

April 2024

Leadership Tools to Support the Transformational Leadership Style

Emily P. Haire

Fayetteville State University, emilyhaire.edresearch@gmail.com

Dr. Catherine E. Barrett

Fayetteville State University, cbarret1@uncfsu.edu

Dr. Ashley C. Johnson

University of Mount Olive, ajohnson@umo.edu

Dr. Bradley Mills

Fayetteville State University, bmills4@uncfsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/aljsr>



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Other Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), [Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#), and the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Haire, Emily P.; Barrett, Dr. Catherine E.; Johnson, Dr. Ashley C.; and Mills, Dr. Bradley (2024) "Leadership Tools to Support the Transformational Leadership Style," *Academic Leadership Journal in Student Research*: Vol. 7, Article 1.

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/aljsr/vol7/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Peer-Reviewed Journals at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Leadership Journal in Student Research by an authorized editor of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu.

Leadership Tools to Support the Transformational Leadership Style

Emily Phipps-Haire, M.A. Ed.
Fayetteville State University

Catherine Elise Barrett, Ph.D.
Fayetteville State University

Ashley Johnson, Ed.D.
University of Mount Olive

Bradley Mills, Ph.D.
Fayetteville State University

Abstract

The lives of many have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021). In higher education, students, professors, instructional aids, and other school staff were sent home from institutions to protect health and safety. There became an immediate need for clear, straightforward leadership to guide and lead higher education students and professionals through these unprecedented times, and amid the COVID-19 global pandemic, transformational

leaders have been effective in changing the world of higher education institutions. This paper will explore the findings of effective leadership styles for individuals after going through a global pandemic, still focusing on social justice reform.

Keywords: transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, participative leadership, ethical leadership

Leadership Tools to Support the Transformational Leadership Style

At the onset of the triage period of COVID-19, leaders were expected to adapt and make autocratic decisions to lead their organizations. These leadership behaviors were highly task-oriented, focusing on short-term operations, organization of activity, and setting specific goals and standards (Yukl, 2013). Institutions of higher education were quickly forced into a virtual learning format with little time to prepare. According to Gigliotti (2020), swift changes caused by the pandemic transformed the typical comfortable leadership style of higher education leaders into crisis leadership methods of survival.

As time passed and institutions approached the stabilization period of COVID-19, educational leaders were able to collaborate and create an organizational-level leadership mindset and plans to navigate the virtual 2020 academic school year. During this time, leadership behaviors were mostly relations-oriented, that is, providing support, building relationships, keeping members informed, and empowering faculty to progress (Yukl, 2013). After an additional summer of planning, organizing, and analyzing data, educational leaders were able to determine the implications of the pandemic and use them to their advantage. Actions taken by leadership were the result of a continuous learning cycle, so these behaviors were considered change-oriented. To maintain strong institutions of higher education that meet the needs of all students, leaders continually focus on developing new, innovative ideas to meet ever-changing needs; this can mean implementing additional innovative technology tools and envisioning continuous improvement, especially in terms of realizing social justice reforms. Such work is ongoing as the pandemic continues to transform in various phases (Yukl, 2013).

Consequently, as the pandemic shifts and changes, leaders in higher education continue employing systemic institutional changes to address needs, incorporate current innovations, and realize social justice reforms. Examining critical aspects of leadership roles through the lens of transformational leadership theory provides an analysis of the leadership styles that leaders use to navigate and guide institutions through the pandemic and beyond. Many higher education

leaders used the pandemic as an opportunity to take a stance on social justice matters as institutions morph to meet the changing needs of a diverse society (Ravitch, 2020).

Transformational Leadership

Understanding the various components of transformational leadership and how each component contributes to effective leadership and transformational change requires a more in-depth look at the various aspects of each component. More broadly, we must also look at how each promotes and contributes to transformational leadership overall. Charismatic, ethical, servant, and participative leadership are key styles included in the description of transformational leadership in higher education (Yukl, 2013). Charismatic leadership, ethical leadership, servant leadership, and participative leadership are the four main components associated with transformational leadership.

Charismatic leadership includes adaptive leadership, which requires leaders to make necessary changes in crisis situations and gives leaders the authority to spearhead social reform. Ethical leadership includes personal integrity, leading by example, and advocating for social reform. Servant leadership contains supportive leadership, concern for subordinate wellness, and promotion of equity. Finally, participative leadership, also known as democratic leadership, includes joint decision and delegation. Leaders empower subordinates, increase subordinate motivation and participation, and acknowledge the diversity of members within the organization. This transformational leadership schematic diagram represents important qualities of effective higher education leaders following the COVID-19 pandemic (Yukl, 2013).

Charismatic Leadership

Delving deeper into each aspect of transformational leadership, charismatic leaders have an appealing vision, emotionally appeal to subordinates' value subordinates, make sacrifices, use unconventional leadership behaviors, and display optimism and confidence in subordinates and the institution (Yukl, 2013). Leaders with charisma, when using their authority appropriately, hold the legitimate power to make abrupt changes within their organization. Charismatic leaders are transformational leaders when they use their influence to motivate, inspire, and empower their subordinates to work toward the goal and vision of the institution.

Post COVID-19, transformational leaders should challenge the idea that people "will tend to reflect on their own 'situationally' that they are challenged by to act upon it" (Freire, 2011, p. 109). It is in charge of transformational leaders to be charismatic and willing to make a stand to enact social justice reform within higher education institutions, and this is increasingly important

post COVID-19. We are able to “articulate an inspirational vision and can influence followers to internalize attitudes and beliefs that will subsequently serve as a source of intrinsic motivation to carry out the mission of the organization” (Yukl, 2013, p. 311). In saying so, transformational leaders can influence subordinates to contribute to the social justice reform necessary within the higher education institution.

Adaptive leaders are able to “quickly identify the nature and scope of the problem” (Yukl, 2013, p. 179). This leadership style often results in subordinates’ trust in their leader. They remain informed and rely on the leader to make responsible and trustworthy decisions. Due to the relationship created by the leader, subordinates are likely to be influenced by their leaders. We can see from “reflecting on the current health crisis and now the rising social tensions based on inequality that there is still more to be done” (Quan & Patel, 2020, p. A17). Charismatic and adaptive leaders have the power to make strides in this area.

As we are advancing post-pandemic, “the rise of the flexible ‘allostatic leader’ with the adaptive capacity to learn and evolve in crisis” will benefit our institutions because the transformational leader “is better able to address future crises” (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020, p. 39). As transformational leaders committed to the vision of the higher education institution, we can use the COVID-19 pandemic as a springboard for improvement in our institutions. It is important to note charismatic leaders “advocate a vision that is highly discrepant from the status quo, but not so radical that followers will view the leader as incompetent or insane” (Yukl, 2013, p. 310). Limitations are necessary within charismatic leadership to ensure the leader is taken seriously and not in jeopardy of losing their position of power.

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is described by the honest, ethical behaviors, motives, influences, and values a leader demonstrates within his/her company. Yukl (2013) provides values emphasized in theories of ethical leadership - integrity, altruism, humility, empathy and healing, personal growth, fairness and justice, and empowerment. Personal integrity is a central premise of ethical leadership. Yukl emphasizes this by writing, “Integrity is an attribute that helps to explain leadership effectiveness” (Yukl, 2013, p. 341). Ethical leaders influence subordinates' ethical behaviors, too. Transformational leaders are ethical and empower their subordinates by setting a positive example because “to say one thing and do another cannot inspire trust” (Weber, 2011, p. 91). We must be honest with our subordinates to create an environment of trust and influence.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many higher education institutions made the necessary changes to virtual instruction. Students, professors, and other higher education leaders began working remotely from home. The importance of honesty and integrity was heightened as we began to rely on the use of technology for instruction, practice, and assessment.

Transformational leaders used this opportunity to provide additional support for students online, reiterate the importance of digital literacy, and set high ethical expectations. These leaders set an example for their colleagues and students by modeling appropriate digital literacy, being available for support sessions, and following the same ethical standards for the institution.

As we move forward from the global pandemic, higher education institutions can take advantage of the opportunity for growth and reform. Transformational leaders “influence individuals... and mobilize power to change social systems and reform institutions” (Yukl, 2013, p. 348). As transformative leaders, we possess the power to use this opportunity as a springboard to ethically empower our subordinates to make positive social justice changes within our higher education institutions. Revolutionary, ethical leaders realize their convictions “by means of the totality of reflection and action” (Frerie, 2011, p. 67). As transformational leaders reflect on the pandemic, we are sprung to action to bring change that supports the needs of all members of higher education institutions.

As we serve our subordinates in this role, we must consider equity. As leaders managing an organization post COVID-19, we have the ethical obligation to “protect minority rights and individual freedoms, respect differences, create equity, and develop interlocking webs of caring and supportive relations in a democratic community” (Weber, 2010, p. 209).

Servant Leadership

Servant leaders are dedicated to “helping others to accomplish shared objectives by facilitating individual development, empowerment, and collective work consistent with the health and long-term welfare of followers” (Yukl, 2013, p. 349). Servant leaders are cognizant of their subordinates’ needs and work diligently, sometimes even assuming the responsibility, to support and help subordinates grow.

During the pandemic, higher education professionals and students experienced major changes inside and outside of the virtual classroom, and their present health was a concern more than ever before. Educators were reluctant, nervous, and unprepared to start a new school year virtually. As expectations heightened for a more “normal” year with innovative teaching techniques, increased technology, and student growth, higher education professors needed additional support and coaching to navigate the new year successfully. The servant and

supportive leadership approach became emphasized even more as the 2021 academic year approached. Transformational leaders recognize the “concern for needs and feelings of other people” and “building and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships” as a top priority (Yukl, 2013, p. 63). As a result, the leadership understood the need to “help build a strong community through commitment to the needs of the organization’s members” (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021). Now, it is more important than ever to be able to foster an empathetic and supportive working environment. Transformational servant leaders understand the importance of “showing concern for each person’s development, helping identify ways to improve performance and be patient and helpful when providing coaching” (Yukl, 2013, p. 65).

COVID-19 revealed a greater need for servant leadership in the workplace. According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (2020), higher education transformational leaders must use emotional intelligence, consistently monitor and adapt to the changing needs of their environment, and empower staff and faculty to prioritize positive mental health. The pandemic increased self-isolation and lack of active communication, which resulted in increased loneliness, depleted self-worth, and anxiety and depression (Kumar & Nayar, 2021).

The decreased perceptions of self-worth coupled with the emotional distress of providing for families, losing loved ones, and supporting others through the pandemic increases the stress levels and ability of participation for higher education employees (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2022). Transformational leaders should remain cognizant of the emotional, social, and mental needs of employees in this post-COVID-19 era. Because their attitudes are contagious, higher education leaders must set an example by demonstrating compassion and care, being aware of others’ backgrounds and needs, valuing communication, and reflecting on their own emotions (“The COVID-19 Leadership Guide: Strategies for Managing Through the Crisis”, 2020). Supporting employees in this way is likely to increase motivation, persistence, and success within the institution.

Participative Leadership

Yukl describes participative leadership as “efforts by a leader to enlist the aid of others in making important decisions” (Yukl, 2013, p. 105). Participative leadership, commonly referred to as democratic leadership, can vary in procedure and leader influence. A leader can utilize autocratic decisions, consultation, joint decisions, or delegation (Yukl, 2013). One type of decision-making may be more appropriate in one situation than another. For example, as higher education institution leaders accepted responsibility and began to lead through the triage period of COVID-19, the organization determined the need for explicit expectations and moved away

from participative leadership. While we want all members to feel apart, participative leadership is not effective in all situations, especially crises (Yukl, 2013, p. 37). However, after a year of virtual instruction and managing the pandemic, joint decision and delegation were more commonly used. Transformational leaders can assess the situation and determine the appropriate level of delegation that is effective for the leader, subordinates, and institution.

Participative leadership is likely to “include higher decision quality, higher decision acceptance by participants, more satisfaction with the decision process, and more development of the decision-making skills” (Yukl, 2013, p. 107-108). As leaders implement participative leadership, subordinates feel included and valued. They can feel they have ownership of the decision and its implementation. This “increases motivation to implement it successfully” (Yukl, 2013, p. 108).

Participative leadership is important, especially when the leader lacks adequate information to make the best decision. Skills required to make specific decisions may rely on involving subordinates who are more informed, so “transformational leaders will identify stakeholders who compliment their skills and abilities in the best interest of the institution” (Brower & Balch, 2005, p. 75). During the global pandemic, people had different experiences (Dumulescu & Mutiu, 2021). It is necessary to include multiple perspectives and backgrounds in the decision-making process to ensure equity across diverse groups. What “we come to see as real” will “shape our understanding of the world” (Weber, 2010, p. 92), so transformational leaders at higher education institutions must include multiple viewpoints to ensure that the diversity of the institution is considered when making the decisions. “If we try to make sense of our world without incorporating the input of the many different images produced by the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, we allow ourselves only a distorted glimpse of the larger picture” (Weber, 2010, p. 7).

Conclusion

As we consider the role of transformational leaders in higher education institutions, we are reminded that “the education system holds promise as a potential site for increasing race, class, gender, and sexual equality” (Weber, 2010, p. 209). Transformational leaders have authority with their charismatic traits to influence subordinates and elicit change for social injustice within the institution. Transformational leaders do not lose sight of their subordinates’ needs and conditions. This transformation relies on the “success of social movements in providing the impetus for equity...and changes in instructional structures...that emphasizes promoting understanding across diversity” (Weber, 2010, p. 209).

Within our higher education institutions, transformational leaders have the necessary leadership skills to empower their subordinates, lead social justice reform, and establish effective subordinate participation to be reflective of the diverse population. Each of the components of transformational leadership - charismatic, ethical, servant, and participative- equips transformational leaders with the skills to lead higher education institutions to greater heights amid the COVID-19 global pandemic.

References

- Blanchflower D.G., & Bryson A. (2022). COVID and mental health in America. *PLOS ONE* 17(7). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269855>
- Brower, R., & Balch, B. V. (2005). *Transformational leadership & decision making in schools*. Corwin Press.
- Dumulescu, D., & Muțiu, A. I. (2021). Academic Leadership in the Time of COVID-19- Experiences and Perspectives. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(648344). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648344>
- Fernandez, A. A., & Shaw, G. P. (2020). Academic leadership in a time of crisis: The coronavirus and COVID-19. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 14(1), 39–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21684>
- Ferry, K. (2020). The COVID-19 leadership guide: Strategies for managing through the crisis. https://www.kornferry.com/content/dam/kornferry/special-project-images/coronavirus/docs/KF_Leadership_Playbook_Global_MH_V13.pdf
- Freire, P. (2011). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30th Anniversary Edition). Continuum.
- Gigliotti, R. (2020). *Crisis leadership in higher education: Theory and practice*. Rutgers University Press.
- International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2020). *10 leadership strategies for navigating COVID-19*. https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/10%20Leadership%20Strategies%20for%20Navigating%20COVID-19_0.pdf
- Kumar, A., & Nayar, K. R. (2021) COVID-19 and its mental health consequences. *Journal of Mental Health*, 30(1), 1-2. doi:[10.1080/09638237.2020.1757052](https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2020.1757052)

Ravitch, S. M. (2020). Flux leadership: Leading for justice and peace in and beyond COVID-19. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 18(1).

Weber, L. (2010). *Understanding race, class, gender, and sexuality: A conceptual framework* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Yukl, G. A. (2013). *Leadership in organizations* (8th ed.). Prentice Hall.