational capabilities. The study reported in this paper was conducted to examine the impact of short‑term training programs on transactional and transformational leadership. It was hypothesized that unplanned, single-phase, and short-term training programs would help enhance transactional leadership, but will have no significant impact on transformational leadership.

Methodology

I conducted a longitudinal study to look at the impact of a two-day leadership-training program on transformational, transactional, and laissez‑faire leadership in a large manufacturing organization in eastern India. Data was collected from 31 subordinates on the leadership behaviors of their managers before and six months after the managers attended a training program. Subordinates answered the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5x of Bass and Avolio (1991). The Questionnaire had a total of 77 items—8 items for attributed idealized influence, 10 items each for idealized influence behavior, inspirational leadership and intellectual stimulation, 9 items for individualized consideration, 8 items for contingent reward, 7 items each for active management-by-exception and passive management-by-exception, and 8 items for laissez‑faire leadership. Subordinates were requested to answer the MLQ by rating how frequently their current immediate supervisors (who attended the training program) displayed the behaviors described, using a five-point scale (1=Not at all; 2=Once in a while; 3=Sometimes; 4=Fairly often; 5=Frequently if not always).

Matched sample t‑test did not reveal any significant difference in ratings between the two periods on any leadership variable. It is possible that significance was not reached because of the small sample size. I therefore did a correlation analysis between pre-training ratings and post-training ratings for each leadership variable separately. Pre-training ratings significantly ($p<0.05$) and positively predicted post-training ratings in the case of idealized influence-behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, and active management-by-exception. There was no significant effect in the case of attributed idealized influence, passive management-by-exception and laissez‑faire leadership.

Discussion

Results suggest that training might differentially affect low involvement leadership and high involvement leadership. Transformational leadership seems to be unaffected by training, since the pre-training scores significantly predict post-training scores. It is probable that short duration and single phase training programs like the one that I studied, might reduce passive management-by-exception and laissez‑faire leadership, but they may not enhance the other leadership behaviors.

It is generally taken for granted that leadership capabilities can be enhanced by sending managers to executive development programs usually lasting less than a week. Those in charge of developing human resources should probably reflect on the possibility that certain leadership capabilities may not be enhanced unless more focused attention is given to leadership training. The findings of this study indicate the importance of distinguishing

between two types of leadership capabilities—transformational leadership and less involvement leadership (like passive management-by-exception and laissez-faire leadership). While it might be possible to reduce less involvement leadership or enhance the most basic supervisory skills through executive development programs lasting less than a week, such programs may not be of any use if the objective is to enhance superior leadership capabilities like transformational leadership.

Findings of this study suggest that sending managers for leadership training programs in an unplanned way may not make any difference except in some basic supervisory skills. Considering the importance of transformational leadership in enhancing performance at all levels, it is time that human resource managers took leadership training more seriously. It is necessary to design leadership training programs in multiple phases, with data from earlier phases being fed into the subsequent phases of the program. Transformational leadership can produce wonders in organizations, but it requires whole hearted and well-designed efforts to train such leaders.

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