Transformational Leadership

ORGL 518

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Intro

Through various studies it is proven that positive transformation is a critical aspect of leadership. In this paper I will discuss what transformation is, and why it’s important to leadership. Leaders are dependent on transformation equally as much as organizations are. This paper will discuss what Transformational leadership is, how I have personally transformed as a leader, how transformational Leadership differs from other types, and what I am currently doing to strive as an ethical leader using transformation as a tool.

Organizations are living, breathing entities that are constantly changing. This being so they require resilient leaders who are grounded in their values and beliefs. Having strong core values helps leaders have conviction in what they are doing and how they are doing it. However, as resiliency is an important aspect for a leader to have, solely having strong moral convictions isn’t enough of a leadership trait in itself to foster transformation. Willingness to evolve to meet the needs of the organization is also a behavioral aspect that a leader who wishes to lead transformation must have. As organizations are ever changing entities, transformation is an integral part of leadership; a leader without the ability or willingness to transform can become stagnant, thus become unaware of the actual needs of the organization .

The core of strong leadership in any organization is the recognition of real need, the detection of contradictions among values and practice, the realigning of values, the reorganization of customs where necessary, and the governance of change (Burns, 1978 p.43). Burns describes this and stresses that good leadership is essentially the ability to raise consciousness.

Transformational leaders recognize the needs of individuals throughout an organization, and it is from this recognition that leaders can manipulate and satisfy the needs or demands of followers. An effective transformational leader has the ability to identify potential motives in followers; attempts to satisfy higher needs, and engages the entire essence of the follower. Transformational leaders distill a unified shared vision and then encourage and empower followers to pursue that goal.

Moral leadership can be viewed as an extension of transformational leadership. Moral leadership pursues the fundamental wants, needs, aspirations, and values of followers. Leaders are compelled to own their convictions and commitments. Burns (2003) says “The transformational dynamic that mutually empowers leaders and followers involves as we have seen, wants and needs, motivation and creativity, conflict and power. But at its heart lie values” (p. 211). To me this suggests that as organizations’ needs are ever evolving, thus organizations require strong values to hold the structure together. Values are the guiding compass for an ever-moving organization, comparatively, they are the foundation upon which a house is built and then continuously remodeled to satisfy current needs. Burns (2003) states “The stronger the value systems, the more strongly leaders can be empowered and the more deeply leaders can empower followers” (p. 211)

Organizations need transformation and adaptability to stay relevant. This requires leaders within them to be flexible yet grounded to lasting values. This is the balance that keeps transformation in organizations from becoming chaotic. Transformation and leadership are reliant on each other, and both require each other to be successful, this is why transformational leadership is so effective and important. While change is merely becoming or making something different, transformation is dramatic change in the essence of the substance or nature of something. It is important to notice the difference between these to terms when measuring transformation.

Autobiography

It’s difficult for me to recall a time in my life where I wasn’t in a state of transformation. From adolescence to teenage to adult life, and the changes in my personality and character along the way truly seem like an ongoing transformation for me. When I was younger I was extremely shy and was not outspoken. It wasn’t until my teenage years that I began finding my voice and the desire to be outspoken. Still at that point I wouldn’t have necessarily considered myself a leader. It wasn’t until after college and traveling the world a bit, that I began understanding my place in the world and how I fit into it. . After this self-finding period of my life I found myself in a position that began my journey as a leader., and this was becoming appointed to chairman of the finance department for a Native American government. It was in my finance position in which I grew immensely as a leader, it was here where I learned how to motivate and inspire people, even though the job was focused on the bottom line and the numbers. In this position I learned how powerful individuality in the workplace is, and that no one solution will work for all people in an organization. This was truly a position that taught me how to adapt and be flexible, yet still be able to put my foot down and provide direction.

newI work, and I . This Job has me over seeing employees at three different organizations and giving speeches to hundreds of people at a time. Me being able to do this now is a huge benchmark for how much positive transformation I have been through as a leader, from being a shy kid who was often fearful of speaking up, to the position I’m in now where I must communicate with confidence and intellect on a daily basis, the change I see when looking back is sizeable. Right now with all of this incredible opportunity and responsibility, I have a huge feeling of pressure, I can strongly relate to the saying heavy lies the crown. This will be the transformation that I will be in the next stage in my life. Weighing decisions that affect hundreds of people and their families, and living with that responsibility without carrying high stress all the time will be my challenge and opportunity for growth.

Being in this position, and this program through Gonzaga, has made me reflect on my why. After seeing so many leaders before me, and how they’ve lead, I’ve truly had to dig deep and see what makes me who I am, and what my reason for leading is. In leadership it is extremely important to find out why you are doing something, after all "People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it." Finding your why isn’t necessarily the simplest task at first. I found myself trying to overthink, and inorganically create a purpose and reason for having the passion for what I do. It wasn’t until I took a step back, pulled myself out of the weeds and saw the bigger picture of everything I was doing, wanted to accomplish and why. It was at this point that I realized that my driver, my why, is building an environment that is conducive to success for children in the community, and the generations to follow. I realized that as many adults might be stuck in their ways and unwilling to transform, children have potential to be the next group of thoughtful, just individuals. I believe it is my duty as a leader of a tribal government, to protect these individuals and build an environment in which they can thrive.

Review of Literature

There are many differences between transactional and transformational leadership, and with these types of leadership varying so greatly, there is a time and place in which each should be used. To know when to use them we must first know the elements of each style (Bass, 1990).

Personal and social awareness play a huge role in transformational leadership. Social awareness is important for a leader to have, as it stops one from being biased based on situational influences, others personality or disposition. Attributional complexity is defined as “the capability of discriminating and integrating dimensions related to social judgment in order to understand social behavior” (Sun and Anderson, 2012, p. 1001). This characteristic allows leaders to positively influence subordinates’ sense of self and motivation (Sun and Anderson, 2012, p. 1001). Along with this, an article that Bass (1990), states that there are four elements to transformational leadership that make up its entirety. The first element is charisma in which a vision is provided by leadership. This vision creates a sense of unity, pride and respect for the organization. The second trait is inspiration, and the ability to communicate high expectations, in simple ways. Third is intellectual stimulation, in which high expectations are communicated; and intelligent, rational and careful problem solving are encouraged. Lastly is an individualized consideration, which gives personal attention to treat employees as individuals.

These four elements outlined above have since been studied and reconsidered to reflect on the personalities of the leaders themselves. This has caused leadership characteristics to have been broken down further, “it is likely that different transformational leadership sub-dimensions influence different outcomes via different mediators and in a variety of ways, and thus require different theoretical argumentation to account for transformational leadership's multi-dimensional nature (Deinert, 2015).” Deinert’s article goes on to explain five personality characteristics, and how they influence transitional leadership or not. The five personality characteristics that are explained are; neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These are called the big 5 leadership sub-dimensions and all of them play a great role in how leaders are perceived by their community (Dienert, 2015). This adds an entire element to what people believed was required from transformational leaders, and causes the entire realm of transformational leadership study to demand more in depth thought and consideration for what transformational leadership requires. While it is not an exact science, “Transformational leadership should be encouraged, for it can make a big difference in the firm's performance at all levels (Bass, 1990)”. Many leaders who exhibit transformational characteristics are seen by their colleagues to be more satisfying and effective, than leaders who exhibit transactional characteristics (Bass, 1990).

As important transformational leadership is in modern organizations, transactional leadership can still be an effective tool when used properly under the right settings. Bass (1990), characterizes transactional leadership being composed of three elements. First is the contingent reward, in which recognition of accomplishments, and promises of rewards for good performance is the incentive. Second is active management by exception in which leaders watch for deviations from organization rules, and corrective actions are implemented when these take place. Lastly is, passive management by exception, in which leaders intervene only if standards are met; this style relinquishes responsibilities and avoids decision-making (Bass, 1990).

While transformational leadership is highly valued and very effective in today’s workplace. It is not a remedy for all situations. Many situations in which the internal and external environments of the organization are stable and have functioning effective rules, a transactional leader may be appropriate. When problems and rapid change call for a flexible organization however, a more transitional leadership style is, however, appropriate (Aarons, 2006).

Another leadership style, which is very much like transformational leadership, but has not been discussed yet, is servant leadership. Like transformational leadership, servant leaders are “visionaries, generate high levels of trust, serve as role models, show consideration for others, delegate responsibilities, empower followers, teach, communicate, listen, and influence followers” (Stone, 2004, p.). The difference between the two is that transformational leaders focus on organizational directives while servant leaders focus more on the people who follow them. Both of these styles of leadership offer great foundations of dynamic leadership, and can create real change in organizations. In an article by Stone (2004, p), it is discussed that servant leadership believes that when true servant leaders are in place, the subordinates to them are very likely to follow the same principles and become servants in the same respect. This is believed to create long-term success in organizations (Stone, 2004, p).

While the elements of all these leadership styles has been thoroughly discussed, the impact of each, haven’t been explored at such depths. Transactional leadership creates clear goals for subordinates with clear rewards for achieving those goals, and clear punishments for non-compliance. This transactional relationship creates a very predictable behavior that falls exactly in line with the requirements expected from the leadership (Rodrigues, 2015). Transformational environments however are very dissimilar to those of transactional. “Transitional leaders consider the individual needs of their subordinates and encourage them to prioritize the collective over the individual interests as a way to achieve the organizational targets and the wellbeing of the group (Rodrigues, 2015).” This encourages a social exchange, between subordinates and leadership, and promotes the organization to share a collective identity and promotes the common good (Rodrigues, 2015). Servant Leadership has an outcome very similar to this; however it has a greater focus on the individuals’ goals rather than the organization. All forms of leadership have some form of a transactional component, in which there are clear expectations that must be met in order to maintain functionality. Transformational leadership pushes individuals to grow and potentially exceed the original expectations required. This is why transformational leadership is so sought after to enhance organizations, but not required in all situations.

Whether Leadership is transactional or transformational, one thing that is critical to understand is what ethical leadership is. Brown (2005) states that it is ‘‘the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making’’ (Brown, Trevin ̃o and Harrison 2005, p. 120). This alludes that ethical leadership involves some aspect of personal conduct, regarded it is ethically appropriate (Lawton, 2014). Ethical leadership is important whether it’s in a transactional or transformational environment, this is because, leaders acting fairly and with consideration for others may elicit positive responses in employees’ attitudes and behaviors (Brown et al. 2005; Brown and Trevin ̃o 2006). “Morally developed leaders may have a selfish interest in seeing their country come together in peace, and this may be in alignment with their people’s selfish needs or interests” (Ciulla, p.114). Leaders of higher moral character who embrace and live toward universal end values, will see that satisfying their selfish interests neither benefits the groups they lead in the short term, nor themselves over longer periods (Ciulla, p.114). When leaders provide better transparency, they are better able to execute, and what they are asking of employees will be more accepted , as they see the authenticity in leadership. “I believe that leaders must create high levels of transparency in their organization for their followers to fully understand the intent underlying their actions” (Ciulla, p.116).

Using these studies it is important to remember, whether leadership is transactional, or is fostering transformational change, ethical leadership should always be a cornerstone of any leadership style.

The ability to differentiate leadership styles, and attributes of each is very important. For instance it’s easier to lead transformation if you know what it is, however, knowing what something is vs. knowing how to implement it are two different things. While most organizations focus on what they do and how they do it, inspired organizations always look at why they do something, then they figure out how to do it, then conclude on what it ends up being (TEDTalks). The ability to first answer why this resonates with individuals and helps them understand it better on a primal level. This is due to the evolution and parts of our brain that control different functions. The “what” and the “how” stimulate the neo-cortex, which controls rationalization and language. The why stimulates the limbic brain, which controls instincts, sensation, feelings and controls behavior and decision-making. This is the primal brain, and though we might not notice it at work, it has a vast effect on behavior. When you speak to “why” rather than what or how, peoples’ brains register it on a primal level which influences feelings and influences people on a level that they can’t put into words, this is what causes the gut feeling decisions that people make (TEDTalks). Whenever in a leadership role it is always important to first address why you are doing something before implementing any type of change, either big or small

Case Study Analysis

One of the organizations I oversee right now that will truly test my ability as a leader and my ability to transform myself and an organization is the tribal government (UAIC). This organization is not in a highly functioning state and I plan to change that. In order for me to describe why I must transform the organization and how I intend to transform it, I will describe the past situation that put our organization into an unchanging stagnant environment.

Previously we had an issue with our Tribal Administrator at the time, who acted as the head administrator for all operations, but answered to and took direction from the five board members who were elected (BOD). The issue that arose was the fact that the organization found out that the administrator was embezzling money from the tribe through inflated change orders on construction projects. Since this was discovered there have been huge changes and good controls put into the accounting department to mitigate any chance of this reoccurring in the future. With all of the new safeguards in place there is still a huge void in the organization and it is unclear as to what is needed in a new tribal administrator. Currently our attorney is working as an interim administrator to fill the void, this is to help the operations get by but it’s comparatively putting a Band-Aid on a wound rather than healing it. The dilemma at hand is that the board has historically had issues putting a person with legitimate control in the position, and on the other hand there are no qualified applicants that want that level of responsibility without an ultimate authority. Meanwhile, I believe I have found the remedy to the problem.

The problems caused from this dilemma that are adversely affecting the organization are; general lack of trust, micromanagement issues, fear of change, communication issues, and little unifying vision. In order to fix this problem, it must be re-thought what control the BOD has over this tribal administrator position is, and what it this tribal administrator position is responsible for. Currently this position is a bottleneck of information from the bottom to the top, due to lack of time and other possible self interest issues. Currently, the attorney/administrator holding the position is overworked, and not trained or educated in management or leadership. My proposal is to empower all of the heads of departments to have a direct line of communication with the BOD, and have biweekly, or monthly reports that they give to the board and administrator directly; from here the board can make necessary decisions and allow the administrator and heads of department implement them.

This change would allow all top managers to have a direct line of communication with those who make the decisions, as well as empower department heads to run their department without being micromanaged. This will take time to implement and, of course buy in from the organization, but will be beneficial for the organization in the long run. “Leaders must create high levels of transparency in their organization for their followers to fully understand the intent underlying their actions” (Ciulla, p.116).

Implementing this transformation would alleviate micromanagement issues, communication issues, and allow other managers to hear the BOD’s perspective rather than hearing it from the administrator, which would lead to a better, unified vision.

My values as a leader are reflected in this change; however, I believe that it is best to empower people rather than giving them orders and hold them down, as giving them responsibility and room to grow will not only benefit the individuals but the organization as well. This, however is where I believe that there is still a transactional form of leadership that comes with transformation. As I am empowering employees with greater communication and ability to make decisions, there is still an element of our relationship where there is time and work in exchange for money, along with a standard expectation that must be met. The transformational aspect of what is happening here though is that there is potential and ability to move far beyond the transactional aspect of the situation. I believe this change must be implemented in order to improve communication, empower employees, and successfully move the organization from its stagnant/unmotivated state. In time, with this process implementation, I believe the lack of trust and fear of change would dissipate within the organization, simply because of a better communication flow and a less Machiavellian approach to information sharing. This example from my life is a great display of why I believe leadership and transformation are reliant upon each other, as I am in a transformation myself; my new found positional leadership allows me to transform the organization and the people within it.

Conclusion

Transformation is defined as “a process of profound and radical change that orients an organization in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness” (What is transformation?). In a leadership role it is important to understand the difference between change and transformation. Lynn Twist once said, “Change is volatile. Transformation is completely different – though sometimes it is called change. Transformation never makes the past wrong. It transforms it. It doesn’t deny it. It honors it in a way that you can move forward without doing anything wrong, and having the past somehow now become complete, rather than wrong. Transformation has a permanence to it – where once you transform, once you awaken, once you see the stations you didn’t see before, you can’t go back… Transformation suddenly makes the past make sense, and new futures open up” (Twist, 2013).

Transactional leadership discussed throughout this paper references the idea that this style of leadership is purely reliant on a transactional exchange between leader and follower. Transformational leadership moves beyond this relationship with hopes to empower the followers within the organization to move beyond expectations for the enhancement of the individual and the organization. When a leader is in a position in which they are attempting to lead organizational transformation it is important to understand how followers will respond, and how to inspire followers to want to take part in the transformational process. Always remember that, "people don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it" (TEDTalks). This “why” is really gets individuals to look at themselves, what they stand for and align that with the cause for transformation. Answering why to do something is something much more personal and relatable to someone, rather than simply explaining what to do, or how to do it.

I believe that great leaders do not tell you what to do, they show you how its done. As I am leading my life and the people within it, I always want to have the most positive impact that my ability allows me to. Understanding how individuals respond to transactional relationships compared to transformational relationships is all a part of that. The ethical leader who can inspire growth and transformation is a rare but important component to organizations and communities. It is leaders like these who can foster trust and empowerment in individuals.

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