

Effective leadership: Transformational or transactional?

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Abstract

Theory and research in outdoor leadership is often based on studies undertaken in the 1980s, however, whilst such findings are valuable, it is interesting that leadership theory in other fields such as sport, education, leisure, health, management studies and the military have taken on a different perspective. One of the most often studied models is the transactional-transformational model (Bass, 1985). This paper reviews the transactional-transformational leadership model in terms of its appropriateness for understanding and exploring outdoor leadership. Insights drawn from the discussion point to the transformational leadership model as appropriate for theorizing outdoor leadership. This conclusion was drawn as a direct response to the focus of certain key elements within outdoor leadership as a whole.

Introduction

Theory and research that has explored leadership issues in what can be broadly considered outdoor education (or perhaps adventure programming) is often based on studies undertaken in the 1980s (Priest & Gass, 1997; 2005). For example, Priest and Gass (1997) based their guidelines for effective leadership on a meta-analysis undertaken by Priest (1987 as cited in Priest & Gass, 1997) with additional consideration to ethical issues presented by (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988). Whilst the knowledge espoused should not be taken lightly, it is interesting to note that around the same time leadership research in other fields advanced with a different perspective (Bass, 1985). The aim of this paper is to introduce the transactional-transformational leadership model as appropriate for understanding and exploring outdoor leadership. Our hope being that this model might add further insights into leadership and how we can better prepare leaders for work in the outdoors.

Firstly, this paper places current outdoor leadership theory in context and documents what have been proposed as determinants of effective outdoor leadership. Secondly, the transactional-transformational leadership model is outlined and briefly discussed with the purpose of illuminating transformational leadership. Thirdly, we relate the criteria from the discussion to the outdoor leadership field and finally conclusions are drawn and further reflections outlined. The development of transformational leadership in leaders is beyond the aim of this paper.

Leadership: A brief review

Before the transactional-transformational leadership model the evolution of leadership theory had broadly passed through a number of stages (Straub, 1980). These stages are outlined in Figure 1.

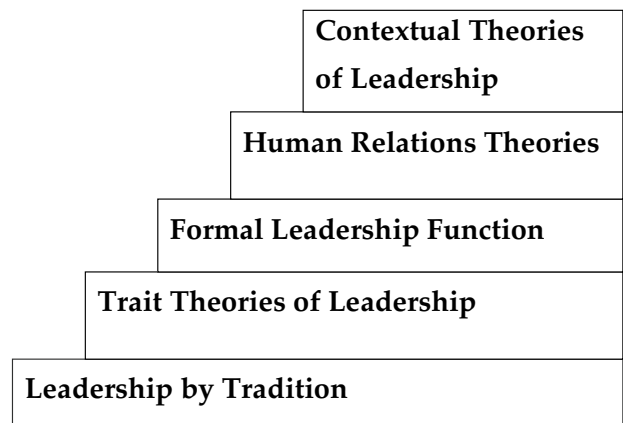


Figure 1. Evolution of Leadership Theory (adapted from Straub, 1980)

The first step describes being born into a leadership role. In the second phase leaders were those who were endowed with specific personality traits. The third stage reflected formal positions and the power to direct. Stage four focused on relationships and accepted that those being lead also had agency. For the purpose of this paper, the authors' have conceptualised the fifth stage of leadership evolution as those leaders who

were able to recognise environmental clues and adapt their behaviours to the context or situation. Examples of the fifth stage are path-goal theory (Szilagyi & Sims, 1974), Fielder's contingency theory (Fiedler, 1967) and situational theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Still, this brief history is not meant to imply that one approach died off as another arrived, as this is clearly not the case, but merely to position current leadership understanding in context.

In the outdoor leadership field research and scholarship focused on situational leadership. For example, Ford and Blanchard (1985) attempted to make explicit the relevance of leadership theory to the outdoors. In the first instance, they recognized that leaders require followers and that those followers required certain attributes in their leaders. In the view of Ford and Blanchard (1985), followers required leaders to take responsibility when followers chose to abdicate responsibility. Followers preferred to be satisfied with the leader as opposed to taking any leadership role. Further, most followers required a leader who was more experienced. A leader would need to be "easy to get along with" (Ford & Blanchard, 1985, p. 216), excited about the program, have good sense and maturity and have specific knowledge and risk management skills. Essentially the focus is on the leader as expert who is able to adopt an appropriate style to "guide, influence, and direct the participant toward what should be mutually agreed upon goals" (Ford & Blanchard, 1985, p. 227). The style adopted would depend on the task and psychological maturity of the follower and is typically represented as telling, selling, participating or delegating.

Phipps and Swiderski (1990) considered the importance of soft and conceptual skills in effective leadership. A leader is encouraged to develop skills in social matters (e.g., team related, support, empathy), psychological matters (e.g., trust, stress, motivation, emotions), communication (e.g., verbal, non-verbal, persuasiveness), judgment (e.g. dangers, problems, anticipation) and creativity (e.g., ideas, improvisations). Still, the focus is on the leader as expert with the ability to adapt certain skills and behaviours.

Peart (1991) focused on the importance of leadership style, which incorporated the marriage of technical skills, affective skills and personality. He noted the move away from the simplistically determined autocratic/democratic dichotomy towards a perception of leadership style as a continuum. Here a leader retains control at one end and shares control on the other. The main point Peart emphasized was that a leader should ensure flexibility in their approach. Peart (1991), Phipps and Swiderski (1990) and Ford and Blanchard (1985) posited the situational leadership theory (the interaction between task and relationship behaviours and skills, depending on the situation) as an appropriate model for the outdoor environment.

The Conditional Outdoor Leadership Theory (COLT) (Priest & Chase, 1989; Priest & Gass, 1997; 2005) also considers the importance of contextual variance such as task relationship and conditional favourability. For Priest and Gass (1997; 2005) effective outdoor leaders should be proficient in 12 areas. Effective leaders should have appropriate technical, safety, environmental, organizational, instructional, facilitation, problem-solving, decision-making, experienced-based judgment and communication skills. Leaders should also be flexible in style and demonstrate professional ethics (Priest & Gass, 1997). By obtaining these competencies and balancing the appropriate skills depending on context a leader can effectively lead. Yet, as Priest and Gass (1997) noted the most effective blend of these 12 elements is still unknown. This raises the questions, 'Is this a sufficient theory of leadership?' and 'Could the transactional-transformational leadership model help explore this notion further?'

Effective leadership

An outdoor leader may be required to lead expeditions or facilitate the successful completion of group goals whether as the designated expert or as the member of an equally expert group (Brymer, 2002; Priest & Gass, 1997). An outdoor leader might also lead recreational, educational, developmental or therapeutic programs and as such will often need to encourage elements such as personal responsibility, empowerment, creativity, choice and personal growth (Priest & Gass, 1997). For McKenzie (2000) the ability to facilitate factors such as the personal growth of others requires more than a particular set of skills or competencies, effectiveness depends on the personal and social qualities of the leader. Qualities such as empathy, care, acceptance, trustworthiness, compassion, creativity, the desire to encourage and not judge may also be essential for effective leadership (Luckner & Nadler, 1997). Leaders may be called upon to help others in a cycle of continuous re-creation of their own personal, work and social worlds. Thus leadership in the outdoor environment reveals its complexity. On the surface the leader needs to consider certain contextual or situational happenings and demonstrate appropriate behaviours. Yet on deeper reflection a leader in outdoor education also needs to consider their own and others values, beliefs and other personal qualities. As Nicholls (1986), in his comprehensive critique on situational leadership, recognized leadership in any context is more than adopting a style that depends on willingness and ability. Effective leaders "transcend self-imposed limitations and create a new reality. They alter perceptions, release latent energies and make possible the formerly unthinkable" (Nicholls, 1986, p. 41). The authors believe that effective outdoor leadership requires such leaders and as such understanding transformational leadership is imperative.

Transactional-transformational leadership

The transactional-transformational leadership model has been a large part of leadership research and theory for the past 25 years (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Sosik, Avolio, & Kahai, 1997). Originally the terms were developed by Burns (1978) and then further clarified by Bass (1985). In broad terms, the model posits an understanding of the essence of effective leadership.

Transactional leadership

Often termed the traditional form of leadership (Hsu, Bell, & Cheng, 2002) transactional leadership follows the traditional structure of leader-follower relationships and is based on an interchange of bargains between followers and their leaders (Howell & Avolio, 1993). There are generally two factors that are attributed to transactional leadership. The first, *contingent reward leadership* is considered to be both an active and positive exchange between the leader and follower. Followers are rewarded or recognized for successfully completing previously agreed goals or objectives (Bycio *et al.*, 1995). Followers gain by receiving bonuses, merits or recognition.

Contingent reward leadership is presumed to result in followers achieving only the negotiated level of performance (Kraaft, Engelbrecht, & Theron, 2003). The reward provided is dependent on satisfactory completion of the task (Howell & Avolio, 1993). As long as both leader and follower are happy with the arrangement the relationship will continue, performance will suffice and rewards will be consistent. Klimoski and Hayes (1980), amongst others, have found that in the workplace this type of leadership can positively influence performance and employee satisfaction.

Transactional leaders may also only approach followers when problems or mistakes occur, that is by avoiding any intervention until something has gone wrong. In this instance transactional leadership is termed *management-by-exception*. Management-by-exception can be either passive or active. In the active form leadership involves the continual monitoring of followers' performance with the specific purpose of anticipating mistakes before they become a more serious problem. In this type of transactional leadership the leader sets out and clarifies standards, expectations and criteria for assessment and monitoring at the start of a task or work thus corrective action can be more immediate as the leader is continually measuring performance against expectations in an attempt to determine deviations. In passive management-by-exception the leader waits until a task is completed before assessing and determining whether a problem exists. Standards are only made clear once a mistake has occurred. The leader intervenes after a problem

has been identified or mistake made (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Leadership following this management-by-exception form has demonstrated negative impacts on satisfaction and performance (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Still, as Howell and Avolio noted:

[I]t is hard to conceive of an effective leader who would not monitor performance and take corrective action when such action was required. At the very least, contingent negative, or aversive, reinforcement serves to clarify roles for followers and, in that sense, represents an important feature of leadership. (p. 892)

Still it is important to note that for Gerstner and Day (1997) transactional leaders are primarily motivated to satisfy their own self-interests. This has implications for outdoor leadership in that leaders might be subtly directive in their approach to participants.

Transformational leadership

The type of leadership that has in the past been labeled charismatic or inspirational (Howell & Avolio, 1993) and goes beyond the concept of performance for reward is now termed transformational leadership. For Howell and Avolio (1993) transformational leadership develops followers' 'thinking' (intellectual stimulation), supports individuals (individualised consideration) and provides inspiration, faith and respect (charismatic leadership) (Barling *et al.*, 1996). Hsu *et al.* (2001) understand these elements such that in *intellectual stimulation* the leader encourages followers to enhance curiosity and creativity in problem solving and thinking. *Individualised consideration* involves both developmental orientations and individual orientations. *Developmental orientation* is about the leader assigning tasks that will enhance motivation, abilities and potential. *Individual orientation* is about personal relationships and emphasising mutual understandings, familiarity and two-way communications. For Hsu *et al.* (2001) charismatic leadership is split into two distinct elements. The first *inspirational leadership* is about the ability to inspire and encourage a greater emotional attachment to the leader and the leader's vision. The second, *idealized influence* is the behavioural aspect of charisma and is about obtaining full commitment from followers.

Transformational leaders stimulate followers and encourage them 'to transcend their own self-interests for a higher collective purpose, mission, or vision' (Howell & Avolio, 1993, p. 891). Transformational leaders value developing a vision of the future and focus on longer-term goals (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1997), are comfortable pursuing risk and challenging the status quo, and demonstrate high internal locus of control (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Systems are seen

as flexible and changed to meet the requirements of the vision and goals. Transformational leaders focus on developing others (Gerstner & Day, 1997) or helping others to develop themselves (Peterson, 1996). Motivation for this type is based on "higher order values and beliefs" (Gerstner & Day, 1997, p. 838). Maude (1997) extended this view and determined that becoming an effective leader was synonymous with becoming oneself.

Transformational leaders can enhance commitment (Barling *et al.*, 1996), develop acceptance of responsibility and increase followers' effort (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Thus performance is invariably beyond the expected or negotiated levels. For Howell and Avolio (1993) this is as a direct result of the level of commitment, intrinsic motivation, personal development and sense of purpose demonstrated by the leader. Scholl (2001; 2002) noted that whilst for-profit organisations have focused on the transactional approach the not-for-profit sector has "long relied on transformational approaches" (Howell & Avolio, 1993, p. 932). Transformational leadership can be measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

Critics of transformational leadership have pointed to the potential for leaders to use the manipulative power inherent in transformational leadership in an unethical or self-centered way (Bentley, 2002; DeRuyver, 2001). Though for others, leadership involves a moral and ethical dimension, anything outside of this is seen as rulership or dictatorship (Deruyver, 2001). However, this may also be dependent on one's point of view and on factors such as who determines the appropriateness of the greater vision, what is moral, or how appropriate are the organisation's mission and goals. For example, a transformational leader working for a cigarette factory or an ecologically unsound manufacturer or the negation of individual or minority values for the sake of the majority (Deruyver, 2001). To counteract these critics, researchers have emphasized a full range transformational leadership model that encourages more authentic or ethical leadership characteristics and enhancing the personal development of leaders would resolve these issues (DeGraaf, Neal, & Tilley, 2000; Elliot, 2002; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Sanders, Hopkins, & Geroy, 2003).

However, whilst it could be argued that such a leader would not work for ethically or morally inappropriate organisations; the question still remains: Who determines what is and is not ethical or moral? Extending this argument is not the point of this paper – however, it is important to note as, depending on one's point of view, such matters could be considered a measure of success.

Applying the transactional-transformational model

It has been argued that the primary focus for leaders is to provide experiences that foster personal (e.g., values, beliefs, self-constructs, confidence, emotional and spiritual growth), social (e.g., leadership, communication, trust and group work) and environmental awareness, development and well being (Burridge, 2001; Hill, 2001). As such, leadership is more than ensuring the completion of tasks. Equally the leadership qualities outlined by Luckner and Nadler (1997) of empathy, care, acceptance, encouragement, trustworthiness, compassion, creativity and nonjudgment indicate that leadership is more than the adoption of particular contextual styles. In the model presented it would seem that transformational leadership has a lot to offer (Jaworski, 1998). Notably, research in other fields tends to indicate that transformational leadership is more effective (Barling *et al.*, 1996; Gopolachary, 2003; Howell & Avolio, 1993). Whilst transformational leadership has barely been considered in the outdoor field, those that have written or researched in the area (Hayashi, 2005; Jordan, 1992) espouse the value of transformational leadership. Hayashi (2005) advocates transformational leadership for the training of future outdoor leaders.

As we have outlined outdoor leaders are often required to undertake a variety of seemingly disparate duties from expedition journeys to therapeutic programs, from group management to the demonstration and teaching of appropriate technical skills. Leaders are called upon to facilitate personal development and the successful completion of group goals, deliver recreational, educational and developmental programs whilst still ensuring the effective management of risks (physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual) (Priest & Gass, 1997).

Transactional leadership, therefore, may be a useful model to support task-focused leadership (even if that task is to develop social aspects such as communication). However, it could also be argued that transactional leadership may not be effective in developing longer-term outcomes or leading when outcomes are not pre-determined. Essentially transactional leadership in the outdoor environment may be ideal for ensuring certain attributes based on skills and behaviours undertaken in specific contexts or environments. However it may not be ideal for developmental purposes. A leader would also need to be aware of what could be construed as a reward and thereby shaping desired outcomes based on the leaders personal fulfillment.

For those considering the application of transformational leadership to certain aspects of outdoor education the implication is that transformational

leadership is more than just a set of skills. Research in other fields has shown that focusing solely on the skills aspect of transformational leadership is short lived and potentially open to abuse. Those being subjected to the leader's transformational skills may conform to charisma or being manipulated but the results may not be in their best interest. Research in other fields has shown that a leader who is believed to have extrinsic reasons for actions will undermine a follower's belief in their sincerity and therefore diminish leadership influence (Yorges, Weiss, & Strickland, 1999). Equally a leader who acts out genuineness in an attempt to motivate or persuade will usually be detected and lose respect (Sugarman, 1999). Thus it is incumbent on the aspiring leader to question their personal motives and aspirations. Still the importance of transformational leadership is that it provides a model for those wishing to undertake leadership in areas beyond those reliant on situationally determined skills and behaviours, where the development of self and others is a priority.

In conclusion

This paper has reviewed the transactional-transformational leadership model in terms of its appropriateness for understanding and exploring outdoor leadership. Insights drawn from the discussion point to the transformational leadership model as appropriate for effective outdoor leadership. This conclusion was drawn as a direct response to the focus of certain key elements within outdoor leadership as a whole. However, it is also important to note that transformational leaders may need to demonstrate transactional leadership behaviours when required. In certain cases it may be appropriate to provide recognition and reward (though perhaps not in the form of payment) for certain task based requirements (including social tasks such as communication).

Still, effective transformational leadership does require boundaries and guidance and as such it is important that organisations espousing transformational leadership ensure a culture that supports such leaders. Equally to be an effective transformational leader requires a deep understanding of oneself. Thus, transformational 'skills' should be supported by a leader's personal, authentic or spiritual growth (Luthans & Avolio 2003; Elliot, 2002). Furthermore, organisations purporting to support transformational leadership in their outdoor leaders have a responsibility to actively create a culture which fosters each leader's journey in becoming themselves.

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