

# **Transformational Leadership:** The Role of Follower Autonomy

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Being a Transactional Leader	3
Being a Transformational Leader	4
Being a Transactional vs. Transformational Leader: The Role of Morals and Ethics	6
Existing Literature on Transformational Leadership: Being & Becoming	8
Problem Statement on Being a Transformational Leader	17
Literature on the Role of Autonomy in Transformational Leadership	19
Granting Follower Autonomy	22
Proposed Revised Framework	24
Conclusion	26

## Introduction

In today's competitive society, many millennials strive to be known as "leaders" and there is this common mindset that if one is not a leader, then he or she is not necessarily hireable in the job market. This is because organizations both want and need their management teams to be comprised of new and better leaders. There is extensive literature on leadership: topics ranging from different leadership styles to the most effective kinds of leadership to the effects and influences of leadership. Oftentimes, these topics are centered around the transactional-transformational leadership dichotomy. There is an abundance of literature defining the two, recognizing the differences between them, explaining the impact of each one, and discussing which style is more effective. It is well known that transactional leadership, also known as contingent reward leadership, is one of the most commonly practiced leadership behaviors today, but a majority of recent literature on leadership encourages individuals to move from transactional leadership and become transformational leaders. This shift is because, in the current economy, both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are needed for success, which is why transactional leadership can have a limiting affect and organizations seek transformational leaders. Many organizations have recently started to shift their focus to the development of management in order to provide for a healthy internal environment, which will in turn, provide positive results for the overall success of the company. This means improving the leadership skills of managers and encouraging them to become transformational leaders as opposed to transactional leaders. However, there is a lack of research on how exactly to become a transformational leader. There are a few frameworks or models that explain this process in detail. Therefore, this paper builds upon existing frameworks so that organizations can utilize it for their management teams.

Two different parts make the process of turning a good transactional leader into a transformational leader. The first part is a transactional leader actually "becoming" a

transformational leader by developing those characteristics. The second component is “being” a transformational leader by embodying specific behaviors that are unique to a transformational leader. This paper argues that to *become* a transformational leader, one must develop the ability to express moral courage, and to *be* a transformational leader, one must express moral courage and provide integrated autonomy to followers.

## **Being a Transactional Leader**

Transactional leadership describes an exchange relationship between the leader and the follower by focusing on rewards and punishment to achieve performance standards (Fairholm, 2001, p. 2). A transactional leader sets goals and expectations and assigns tasks to his or her follower, through an implied or formal contract. If the goals are met, then the follower receives a reward from the leader. If goals are not achieved, the follower will not get a reward and could be punished. (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 13)

James MacGregor Burns, known for distinguishing between transformational and transactional leadership, defines transactional leadership as when:

one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things. The exchange could be economic or political or psychological... [Each party's] purposes are related, at least to the extent that the purposes stand within the bargaining process... But beyond this, the relationship does not go [further]... A leadership act took place, but it was not one that binds leader and follower together in a mutual and continuing pursuit of a higher purpose (Burns, 1978, pp. 19-20).

This managerial style “relies on extrinsic motivation to drive followers toward the goal” and is effective for “building base levels of trust and commitment in followers, and for meeting targeted performance levels” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 13). While transactional leadership can be effective

in reaching the end goal, it can still have “limited success in today’s knowledge-based economy,” wherein both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are needed for success (Sosik & Jung, 2010, pp. 13). Therefore, there is a high demand for transformational leadership in the workplace.

## **Being a Transformational Leader**

Unlike transactional leadership, transformational leadership encourages followers “to perform beyond expectations” and “promotes positive and meaningful changes” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 14). Transformational leaders not only inform purposes, needs, and wants in their followers, but also brings them closer to achievement with vision and confidence (Fairholm, 2001, p. 2; Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 14). Burns defines 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. Their purposes... become fused. Power bases are linked... as mutual support for common purpose... transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both (Burns, 1978, p. 20).

Transformational leadership consists of four different components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 14).

### **Idealized Influence**

A leader who displays idealized influence is a respected role model to his or her followers in terms of performance, ethics, and confidence (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 15). He or she is authentic and holds oneself to a moral standard and an enduring work ethic (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 15). This kind of leader is well respected by his or her followers because self-interest is set aside for the collective mission and the importance of the organization’s values and beliefs (Sosik & Jung,

2010, p. 15). This means that followers “identify strongly with a leader, show high levels of trust in and commitment to the leader, and exert high levels of drive and motivation” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 15). Idealized influence ultimately “increases followers’ willingness to trust and emulate the leader” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 15).

### Inspirational Motivation

Both idealized influence and inspirational motivation create emotional bonds between the follower and leader because of mutual trust and commitment (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 16). The behavior of inspirational motivation creates a collective vision that encourages “confidence in followers and their shared vision... [and] energize[s] followers to exert extra effort in challenging situations” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 16). This vision sets high expectations and fosters an environment in which followers want to meet the elevated performance expectations and actively take part in an organization with a meaningful purpose (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 16). According to Sosik and Jung, “inspirational motivation increases followers’ willingness to excel” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 16).

### Intellectual Stimulation

A leader who displays intellectual stimulation appeals to followers’ rational and intellectual sides (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 17). Leaders encourage their followers to think critically and independently to obtain new perspectives and nontraditional ideas (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 17). They inspire their followers to challenge routine thought and deconstruct assumptions when solving problems (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 17). Intellectual stimulation allows for followers to be innovative and open to change by helping to utilize the strengths and natural talents of the followers in the most advantageous way (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 17). In short, intellectual stimulation “increases followers’ willingness to think” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 17).

## Individualized Consideration

When leaders practice individualized consideration, they “spend time listening, coaching, and teaching for followers’ development... [and] treat others as individuals with different needs, abilities, and aspirations” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 18). Leaders are empathetic, supportive, and encourage continuous personal improvement. Individual consideration “increases followers’ willingness to develop” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 18).

All together, the four I’s of transformational leadership mean that good transformational leaders are role models, “have an exciting vision, challenge the status quo and continually innovate,” and are mentors to their followers to help them reach “their full potential and performance” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 18).

## **Being a Transactional vs. Transformational Leader: The Role of Morals and Ethics**

Good transactional leadership is the foundation for transformational leadership so it is imperative to recognize that both transactional and transformational leadership have motivational and moral components to some degree that play different roles depending on the leadership style. Transactional leadership has motives based mostly on self-interest, while transformational leadership is motivated by self and mutual interest, especially the mutual development of both leaders and followers. Authentic transformational leadership maintains morals and ethics as a primary objective, and good transactional leadership also promotes morals and ethics. These distinctions made between the importance of morality and the main motivation behind the leader’s interest are crucial factors into understanding how a good transactional leader can become a transformational leader.

While transformational leadership does have moral and ethical foundations, there is some controversy over whether or not transactional leadership does, and if it does, what are the

differences and/or similarities compared to transformational leadership (Kanungo, 2001, p. 257). Some argue that “while authentic transformational leaders who exert long term transformational moral influence over followers are seen to be providing ethical leadership, one is not sure whether transactional leaders can also provide such sustained moral influence” (Kanungo, 2001, p. 258). If transactional leadership is based in self-interest, it may lack moral legitimacy because such leaders “use control strategies through the exchange of valued resources merely to induce compliance behavior among their followers” (Kanungo, 2001, p. 258). This contrasts with the transformational leader who uses empowering strategies to encourage self-development among followers (Kanungo, 2001, p. 258). Another viewpoint suggests that even the role of ethics in transformational leadership is not clear because it is difficult to have “unanimity of interests” among followers, therefore, there can be no moral basis that supports all followers (Kanungo, 2001, p. 258). However, transactional leadership only requires followers to agree to the rules and responsibilities, thus serving everyone’s individual interests separately and allowing for a moral basis that is fair for everyone (Kanungo, 2001, p. 258).

Rabindra N. Kanungo, of McGill University, explains the differences in ethical foundations between transactional and transformational leaders in terms of two fundamentally different ethical approaches: teleological and deontological (Kanungo, 2001, p. 260). Teleological ethics is driven by the outcomes of a situation, in which hedonism and utilitarianism are the foundation for all ethical decisions, and this appears to be the ethical foundation of transactional leadership (Kanungo, 2001, p. 260). Deontological ethics states that “an act is considered moral when it is performed with a sense of obligation or when it stems from a sense of duty guided by pure reason,” which is consistent with transformational leadership. Kanungo further discusses each ethical approach through motives, values, and assumptions of each leadership style (Kanungo, 2001, p. 260).



In terms of ethical leadership, Kanungo argues that there are two kinds of motives: altruistic intent and egotistic intent (Kanungo, 2001, p. 260). Altruistic intent can be categorized by mutual altruism or moral altruism (Kanungo, 2001, p. 260). Mutual altruism, or utilitarianism, occurs when the leader's concern for self-interest "will lead to mutually beneficial consequences," which mirrors the behavior of a transactional leader (Kanungo, 2001, p. 260). Moral altruism "is prompted by a sense of duty toward others without any regard for self-interest," which is similar to that of a transformational leader (Kanungo, 2001, p. 261).

There are two types of internalized ethical norms or values for altruistic intent: the reciprocity norm and the social responsibility norm (Kanungo, 2001, p. 262). "The reciprocity norm dictates that we do good to others who do good to us," which aligns directly with the utilitarian altruism motive, therefore being a value of transactional leaders (Kanungo, 2001, p. 262). The social responsibility norm is the "moral obligation to help others without any consideration of an expected personal benefit," which is the foundation for moral altruism and transformational leaders (Kanungo, 2001, p. 262).

Last, the assumptions of each leadership style are formed from two kinds of self-concepts: allocentric and idiocentric (Kanungo, 2001, p. 262). "The transformational leader is allocentric because he/she defines self in terms of relating to others, and considers group goals, group achievement, cooperation, endurance, and self-control to be more important" than personal achievement, thus being considered as organic or inseparable from others (Kanungo, 2001, p. 260). The transactional leader is idiocentric because he/she identifies as an independent thus being considered atomistic or separate from others (Kanungo, 2001, p. 260).

## **Existing Literature on Transformational Leadership: Being & Becoming**

Knowing the main differences and similarities between transactional and transformational leaders, it is possible to become a transformational leader from being a good transactional

leader. Typically, the becoming part of this transitional process comes first and the being component comes second. But it is important for the leader to know the characteristics needed to be a transformational leader before starting the process to become one so that he or she can set clear goals to be efficient and successful. Below is a chronological review of some of the existing literature need to both be and become a transformational leader.

### “Being” a Transformational Leader

Liebowitz, J. (1998). You can become a transformational leader. *Supervision*, 59(8), 14.

This article briefly discusses why a transactional leader is not sufficient to support the performance and health of an organization and describes six components of being a transformational leader. Liebowitz argues that United States organizations need “strong leaders who ‘transform’ our companies into the powerhouses... in order to compete successfully in today’s global arena.” He says most organizations have managers who lead in a transactional style, in which rewards are contingent on performance. However, companies do not always have good transactional leaders and bad leaders tend to approach employees in a manipulative and negative way by promising “rewards for a certain level of performance but often make excuses when it’s time to deliver those rewards.” Therefore, organizations need to have more proactive leaders. In other words, companies need transformational leaders who use rewards in a positive way.

Liebowitz proposes the following six components of a transformational leader: vision, charisma, energy, supportive culture, values, and systems oversight. An organizational vision must be compelling, straightforward, and inspiring so that all employees can support it in everyday actions. A charismatic leader has contagious enthusiasm by being “very self-confident, optimistic, articulate, passionate, assertive and likable.” It is not a quality that a leader needs to be born with. Transformational leaders must have immense energy to communicate the vision and values of

the organization. The leader must also set the stage for a powerful organizational culture that inspires, energizes, and instills faith in the employees to perform based on the organization's values.

The most crucial component of transformational leadership for Liebowitz is values. Values are "certain over-arching core beliefs as to what is really important" in employees and followers. He suggests a list of eight values, derived from management consultant Tom Peters: desire to be the best, people, customer service, innovativeness, informality, growth and profits, diversity, and embracing change. Desiring to be the best simply means wanting the organization to perform the best in the given industry. Making the people who both comprise the organization and give back to the organization a value provides for a key competitive advantage. People as a value ties into the value of customer service, which requires an organization to be customer centered by having all employees show that they care for their customers. Companies need to "create an atmosphere where the employees are encouraged and feel good about experimenting, taking risks and trying out new ideas" to foster innovativeness. The fifth value of informality means to create an environment that is casual to promote communication across all levels and departments of the organization. The sixth value of growth and profits requires trust among managers and employees, honesty, integrity, safety, and ethics to formulate the best long-term solution. The seventh value of diversity means to have the demographics of both employees and managers "mirror the diversity of customers so we can generate the creative ideas to better meet our customers' diverse needs." Last, embracing change entails providing a culture in which continuous change can occur whenever necessary without many obstacles.

The last component of transformational leadership is overseeing systems, which consists of eight policies and procedures that will shape the organizational culture so that the values can be reinforced. First, start at the hiring process. If applicants do not appear to know or embody the company's values, they should not be hired. Second, employees should be trained on these values.

The third policy concerns the organization's performance appraisal system, in which employees should be rated based upon the company values. Fourth, rewards should be based on the values defined by the organization. Fifth, employees need to be encouraged to be more innovative. Sixth, management must implement a system that emphasizes ethics and integrity. Seventh, the company's promotional policy must require that employees display the values. Eighth, do not fire risk takers or whistleblowers. Instead, encourage the risk takers and encourage whistleblowers for bringing an issue forward.

Together, these six components (vision, charisma, energy, strong culture, values, and overseeing systems) are what can create a transformational leader as well as transform an entire organization for the better. The most important component is the values, which, once clearly defined, will set the stage for the other five components. If every manager and employee of the company adheres to the values set by the leader, then the leader has the capacity to become a transformational leader.

Bromley, H. R., & Kirschner-Bromley, V. A. (2007, November/December). Are You a Transformational Leader? *Physician Executive*, 33(6), 54-57.

This article provides a list of six competencies necessary for a leader to be a transformational leader. It introduces background information on the characteristics of an effective leader and descriptions of four different leadership theories, which include Attribution Theory, Charismatic Leadership, Transactional Leadership, and Transformational Leadership. An effective leader is one who has direction, purpose, vision, and the "responsibility to develop, transform, sustain and communicate that vision." Attribution Theory concerns the leader's behaviors and specific traits, such as personality, intelligence, and determination. Charismatic Leadership means that leaders are charismatic in the way they communicate their vision, "consistent and focused, highly confident, and know their own strengths and weaknesses." Transactional leadership "states that leaders 'guide or motivate their followers in the direction of established

goals by clarifying' their particular roles and tasks" and provide a reward when the task is fulfilled. Transformational builds upon transactional leadership and it requires the leader to be concerned with the followers and their intellectual stimulation, encouraging them to set aside their self-interests for the greater good of the organization. "The term 'transformational' stems from the ability to inspire and develop people as resources and move them to a higher state of existence, transforming them in the process."

Bromley and Kirschner-Bromley derive their six competencies by first explaining transformational leadership by referencing three different pieces of existing literature written by James McGregor Burns (1978), Bernard Bass (1989), and Hackman and Johnson (1991). According to Burns, transactional leadership is not the most effective type because "it is based on the needs of the leader rather than the follower." Transformational leadership motivates followers "by appealing to higher ideals and moral values" and articulating a vision. Bass proposed the four I's of transformational leadership, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, which were previously discussed in regards to the Full Range Leadership Development model (Sosik & Jung, 2010). Hackman and Johnson proposed six central personality characteristics of transformational leaders: creativity, interaction, vision, empowerment, passion, and ethics.

Based upon this literature, Bromley and Kirschner-Bromley compiled six competencies to lead an organization's transformation: "having, holding, conveying and fulfilling the vision of the transformed organization; learning systems thinking and creativity; effective communication and interaction; building capability in self and others (empowerment); passion, charisma and energy; protecting the organization and its employees through proper ethics and morals." They argue that these competencies are the minimum requirements for being a transformational leader and make it clear that transformational leaders must continue to further learn and adapt.

Matthews, J. J. (2012). *Blacksheep Leadership: a story about a leadership challenge and the nature of transformational leadership*. University Place, WA: University Place Publishing House.

Matthews uses the term “Blacksheep leadership” as a synonym for transformational leadership, which he argues, “does not discount the practical benefits of transactional leadership; it builds upon them.” He underscores how transformational leaders do not solely focus on extrinsic motivators, but rather “are propelled by intrinsic motivators” in regards to personal development and how organizational climate is shaped. Matthews does not have a list of characteristics like many other authors on the subject do, but writes that the “definitive aim of transformational leadership [is] a person’s progression from an exemplary follower to a capable leader.” Through this main objective, a Blacksheep leader must provide a “worthy and inspirational vision” for his followers to understand and carry out; “set credible, ethical examples” by emulating moral values through his everyday actions; engage his followers intellectually by encouraging critically independent thoughts; and provide “fair and sufficient” compensation and benefits that are not based on contingent rewards or penalties. A Blacksheep leader uses referent power to guide his followers through a relationship based on “interpersonal influence.” A transformational leader wants his followers to be innovative and think critically in terms of decision making, by granting his followers autonomy. He is continuously striving for self-improvement in all facets, not only for himself, but also for his followers.

### “Becoming” a Transformational Leader

Johns, C. (2004). *Becoming a Transformational Leader through Reflection. Reflections on Nursing, 24-26.*

In a master’s program in clinical leadership at the University of Luton in England, Johns helped eight practitioners, holding different leadership positions, realize what it takes to become

transformational leaders. This two-year program requires the leaders to reflect on their experiences of being a leader and their journey of becoming a transformational leader. For Johns, “reflection is learning from everyday experiences with the intent of realizing desirable practice,” and it can be done in two ways. The first involves being reflective after an experience has occurred and the second requires reflection during the event. This program also incorporates “modules that address diverse aspects of leadership-quality, resolving conflict, creating a learning organization, leading change, and chaos theory.” Through various frameworks and tasks, transformational leadership is developed.

The program consists of three specific tasks. The first task is to ask the question: Who is a transformational leader? To answer this question and foster reflection, Johns uses Schuster’s (1994) list of 13 qualities of a transformational leader. This list includes possessing a powerful vision, being honest and empathetic, and having passion and charisma. Johns clarifies that Schuster’s characteristics are significant for transformational leadership, but lack the “value of investing in people and collaborative ways of relating, in contrast to the transactional leader who essentially views people as a means toward an end.” The second task concerns creativity and innovation through reflection by being aware of conflict and anxiety-producing situations that could hinder organizational vision articulation. According to Johns, “the key is being assertive and mindful of self, helping the other person to shift to a more collaborative pattern, while learning to yield as the situation demands without sacrificing personal integrity.” The third task is guidance in terms of challenging and supporting the followers as well as breaking away from traditional authority.

Over the course of the two-year program, the group of leaders learns how to be reflective and turn negative feelings into positive experiences as transformational leaders. They learn how to make “arguments toward consensus while being conscious of their mental models and agendas,” which Johns asserts is the most important quality of a transformational leader born out

of reflection. The feedback from the leaders appears largely positive and they were able to utilize the transformational ideals they learned in a transactional work environment and feel liberated to lead in collaborative and empowering ways.

Avolio, B. J. (2005). *Leadership Development in Balance: Made/Born*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum.

Bruce J. Avolio argues that leaders are made, not born, and provides a framework of how one can develop as a leader. While the entire text concerns leadership growth in general, it is not until the end that Avolio explains how to develop oneself as a transformational leader. He first explains the Full Range Leadership Development Model, which consists of five different leadership styles: laissez-faire, passive management by exception, active management by exception, transactional, and last, the four I's of transformational (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration). Avolio asserts that the ideal leader is one who is transformational in any situation and he offers steps to take to become a transformational leader.

The first step is to “think of someone in your life who had a profoundly positive impact on your leadership development.” Then, consider if you know someone who needs such guidance in his or her life and ask yourself how you can be a role model to that person, specifically what behavioral characteristics you need to display.

The second step is to use the STAARR method on your leadership incidents. STAARR stands for: Situation, Task, Action, Analysis, Relationships, and Results. Start by explaining the situation or the background information. Then, state the task or the leadership incident at hand. What were the actions taken and were they negative or positive? Analyze the behaviors that were used to take action and discuss which relationships were affected by the action. Last, explain the results of the situation. Repeat this process for every incident in one week and categorize each incident into a specific style of leadership from the Full Range model. Analyze your personal influence on



others and determine your weaknesses and strengths in terms of your leadership style. Work towards having predominantly transformational leadership incidents.

Based on the results from the second step, the third, fourth, and fifth steps concern the actual behaviors and actions a leader needs to take to become transformational. The third step is engage in active reflection with the people around you. Discuss the Full Range model with others and what it means personally to you. How does this model apply directly in your life and what can you do to be a transformational leader? The fourth step is to create a developmental goal based on feedback you receive from your colleagues and peers. Ensure that this feedback is honest and comprehensive. Most importantly, it cannot be influenced by you in any way. Last, use your developmental goals to formulate a developmental plan. This plan should consist of a clear, measurable goal pertaining to transformational leadership, a timeline of implementation and feedback, consistent maintaining of the STAARR report and a support system to help achieve your goals.

Matthews, J. J. (2012). *Blacksheep Leadership: a story about a leadership challenge and the nature of transformational leadership*. University Place, WA: University Place Publishing House.

In this book, Matthews uses the term “Blacksheep leader” to refer to a transformational leader. This kind of leader is different in that he or she is not ordinary, but rather exceptional. These two terms can be used interchangeably, for they have the same meaning and value. According to Matthews, the four major factors necessary for becoming a Blacksheep transformational leader are having: a positive open, mindset; time, will, and thoughtful discipline; systematic learning from experience; and a diverse, balanced, life-long education.

Having a positive, open mindset as a Blacksheep transformational leader means to understand that “people’s ability to develop effective leadership and followership capacities” comes from both predetermined genetic inheritances and their environment and personal

experiences. Someone with a negative, closed mindset would believe that a person's ability to be a leader is pre-determined by birth and cannot be changed, but this kind of thinking is largely detrimental.

The second component of becoming a Blacksheep transformational leader is having the "time, will, and discipline, to engage in a thoughtful program of leadership development." Such a leader must have an "*informed will guided by discipline*" and put in a great deal of time, hard work, and dedication to grow and improve as a leader.

Third, a Blacksheep leader must develop "a systematic means for learning from personal experience and the experience of others." This component seems to bring together the first and the second, in that a transformational leader should utilize his or her open mindset to develop oneself as a leader through personal experiences and the environment that he or she actively chooses to be involved in by paying close attention to the surrounding people and events that occur. Transformational leaders can also learn valuable lessons from history and its patterns. The best way to extract knowledge from these different sources is to systematically approach these experiences through consistent recounting and reflective analysis.

Last, a Blacksheep transformational leader needs to have a "sincere appreciation for a diverse, balanced, life-long education," similar to that of a liberal arts education, which promotes independent and critical thinking. This means that such a leader needs to engage in a continuous, challenging education that is not narrow-minded and focused on just one discipline. This education must allow for self-awareness and self-reflection as well as a detailed understanding of opposing opinions.

## **Problem Statement on Being a Transformational Leader**

While the frameworks regarding "being" a transformational leader vary slightly from one another, there are common themes, such as a transformational leader needing to know how to

convey and fulfill a vision for the followers, encouraging creativity and innovation, or being charismatic. The most important theme being that transformational leaders have an obligation to their followers to provide idealized influence, inspire motivation, stimulate intellectually, and consider each follower individually, in other words, the four I's of transformational leadership. However, an overlooked crucial factor in being a transformational leader is granting follower autonomy of action and decision-making.

The above literature does not make follower autonomy a defining element distinct from the four I's of transformational leadership. Some researchers mention the subject of follower autonomy briefly or indirectly, but never as a crucial element for becoming a transformational leader. One of Liebowitz's six components for becoming a transformational leader is values and one of these values is innovativeness, which he argues must be fostered through an environment in which employees are comfortable "experimenting, taking risks and trying out new ideas." This can be translated to giving follower autonomy to employees (Liebowitz, 1998). Ochalla and Stajkovic similarly argue that a transformational leader needs to encourage their followers to be innovative and challenge norms (Ochalla & Stajkovic, 2003). One of Bromley and Kirschner-Bromley's six competencies for becoming a transformational leader is to build capability in oneself and in others, or in other words, empowerment (Bromley & Kirschner-Bromley, 2007). None of these authors explicitly discuss transformational leaders granting follower autonomy, but rather do so implicitly through stating that such leaders need to empower their followers and encourage them to be innovative and challenge norms. Matthews is the only one who explicitly addresses follower autonomy in *Blacksheep Leadership*: "followers should be accorded as much as autonomy and control as feasible in setting personal work goals and in their execution of assigned tasks" (Matthews, 2012, p. 74), however, he does not elaborate beyond this one point. Thus, this paper fills that gap and builds upon these models by discussing what is needed to both "become" and "be" a transformational leader. Before defining follower autonomy more clearly for the purpose

of this paper, however, it is important to understand how additional literature discusses the followers' autonomy as a critical aspect of transformational leadership.

## **Literature on the Role of Autonomy in Transformational Leadership**

Basu, R., & Green, S. G. (1997). Leader-Member Exchange and Transformational Leadership: An Empirical Examination of Innovative Behaviors in Leader-Member Dyads. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 27*(6), 477-499. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.1997.tb00643.x

Basu and Green examine the impact of leader-member exchange (LMX) and transformational leadership on follower innovativeness. LMX theory concerns "how leaders develop different exchange relationships with their followers," specifically providing some followers, known as in-group members, "with greater support, autonomy, and influence in decision making." Previous studies have shown that greater autonomy, which is defined as "the extent to which followers are given latitude to carry out their tasks without excessive supervision," yields higher LMX quality. This autonomy allows for leaders to provide an environment for "free thinking, exchange of information," and exploration of different kinds of problem-solving. And based upon the characteristics of transformational leaders, namely the encouragement of innovativeness, the authors argue that such leaders should "positively moderate the relationship between follower autonomy and innovative behavior." Therefore, the authors hypothesize that "the quality of LMX will be positively related to the extent to which followers have autonomy" and "the extent to which followers have autonomy will be positively related to innovative behavior."

Data was collected from a *Fortune 500* printing company in the Midwest using questionnaires for 251 followers about characteristics of the followers' job and attitudes of supervisors and for 62 supervisors about their perceptions of their followers' innovative behaviors.

The results proved that LMX quality is positively related to employee autonomy, so the better the quality of exchange, the more likely followers will have autonomy. However, autonomy is not correlated with innovative behaviors of employees even though exchange quality is related, but this could be due to the specific company's work environment. Surprisingly, there was a "strong negative relationship between transformational leadership and innovative behavior," meaning autonomy was not moderated in the relationship with innovativeness, which again could be due to the company's work environment, or that charisma deters innovativeness, or that the supervisors' high standard for innovative behavior was not being met by followers.

Dvir, T., Eden, D., Avolio, B. J., & Shamir, B. (2002). Impact of Transformational Leadership on Follower Development and Performance: A Field Experiment. *Academy Of Management Journal*, 45(4), 735-744. doi:10.2307/3069307

This study aimed to prove the influence of transformational leadership on follower development and performance by training a group of military leaders in transformational leadership and training the control group in "routine eclectic" leadership. The authors argue that motivation, morality, and empowerment are the three main domains of follower development, thus hypothesizing that, "transformational leadership has a positive impact on the development of followers' motivation in terms of their self-actualization and extra effort... morality in terms of their internalization of their organization's moral values and a collectivistic orientation... empowerment in terms of their critical-independent approach, active engagement in the task, and specific self-efficacy." In this case, empowerment is the same as autonomy in terms of follower development especially regarding self-management and transformational leaders' encouragement of "followers' capacity to think on their own, develop new ideas, and question out-moded operating rules."

The experimental workshop about transformational leadership covered the following topics: the leader-follower relationship can be viewed through transformational or transactional

leadership; the behaviors needed to enact transformational leadership; “transformational leadership can create higher levels of development and performance among followers than can transactional leadership;” and last, transformational leaders should encourage motivation, morality, and empowerment in their followers. The eclectic leadership training discussed topics, “such as goal setting, self-fulfilling prophecy, crisis intervention, contingency theory, trust building, personal example, and group cohesion.”

The results showed that transformational leadership affects both follower performance and development in terms of motivation, morality, and empowerment. More specifically, the leaders who received the transformational leadership training had more of a positive impact on their “direct followers’ development and indirect followers’ performance than did the leaders” who received eclectic leadership training.

Kovjanic, S., Schuh, S. C., Jonas, K., Quaquebeke, N. V., & Dick, R. V. (2012). How do transformational leaders foster positive employee outcomes? A self-determination-based analysis of employees' needs as mediating links. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 33(8), 1031-1052. doi:10.1002/job.1771

In 2012, two studies were conducted to determine how transformational leaders can foster positive employee outcomes based on the self-determination motivational framework, which states that in order for humans to successfully thrive and develop, the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be fulfilled. Autonomy is defined as “being able to self-organize one’s behavior. It involves a sense of choice and a feeling of not being controlled by forces alien to the self.” The self-determination model argues that autonomy is “fostered by a leadership style that offers opportunities for participation, provides meaning, acknowledges followers’ perspectives, and encourages self-initiation.” Therefore, this study hypothesizes that “transformational leadership is positively related to followers’ sense of autonomy.”

Transformational leaders provide their followers with idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Specifically, through intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders “encourage their followers to develop new approaches to efficiently accomplish their work... Hence, they offer employees freedom and autonomy in the way they are to execute and fulfill their tasks.” Compared to transactional leaders, “who continuously monitor followers’ actions and sanction employees’ behavior through reward and punishment,” transformational leaders relate collective goals to the followers’ self-interest to encourage followers to autonomously reach those goals.

Two studies were tested this hypothesis. In the first, the authors used a cross-sectional design to collect data in a single session from a sample of 410 German employees, “controlling for age, gender, and leader-follower dyadic tenure.” This proved that transformational leadership is positively correlated with the satisfaction of followers’ needs for autonomy. In the second study, data was collected from the German-speaking part of Switzerland with a “time lag between the measurement of leadership behavior and the remaining variables.” Consistent with the first study, when “controlling for age, gender, and leader-follower dyadic tenure,” there was a positive correlation between transformational leadership and the satisfaction of followers’ need for autonomy. Both these findings suggest that followers’ need for autonomy is necessary for transformational leadership.

## **Granting Follower Autonomy**

There is disagreement and ambiguity between the definitions of *autonomy* and *empowerment*, so it is necessary to clarify the difference. Oxford Dictionary defines empowerment as, “the fact or action of acquiring more control over one’s life or circumstances through increased civil rights, independence, self-esteem, etc.” (OED, 2017) and defines autonomy as, “liberty to follow one’s will; control over one’s own affairs; freedom from external influence, personal

independence” (OED, 2017). Dvir, Eden, Avolio, and Shamir’s research does not utilize the word “autonomy,” but instead uses “empowerment,” which they define “in terms of [the follower’s] critical-independent approach, active engagement in the task, and specific self-efficacy” (Dvir et. al, 2012). This particular definition appears to be conflated with autonomy, however, Bromley and Kirschner-Bromley define empowerment as “building capability in self and others” (Bromley & Kirschner-Bromley, 2007), which conflicts with the meaning of autonomy.

For the purpose of this paper, the term “empowerment” should not be used as a synonym for autonomy, and rather should align more with the definition provided by Bromley and Kirschner-Bromley and the Oxford Dictionary. In a business environment, empowerment is about giving employees the motivation and courage to complete tasks and to hold them accountable for their actions. In other words, empowerment is an underlying feature of inspirational motivation, one of the four I’s of transformational leadership. Autonomy is different in the sense that it provides freedom and responsibility for the followers to make their own decisions at their discretion.

Therefore, based upon the above literature, it is clear that follower autonomy is an important mediating aspect of transformational leadership. Yet, within the literature that concerns the models for becoming a transformational leader, it has not been identified as a critical factor. The ultimate goal of a transformational leader is to transform followers into good leaders themselves, which is meant to be done through the four I’s of transformational leadership. However, follower autonomy, is how followers can truly learn on their own and from their mistakes to become a leader. According to Sosik & Jung, “empowerment occurs when followers develop into confident and capable independent-minded leaders in their own right” (Sosik & Jung, 2010, p. 216). Thus, granting follower autonomy produces independent, confident, and committed leaders in the long-run. It allows employees to care for their work on a personal level, which, in turn, can provide for higher quality outcomes that are unique and innovative.



Therefore, I argue that transformational leaders not only have an obligation to their followers to provide idealized influence, inspire motivation, stimulate intellect, and consider each follower individually, but also have an obligation to grant autonomy. In fact, transformational leaders have an *ethical* obligation to grant followers with a good measure of autonomy and responsibility for effective action/decision-making.

## **Proposed Revised Framework**

My revised framework has two main parts: the “becoming” and “being” a transformational leader. Developing one’s moral courage and seizing autonomy is part of becoming a transformational leader, and granting followers autonomy is an expression of moral courage and being a transformational leader.

### **Being a Transformational Leader**

#### *The Five I’s of Transformational Leadership*

As shown by the literature, transformational leaders have an obligation to their followers to demonstrate the four I’s of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence. They also have the duty to offer *integrated autonomy*; or, in other words, a fifth I of transformational leadership.

Leaders provide integrated autonomy when there is some degree of independence and freedom in executing assigned tasks and goals to followers. Employees have the ability to make decisions and take action on their own without the constraints of the leader. This means that leaders place a high level of trust in their employees to make the most effective and informed decisions. This allows for followers to put into practice what they have already gained from the other four I’s of transformational leadership. It encourages employees to be intrinsically motivated, innovative in the way they complete tasks, learn from their own experiences, and practice being leaders. Granting autonomy is an expression of moral courage in terms of being a

transformational leader. Integrated autonomy increases followers' willingness to lead on their own.

## Becoming a Transformational Leader

### *Moral Courage*

Many leaders avoid granting follower autonomy because the followers could make mistakes, which would reflect negatively on the leader. So how can a transformational leader grant integrated autonomy to their followers? A good transactional leader who is morally courageous by granting integrated autonomy, as well as the other four I's, can become a transformational leader. Moral courage is defined as: "a commitment to moral *principles*, an awareness of the *danger* involved in supporting those principles, and a willing *endurance* of that danger" (Kidder, 2005, p. 7). However, to be morally courageous, a leader must have certain values and attributes, and only then can a good transactional leader become a transformational leader because he or she will have the necessary courage to grant followers autonomy.

However, expressing moral courage requires work, but it is needed to provide integrated autonomy to one's followers. A leader must engage in active "discourse and discussion" (Kidder, 2005, p. 243) with her followers, colleagues, mentors, bosses, etc. She must understand what it really means to be courageous and why it is important. The leader must not only be a "model and mentor" to a follower, but have coaches and guides to take example from (Kidder, 2005, p. 243). These examples should demonstrate courage and be transformational in nature. Last, these leaders must "practice and persist" (Kidder, 2005, p. 243) by continuously finding ways to demonstrate their values, test them in the face of danger, and endure through those dangers.

## Conclusion

### Summary

Within the economic environment of today, there is a serious need for organizational climates to be centered around not just extrinsic motivators, but also intrinsic motivators. This can be possible if management teams were more transformational rather than transactional. But how can organizations transform their leaders, especially when that style of leadership is highly demanding and difficult to achieve? The revised framework of the 5 I's of transformational leadership provides answers to that question because it allows followers put into practice what they have learned from their leaders and actually work at achieving transformational leadership themselves.

To be a transformational leader, one must recognize that there is an ethical obligation to grant followers with a good measure of autonomy and responsibility for effective action and decision-making, or integrated autonomy, as well as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Such a leader needs to allow followers to step outside their comfort zone and put into practice what they have learned from working alongside the leader and supporting the vision of the organization. However, it is not easy to provide autonomy to your employees and that is where moral courage is needed. To become a transformational leader, one must be morally courageous. The leader must have a set of ethical values that she lives by, especially in the face of danger. It is also necessary to recognize that not all followers want to be leaders themselves so granting autonomy might not be beneficial for those people, however, it could still benefit your company as a whole in terms of both health and performance.

By turning your management team into transformational leaders, you are setting the groundwork for exponential organizational growth, considering that the ultimate goal of a

transformational leader is to turn followers into leaders. This means that if management teams are comprised of authentic transformational leadership they will be teaching employees to develop into transformational leaders, providing for an internal cycle of growth. This will only strengthen a company's internal health, climate, and culture, which could positively affect the performance of your organization.

### Future Research

Moving forward, it is important to empirically test the efficacy of integrated autonomy in transformational leadership. This research could allow for a clearer explanation on the best ways autonomy can be administered within an organization and to what degree should followers be granted autonomy. It would also be useful to empirically determine how granting integrated autonomy to followers affects specific internal and external factors of an organization, such as culture and revenue, and if there is a significant impact at all. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to determine the feasibility of being morally courageous in such a revised framework, in which the ultimate goal is to provide follower autonomy. Last, it would be interesting to study the gender and cultural differences related to autonomy.

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