

## Chapter 22: Transformational School Leadership

KENNETH LEITHWOOD, DIANA TOMLINSON AND MAXINE GENGE

*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education*

Out of the varying motives of persons, out of the combat and competition between groups and between persons, out of the making of countless choices and the sharpening and steeling of purpose, arise the elevating forces of leadership and the achievement of intended change (Burns, 1978, p. 432).

Transformational leadership is a term which has appeared with increasing frequency in writings about education since the late 1980's. Sometimes it has been used to signify an appropriate type of leadership for schools taking up the challenges of restructuring now well underway in most developed countries throughout the world (Leithwood, 1992). In this context, a common-sense, non-technical meaning of the term is often assumed. For example, the dictionary definition of transform is 'to change completely or essentially in composition or structure' (Webster, 1971). So any leadership with this effect may be labelled transformational, no matter the specific practices it entails or even whether the changes wrought are desirable.

This chapter is not concerned with transformational leadership defined in this loose, common-sense fashion. It is concerned, rather, with a form of leadership by the same name that has been the subject of formal definition and systematic inquiry in non-school organizations for at least several decades. The small but rapidly growing body of evidence, which has emerged quite recently, inquiring about such leadership in elementary and secondary school settings is reviewed in this chapter. Much of this research takes the non-school literature on transformational leadership as a point of departure, both conceptually and methodologically. So it is important, at the outset, to appreciate the general nature of that literature.

Downton's (1973) study of rebel leadership is often cited as the beginning of systematic inquiry about transformational leadership in non-school organizations. However, charisma, often considered an integral part of transformational leadership, has substantially more dis-

work, however, was a testable model of leadership practices or any empirical evidence of their effects. The prodigious efforts of Bass and his associates have been largely in response to these limitations. Bass's (1985) book *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* provided an impressive compendium of survey research evidence about the effects of one model of transformational leadership. Among the most important features of this model are the dimensions of leadership practice it includes and the proposed relationships among these dimensions.

Referred to in more recent publications as the four i's (e.g., Bass and Avolio, 1993, 1994) Bass and his colleagues define transformational leadership as including: charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In addition to these dimensions of transformational leadership, three dimensions define the meaning of transactional leadership: contingent reward, management-by-exception, and a laissez-faire or 'hands off' form of leadership.

Whereas Burns considered transformational and transactional practices as opposite ends of the leadership continuum (essentially more and less effective forms of leadership), Bass offers a quite different conception, a 'two-factor theory' of leadership: transactional and transformational forms of leadership, in his view, build on one another (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 1988; Waldman, Bass & Yammarino, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Howell & Avolio, 1991). Transactional practices foster ongoing work by attending to the basic needs of organizational members. Such practices do little to bring about changes in the organization, however. For this to occur, members must experience transformational practices, in addition. Enhanced commitment and the extra effort usually required for change, it is claimed, are consequences of this experience.

Transactional practices were the traditional focus of attention for leadership theorists until the early 1980's. Disillusionment with the outcomes of that focus, however, gave rise to a number of alternative approaches, among them transformational leadership. These approaches have been referred to collectively by Bryman (1992), Sims and Lorenzi (1992), and others as the 'new leadership paradigm'. Empirical studies of transformational leadership, reflecting this pessimism with transactional practices, often give them minimum attention. This is the case with Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) for example. While Podsakoff and his associates adopted a quite limited conception of transactional leadership for their research,

they offered arguably the most comprehensive set of transformational leadership dimensions available to that point, dimensions based on a synthesis of seven prior perspectives on transformational leadership. These dimensions, which helped organize parts of the subsequent review, include: identifying and articulating a vision; fostering the acceptance of group goals; providing an appropriate model; high performance expectations; providing individual support; providing intellectual stimulation; contingent reward; and management-by-exception.

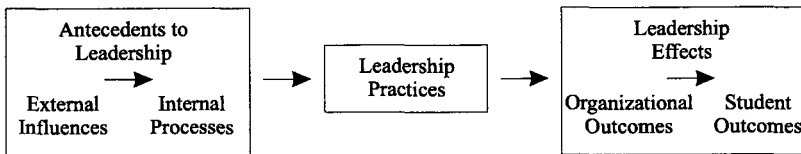
This brief and selective introduction to the formal study of transformational leadership in non-school organizations is intended to assist readers in better appreciating the initial perspectives adopted by many of those whose research in elementary and secondary school settings is reviewed. Subsequent sections of this chapter describe: the framework and methods used for this review; the nature of transformational leadership as it is experienced in schools; what is known about the effects of such leadership; and the antecedents of (or influences giving rise to) transformational school leadership.

## FRAMEWORK AND METHODS FOR THE REVIEW

### Framework

Figure 1 is a comprehensive framework for understanding leadership and an indication of the particular focus for this review. Relationships among the constructs in the framework are conceptualized as forming a causal chain with *Leadership Practices* in the centre of the chain. These practices are the more or less overt behaviours engaged in by leaders and, moving backwards in the chain, are a direct product of leaders' *Internal Processes*: the personality traits, demographic characteristics, and capacities, skills and thought processes which figure into leaders' choices of overt behaviour. While internal processes are, in part, autonomous (a product of innate traits as well as personal experiences), they are shaped also by many kinds of *External Influences*, the far left construct in Figure 1. Formal training, informal socialization experiences, district policies, staff preferences, the weather, community opinion and a host of other factors have the potential for such influence. Neither set of antecedents to leadership are considered in this review. *Leadership Practices*, according to Figure 1, potentially contribute to both organizational outcomes and outcomes which schools aspire to for students (the far right construct). There is nothing

**Figure 1:  
A Framework for Guiding The Review of Research  
on Transformational School leadership**



especially unique about this framework. Variants on it have been proposed, for example, by Bossert et al. (1982) and Yukl (1989).

### Methods

Our intention was to conduct an exhaustive review of both published and unpublished research on transformational leadership in elementary and secondary school organizations up to approximately August 1993. In the early stages of the search, we also located about two dozen empirical studies carried out in non-school settings which were read as background to this review. Electronic searches were made of ERIC, a comparable Ontario data base called ELOISE, Sociological Abstracts, Psychological Abstracts, and Dissertation Abstracts. The reference lists of all studies located through these sources were read and manual searches conducted for all promising study titles. Dissertation Abstracts yielded by far the largest proportion of studies finally selected for the review, an indication of the recency of attention devoted to inquiry about transformational leadership in schools.

To the studies identified in this way, we added a half dozen studies reported by others after the completion of the searches carried out, by this time a year earlier. A comparable number of studies completed by the first author and his colleagues were also available by this point.

This three-staged search resulted in a final set of 34 empirical and formal case studies (see Table 1) conducted in elementary and secondary school organizations. Of these 34 studies, 12 were conducted using qualitative methods, 17 relied on quantitative methods alone, and 5 studies employed some mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Information in the 34 studies were derived from a single source

(e.g., a sample of teachers) in 17 of the studies; sample sizes ranged from 1 (single case studies) to 770. Surveys, interviews, document analyses and observations were among the instruments or procedures used for collecting information. Sixteen studies relied on survey instruments alone, 6 on interviews alone, and 11 studies employed multiple data collection procedures. In one study (Kirby, King and Paradise, 1992) data were collected through a content analysis of the narrative writings of those who were able to identify exceptional leaders with whom they had worked.

Finally, the 34 studies of transformational leadership were largely concerned with the leadership of school principals (22 studies), but described transformational leadership offered by those in a number of other educational leadership roles, as well. These other roles included superintendents and other central office staff (5), some combination of school and district roles (4), and multiple roles across schools and districts (2). One study examined multiple roles, not only in schools but in other organizations, as well.

Taken as a whole, the methodological features of these studies avoid some of the most critical threats to the confidence an aggregated body of evidence permits. The studies are not distributed across so many roles as to provide little evidence about any single role: there is clearly much evidence about principals, in particular. Nor are the methods used exclusively of one type; a surprising number of studies used qualitative or mixed designs. And while many studies use only survey instruments, a reasonable variety of data collection procedures were used in the remainder. These qualities of the aggregate body of research reviewed in this chapter provide initial optimism about the robustness of conclusions that might be drawn.

#### THE NATURE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

This section identifies specific dimensions of transformational leadership found to be relevant in school contexts and describes the specific school leadership practices or behaviours associated with each dimension.