



Kabul, Afghanistan: a Royal Canadian Regiment captain giving a threat briefing to Canadian soldiers on their arrival for service with the International Security Assistance Force, August 2003.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING OLD

by Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Bradley and Dr. Danielle Charbonneau

Leadership is a topic of enormous interest to military people, and all have direct experience with it, either in the role of leader directing others or as a follower, benefiting (or perhaps not) from the lead of others. Aspects of leadership are included in most of the courses military personnel attend beyond basic training, and many military professionals read extensively on the topic. Anyone who has been reading either popular works on leadership or academic literature on the subject will likely have noticed the emergence of a new concept in this field – transformational leadership. The term transformational leadership has also, to some extent, found its way into the leadership milieu of the Canadian Forces (CF). For example, the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) and the Deputy Minister (DM) of the Department of National Defence (DND) invoked “transformational leadership and coherent management” in *Vision 2020*. This was a policy paper outlining the strategic direction for the CF and DND.¹ In his 1998 essay on leadership practices in the CF, Lieutenant-Colonel Jamie Hammond used the term, suggesting that leadership in the CF is typically transactional, whereas transformational leadership is what is required.² Lieutenant-Colonel Bernd Horn also referred to transformational leadership in his paper on executive leadership in the CF.³

While the term transformational leadership has appeared in a few CF documents and is known to some in the CF, the authors suspect that it is not entirely understood by many.

From this starting point, the purpose of this article is to explain transformational leadership to the Canadian military community. It will begin by showing that transformational leadership is but one theoretical perspective among many in the leadership field. There will then be a brief summary of transformational leadership theory and some of the instruments that have been developed to assess this leadership perspective. This will be followed by a summary of transformational leadership research conducted in military settings. Next, attention is focused on CF leadership doctrine and transformational leadership development in the CF. Finally, the authors offer some suggestions on the place for transformational leadership in the CF.

LEADERSHIP THEORY

As compelling as the term transformational leadership may sound, it must be stressed that it represents but one model of leadership among many. The literature on leadership is vast; Joseph Rost found 221 definitions of leadership in his review of the area.⁴ A scan through any university leadership textbook will reveal a variety of theories. Yukl classified these theories into five broad

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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

In 1978, J.M. Burns first coined the term 'transforming leadership' to describe a relationship in which "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality."⁹ Building on this initial conceptualization, Bass extended the concept of transformational leadership to describe those who motivate followers to do more than they originally intended to do by presenting followers with a compelling vision and encouraging them to transcend their own interests for those of the group or unit.¹⁰ In fact, a defining characteristic of transformational leadership is the enormous personal impact it has on followers' values, aspirations, ways of thinking about work and interpreting events.¹¹ Transformational leaders transform followers by transforming followers' values and beliefs.

Members of HMCS *Regina*'s naval boarding party receive orders under 'red light conditions' prior to a night boarding of a suspect vessel in the Gulf of Oman, April 2004.

Bass and Avolio later developed the 'full range of leadership' model which comprises three styles: (a) transformational;

(b) transactional; and (c) laissez-faire.¹² In this model, transactional leadership, again building on the work of Burns, is characterized by an exchange relationship in which leaders motivate followers by providing them with rewards (or punishments) in return for follower effort (or lack of effort). Laissez-faire leadership is a "hands off" style in which the person in charge "abdicates responsibility, delays decisions, gives no feedback, and makes little effort to help followers satisfy their needs."¹³ Laissez-faire leaders permit followers to direct themselves.

Within the transformational leadership construct, Bass identified four factors, or types of leadership behaviours that are classified as transformational. First, there is idealized influence, which is sometimes referred to as charisma. This factor defines those behaviours in which the leader acts as a role model, cultivating faith, trust, and respect in the followers. Examples include doing what is right rather than what is most convenient or cost-effective, and making decisions more transparent by explaining the rationale behind the decisions.¹⁴ According to Judge and Bono, idealized influence "...is thought to be the most prototypical of leaders and is often the most important dimension."¹⁵

Second, inspirational motivation refers to those acts in which leaders present a vision (i.e., an ideal followers can strive for), set high standards and convince individuals that they can achieve beyond expectations. By raising subordinates' self-confidence and by being enthusiastic and optimistic about their followers' work, transformational leaders exhort followers to transcend themselves.¹⁶

approaches.⁵ First, the *trait approach* studies such attributes as personality and values that distinguish leaders from followers. Second, *behavioural approaches* examine the activities and responsibilities of leaders for the purpose of identifying effective leadership behaviours. Third, the *power-influence approach* is concerned with the types of power leaders possess and how they exercise this power to influence followers (e.g., in a participative manner or in a more directive manner). Fourth, the *situational approach* investigates the influence of contextual factors like the nature of the task, followers' characteristics, and type of organization on leadership. Finally, the fifth approach is an *integrative perspective* that attempts to combine elements of the above-mentioned models. In addition to these five approaches to the study of leadership, recent academic books cover the topic of moral leadership, which includes theories such as servant leadership.

Given such a large field of theoretical perspectives, one may wonder why the transformational model stands out amongst so many other theories. Certainly, the name is appealing. Who would not want to be considered a transformational leader? In fact, the popularity and attractiveness of transformational leadership are based on more substantive reasons. These encompass research evidence that it is associated with superior performance in various organizations, including the military.⁶ Transformational leadership has also been found to contribute to the self-confidence of followers, organizational commitment, group cohesion, trust in the leader and work satisfaction.⁷ Some experts also believe there is a moral dimension to transformational leadership.⁸

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Third, the transformational factor of intellectual stimulation includes those actions in which leaders promote the development of future leaders, challenging subordinates to think for themselves, and to evaluate old problems in innovative ways. Telling

a subordinate to think further about a problem (e.g., “What would likely happen if we did this?”) or asking a subordinate to brainstorm with the leader (e.g., “What would you advise if you were me?”) are two ways that leaders can exercise intellectual stimulation.¹⁷

Fourth, individualized consideration focuses on the relationship between the leader and each follower. Leaders who display strength in this transformational dimension treat each subordinate individually, coaching and advising them, and recognizing subordinates’ achievements. Other demands often prevent leaders from spending as much time as they would like with their subordinates, but leaders who are strong on individualized consideration find the opportunity to work one-on-one with their subordinates.

Transactional leadership is essentially an exchange relationship between superior and subordinate. According to Bass, transactional leadership comprises two types of behaviour, contingent reward and management by exception. Contingent reward refers to those actions in which the leader assists the follower in return for follower effort. The leader specifies who is responsible for achieving performance targets and defines the rewards linked to performance. Leaders who hold out the carrots of good performance assessments and plum postings to motivate followers are engaging in contingent reward. Management by exception refers to the leader’s behaviour towards errors and mistakes. There are two types of management by exception (MBE) in the Bass model, active and passive. A leader who is actively engaged in MBE pays very close attention to mistakes, keeps track of them and points them out to the followers. Thus the officer or non-commissioned member applying the Royal Canadian Regiment slogan of “never pass a fault” is applying active MBE.¹⁸ A leader who is applying MBE passively does not intervene until problems are serious.

THE MORAL DIMENSION

While some maintain that there is a moral aspect of transformational leadership, others disagree. The argument supporting a moral dimension follows two lines, the second of which is more compelling.

First, Bass suggests that transformational leadership has a moral quality about it because it “bonds leader and followers in a moral commitment to a cause that goes beyond their own self-interests.”¹⁹ The problem with this argument is that all causes that might bind leaders and followers are not necessarily moral. History abounds with inspirational

leaders like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot and others who bonded with followers for a “higher cause” which, in fact, was immoral and caused great pain and suffering to many. Transformational leadership is moral only to the extent that the cause (i.e., vision in transformational leadership terms) is moral. In reality then, transformational leadership has the potential to be either moral or immoral.

The second argument in support of a moral dimension to transformational leadership comes from two researchers at McGill University. They argue that transformational leadership is more ethical than transactional leadership because transactional leaders use control strategies such as rewards or punishments to ensure follower compliance whereas transformational leaders empower followers.²⁰ Essentially, they contend that transformational leadership is more ethical than transactional leadership because followership is freely given in transformational leadership and extorted in transactional leadership. Because transformational leadership is not coercive in any way, it respects the dignity of followers, avoids inflicting any pain or suffering on them, and therefore can be seen as more ethical.

SOMETHING NEW – SOMETHING OLD

While the term transformational leadership and its associated theory and measurement devices are new, there are many aspects that are well known to military personnel, albeit in other terms. Two books — Jack Granatstein’s *The Generals*, and *Warrior Chiefs*, a volume of essays edited by Bernd Horn and Stephen Harris — are among many works which provide ample examples of transformational leaders in the Canadian military.

For an illustration of idealized influence and inspirational motivation, one need look no further than Granatstein’s description of Major General Bertram Hoffmeister, “a man of powerful personality and striking magnetism... a classic leader, someone the men wanted to follow.”²¹ During the Second World War, Hoffmeister commanded the battalion, brigade, and division levels. His leadership was characterized by courage and perseverance in the face of the enemy (idealized influence) and dedication to fostering the morale and fighting spirit of his troops (inspirational motivation).

While there are fewer examples of individualized consideration in books and articles on Canadian military leaders, most of us have experienced this aspect of transformational leadership, perhaps classifying it as mentoring at the time. Many readers will have personal examples in which one of our superiors has taken time out of his or her busy schedule

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to spend some one-on-one, mentoring time with them. This might have been a formal counseling session, an informal fireside chat, or some other occasion where a leader has illustrated how to do something we didn't understand before. Incidents such as this when the leader singles out a subordinate for special development, counselling, training or mentoring are examples of individualized consideration.

Lieutenant General E.L.M. Burns, a Canadian Corps commander in the Second World War, appears to have embodied the characteristics of Bass's transformational factor, intellectual stimulation. Horn and Wyczynski describe Burns as an intellectual officer who spent most of his military career studying and debating the major military issues of his day.²² They further portray Burns as an innovator, ready to experiment with new ideas. Burns exemplified intellectual stimulation by writing extensively in the inter-war years on the need for speed on the battlefield and the potential of motorized and mechanized forces to this end. When in command, he also displayed intellectual stimulation in his approach to subordinate development by ensuring the most up-to-date tactical procedures and experimental techniques were included in training activities.

Most military personnel would certainly endorse the four transformational factors highlighted above. Indeed, many Canadian military men and women have witnessed leaders exhibiting these traits in operations and training exercises. Therefore, many of the components of transformational leadership are not new. What is new, however, is the terminology and the conceptual framework binding these concepts. The names of the transformational and transactional factors are clearly new. The measures and training programmes developed by Bass and others are also new. In fact, the conceptual framework Bass and associates have given us on transformational leadership and its accompanying measurement devices (described below) provides us with useful tools for developing leaders. In the past, many of us thought that leaders needed to possess certain traits, but recent research by Bass and others has shown that transformational leadership behaviours can be taught.²³

Some authors have described transactional leadership as management and transformational leadership as a purer form of leadership.²⁴ Because there is a general tendency to undervalue management in comparison to leadership, transformational leadership is naturally valued over transactional leadership. Nevertheless, transactional leadership has its uses. There are many occasions in the military in which uninspiring tasks need to be completed and followers occasionally will not respond to the transforming exhortations of their superiors. In these instances, the controlling and coercive elements of transactional leadership may be required to ensure the successful completion of the mission.

The work of Bass and his colleagues in the area of transformational leadership has provided two major benefits to military command. First, they have developed a model of behaviours that can be used to teach aspiring leaders how to influence the conduct of others. Second, they have created useful measurement tools (as shown below) to assist instructors, mentors and others who are engaged in developing the leadership ability of others.

MEASURING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

An important aspect of Bass's scholarship on transformational leadership is the instrumentation he and his colleagues developed. The first of these, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), is used to measure the leadership style of an individual.²⁵ There are several versions of the MLQ, some longer than others, all of which measure the extent that 'leaders' engage in transformational and transactional behaviours. Leaders can rate themselves (i.e., self-report) on the MLQ, or they can be rated by superiors, peers, or subordinates to gather a 360-degree assessment (i.e., students are rated by subordinates, peers and superiors, hence 360-degree) of the target leader. Individual items of the MLQ measure the transformational, transactional and laissez-faire factors described earlier. MLQ results come in the form of scores for each of these factors. The rated leaders can then see where they score highest and where they need to devote more effort. With this type of information, instructors and coaches can help leaders-in-training prepare a personal development plan. More experienced leaders can likely develop their own development goals from their MLQ scores.

Bass and Avolio developed another measurement called the Organizational Description Questionnaire (ODQ) which focuses on the leadership environment within an organization.²⁶ Half the ODQ items describe transactional climates, and half pertain to transformational climates. The ODQ produces a score for each, thereby showing the extent to which the organization's leadership climate can be characterized as transformational or transactional.

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Although the MLQ gives us the technology to measure the extent to which a leader is transformational, Bass and his colleagues are unclear as to when we can categorize someone as a transformational leader. There are four clusters (factors) of transformational leadership behaviours, so it is likely that leaders will exhibit some, but not all of the factors. What if a leader exhibits only two of the factors? What if the leader exhibits only some of the transformational behaviours and then only some of the time? Interesting questions, but it is probably impossible to answer them definitively. It is likely that few leaders will exhibit all transformational factors, to all of their followers, all of the time. For example, General E.L.M. Burns,



Entebbe, Uganda: the co-pilot of a CC-130 Hercules preparing his aircraft for a flight into Bunia, Democratic Republic of Congo at the beginning of Operation "Caravan", June 2003.

whom we described earlier as an exemplar of intellectual stimulation because of his innovative thinking and attention to subordinate development, eventually lost the confidence of his subordinate commanders in the Italian Campaign and was relieved of command.

Most leaders will likely exhibit a mix of transformational and transactional leadership depending on the demands of the situation, their leadership abilities, and the quality of relations between them and their followers. In fact, research into the relations among leaders and followers (called leader-member exchange or LMX theory) shows that those in positions of command can exert transformational leadership over some followers while simultaneously providing transactional leadership to others. While it is possible that some leaders will be more inclined to transformational leadership and some more comfortable with transactional leadership, Bass and his colleagues contend that some can provide both styles of leadership. They point to research showing that these leaders are more efficient than those who exhibit primarily transactional behaviours.²⁷

RESEARCH ON TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE MILITARY

There are many academic studies of transformational leadership, some of which have been conducted in military settings. Unfortunately, the volume of this work is too extensive to summarize here, but four studies are described below to provide a flavour of this type of research.

One of the early studies of transformational leadership in the military involved 186 officers of the United States Navy who were each rated on the MLQ by some of their senior subordinates.²⁸ Those who perceived their superior

officers to be transformational also reported giving more effort than others who had less transformational seniors. Similarly, subordinates were more satisfied with leaders who were more transformational and gave these transformational officers higher ratings of leader effectiveness.

In a study of leadership in the US Army, researchers collected followers' ratings of transformational leadership on battalion commanders, company commanders and platoon leaders in 41 battalions at six posts.²⁹ Among other things, they found that those surveyed gave higher transformational leadership ratings for their higher level commanders (i.e., company and battalion commanders) and higher passive leadership ratings for platoon leaders. This finding suggests that transformational leadership may exist more often at higher levels in organizations. Other possible explanations

are that: (a) followers' perceptions of leaders may become more idealized as the distance between the two increases, or (b) followers are less likely to have transactional relations with their higher level leaders.

Another US study of leadership asked soldiers in 72 platoons at four Army posts to rate their platoon leader and platoon sergeant on the transformational and transactional dimensions described earlier.³⁰ The soldiers were also asked to rate: (a) their confidence in the platoon's ability to perform in an upcoming exercise, and (b) their impressions of platoon cohesion. Several weeks later, 126 instructors assessed the performance of these platoons in an exercise comprising 11 separate missions. Researchers found that both transformational and transactional leadership of the platoon leaders coincided with platoon performance on the exercise. They also observed that both transformational and transactional leadership in the platoon leader and platoon sergeant contributed to the soldiers' confidence in their platoon and the soldiers' ratings of cohesion. On the other hand, passive avoidant leadership (i.e., passive MBE) on the part of the platoon leader was found to have a deleterious effect on platoon performance. Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is that *both* transformational and transactional leadership of the platoon leadership team contributed to platoon performance. Earlier leadership studies in civilian settings found that transformational leadership was generally considered more effective than transactional leadership. More recently, Bass has suggested that transactional leadership will likely emerge and be more effective in stable and predictable environments, in mechanistic organizations (i.e., emphasizing control mechanisms and hierarchies), and in situations where performance goals can be clearly specified.³¹ If Bass's hypotheses are valid, we can expect transactional leadership to be an important part of military command.



Lieutenant-Colonel Don Denne (left), Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, congratulates Lieutenant-Colonel Stéphane Roy, Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion, Royal 22^e Régiment on assuming the Canadian commitment in Kabul, 14 February 2004. Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier, Commander of the International Security Assistance Force looks on.

Whereas the three studies described above were based on survey methods, another study employed an experimental design.³² Infantry cadets in the Israeli Defense Forces were assigned to one of two groups during their basic training. One section completed a three-day workshop in transformational leadership, while the other completed an “eclectic leadership workshop”. Later, when 54 of these cadets were assigned platoon leader positions in a basic training unit, researchers looked at the extent to which platoon leaders influenced NCO development and soldier performance. They found that the former cadets who had been taught transformational leadership had a stronger influence on both outcomes.

This account is but a very small portion of the transformational leadership research conducted in military settings. In addition to showing that leadership research is being conducted in the military, albeit primarily in the USA and in Israel, this small sampling shows three results. (a) Transformational leadership can have a positive

impact on subordinate development and performance (e.g., the Israeli study), (b) Transformational and transactional leadership each contribute to performance outcomes, and (c) Transformational leadership can be exercised at many different rank levels.

“Leaders who hold out carrots of good performance assessments and plum postings to motivate followers are engaging in contingent reward.”

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CF

As for the present status of transformational leadership in the CF, important questions include: (1) To what extent is transformational leadership emphasized in CF doctrine? (2) Have transformational leadership measures been employed in the CF? (3) Is transformational leadership taught in the CF?

Existing CF doctrine does not include any reference to transformational leadership. This is not surprising, seeing that it was published in 1973, before the emergence of the transformational leadership theory. CF leadership doctrine has been under review in recent years and a new manual is expected next year. Framers of the new CF material have advised the authors that transformational leadership concepts will be included, along with important elements of other leadership perspectives.³³ From the doctrinal perspective then, there is mention of transformational leadership in the CDS/DM paper *Vision 2020*, and the promise of some role for transformational leadership in CF doctrine to be published in the near future.

As previously mentioned, the two measures of transformational leadership, the MLQ and the ODQ, are useful in developing transformational leaders, but both have been used sparingly in the CF. Of the two, the MLQ has been used more often.

For several years, the MLQ has been included as part of the student assessment component of the Advanced Military Studies Courses at the Canadian Forces College (this is a Developmental Period 4 course in which students are Lieutenant-Colonels and Colonels). Students completed the MLQ on themselves and sent copies to former subordinates and supervisors to obtain a 360-degree assessment of their transformational leadership. In recent years, the MLQ has also been included in the Unit Morale Profile, a CF survey developed to provide deployed unit commanders with measures of unit morale, cohesion, satisfaction and similar concepts.

The ODQ has rarely been employed in the CF. In fact, the only example the authors know of is their own study of the organizational culture and climate of the CF Land Force. This is a survey-based study, and the ODQ has been included to determine the extent to which the leadership climate in land units is transformational or transactional.³⁴

Transformational leadership is ‘taught’ in some parts of the CF, but, by and large, it is not included in many CF leadership courses. It is covered briefly in the curriculum at the Royal Military College (RMC) of Canada, during basic officer training at St. Jean, and in a few other CF leadership courses.

At RMC, officer cadets take a class or two in transformational leadership in the third year of their academic programme, and cadets also attend RMC training sessions where transformational leadership is taught along with other leadership topics. Exposure to transformational leadership at RMC is generally limited to explanations of the theory and group discussions on the topic. Senior

“Those in positions of command can exert transformational leadership over some followers while simultaneously providing transactional leadership to others.”

cadets get a chance to practise the transformational leadership style in their college leadership roles, but they are not evaluated on the components of the transformational leadership model.

At the CF Recruit and Leadership School, where officer candidates undergo their initial phases of officer training, transformational leadership is taught and elements of the model assessed in basic officer training courses. However, the transformational leadership model is not taught formally in the basic officer occupation courses delivered at the Land Force combat arms schools in Gagetown. Similarly, it is not on the official course of study involving basic naval officer training at Venture, although periods of instruction in the model have been included in recent Operations Room Officer Courses. Moving to mid- and senior-level courses, transformational leadership is introduced in some of the courses taught at Canadian Forces College in Toronto and the MLQ is employed in a 360-degree mode as part of the leadership development portion of the Advanced Military Studies Course.

It would appear then that transformational leadership is occasionally taught in the CF, but not in a consistent, organized fashion. Similarly, the transformational measurement tools (MLQ and ODQ) have also been used periodically, but not extensively.

CONCLUSION

There are many leadership models to choose from and students of leadership should consider many of them when planning their own leadership development. Transformational leadership is not the only perspective that CF leaders should examine, but it is one of the more important ones. The transformational leadership model promoted by Bass and associates is more expansive than most models, and therefore deserves serious consideration. By providing concepts and example behaviours for leadership (i.e., transformational leadership) and management (i.e., transactional leadership), this model gives leaders at all levels plenty of advice on how to project their influence and achieve objectives, arguably the central goals of military leadership. Furthermore, in the important areas of leadership research and development, the transformational leadership measures (MLQ and ODQ) developed by Bass and others are very useful for studying leadership and for developing the potential of individuals.



A Warrant Officer of the 3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment instructing members of the Afghan National Army, November 2003.

DND photo KA2003-A361D by Master Corporal Brian Walsh

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