

## Transformational Leadership 8

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### Abstract

Today's world is shaped by change and transformation. Today's organizations are forced to adapt with structural changes in the face of environmental uncertainty and unpredictable and sudden changes, in other words, transformation. Leadership, as a prominent concept in managing these transformation processes, draws attention in the management literature in directing both the success of organizations and social and individual transformation processes. Organizations that have to change and restructure in order to survive in an ever-changing dynamic environment need leaders who can pioneer radical changes. Leadership is an ancient phenomenon that is intertwined with human history and is constantly transforming in line with the needs of the time. Visionary and innovative leaders who manage the transformation process in organizations, put the interests of the organization above their personal interests, create organizations with employees who constantly renew themselves, and prepare the necessary conditions for transformation are called transformational leaders.

### 1. Introduction

Until the late 1970s, leadership theorizing and research focused on supervision as a way of achieving incremental improvements in the performance of stable or smoothly growing business units (Behling & McFillen, 1996). In the early approaches, leadership was mostly explained in terms of structural elements such as authority, delegation of tasks, and supervision of performance; with the modern era, this perspective was replaced by a people-oriented and visionary perspective. The transformational leadership approach that emerged in the late 1970s is one of the indicators of this transformation in perspective. The transformational leadership approach, which considers leadership characteristics, leadership behaviors

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and the results of leadership as a whole (Karip, 1998), draws attention to the fact that the leader is not only an actor in managing tasks, but also a change agent who positively shapes the beliefs, values and behaviors of followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2022). In sum, this leadership approach emphasizes identification with human values (Çelik, 1998).

In his book “Leadership”, Burns (1978) analyzed leadership under two main headings: transactional and transformational. According to the author, a transactional leader manages a reward-punishment-based change process, while a transformational leader motivates his followers and unites them around a higher purpose. Bernard Bass (1985) took this approach at the organizational level and defined four basic components of transformational leadership: idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation (mental stimulation), and individual attention. Thus, leadership has evolved from a managerial skill to a value system that enables transformation in organizational culture. The essence of transformational leadership is that these leaders “take ordinary people to extraordinary levels”, “enable their followers to do more than expected,” and “set the stage for them to perform beyond expectations” (Bass, 1985; Boal & Bryson, 1988; Yukl, 1989; Podsakoff et al., 1990).

Today, the transformational leadership model has become one of the most influential theoretical frameworks in the field of organizational behavior. The main reason for this is that the change, innovation, and sustainability requirements of contemporary organizations are compatible with the basic dynamics of this model. In particular, digitalization, ethical management, global crises, and the transformation in social expectations require leaders to assume not only managerial but also visionary and inspirational roles. (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Antonakis & House, 2014; Northouse, 2022).

In this framework, it is possible to say that transformational leadership is not only a management style that manages change in organizations, but also a form of interaction that focuses on the development of employees and aims both collective learning and the strengthening of common values; and that a transformational leader is a person who recognizes the desires or needs of potential followers, meets these desires or needs, understands how to motivate followers and enables followers to move towards higher goals (Ayrancı & Öge, 2010). In this section, firstly, the concept of transformational leadership will be clarified, and its historical development and theoretical foundations will be mentioned. Then, the dimensions of transformational leadership and its reflections at the organizational level will be discussed.

## 2. Transformational Leadership Concept

As an inclusive approach, transformational leadership can be used to describe a wide range of leadership, from very specific attempts to influence followers individually to more comprehensive attempts to influence entire organizations, even entire cultures and societal change (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2022). Although the literal meaning of transformation is “a complete change in composition and structure”, the concept of ‘transformation’ here emphasizes “change for the better”, not just a change in goals, structure, functioning, and leader-follower relationships (Leithwood et al., 1996). Sharma (2007) argues that leadership applies to all aspects of life and is not a philosophy restricted to a particular field, group, regime, or mission. The author underlines that while managers in the organization, the first thing that comes to mind can be great leaders, teachers (Bolkan, Goodboy & Griffin, 2011), doctors, dedicated scientists, or caring mothers can also be great leaders, just as coaches lead sports teams (Keçeci & Çelik, 2021; Altıntaş, 2024; Ozdemirkol, 2025) and politicians lead society.

In the organizational context, transformational leadership refers to an approach that integrates the managerial understanding and action styles required in the restructuring and change processes of organizations. Accordingly, transformational leaders transform environmental changes into opportunities by preparing the necessary organizational conditions as well as the new vision they create in order for organizations to achieve their future goals (Özalp & Öcal, 2000; Önen & Elkırmiş, 2022).

The concept was first used in the literature in 1978 by James MacGregor Burns, a political scientist, to explain political leadership in his book titled “Leadership”. Burns categorized political leadership under two headings: transactional and transformational, and stated that the transactional leadership process begins when an individual engages with others to mutually change some elements. While work-oriented leadership focuses on the idea that followers can achieve their individual goals with the realization of the leader’s goals and expectations (high performance, votes), transformational leadership links the realization of the organization’s goals and vision to the change in the needs and values of the followers (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Özalp and Öcal (2000) define transformational leadership as the process of activating the structure by initiating a transformation process required by the changing environmental conditions in the organization; influencing the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the followers with characteristics that arouse respect, trust, and courage; and achieving the mission and goals of the organization.

Transformational leadership stems not from a commodity exchange between leaders and followers but from the personal values and beliefs of leaders, and refers to the leader's ability to deeply influence the attitudes, values, and behaviors of followers and mobilize them towards a higher purpose and common vision (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). This approach is based on the positioning of the leader as an actor who not only takes part in the management of tasks but also unlocks the potential of employees, supports their development, and leads the organization to a holistic change process (Bass, 1985; Avolio & Bass, 1991). The transformational leader strengthens the intrinsic motivation of the followers, enables them to identify with organizational goals beyond individual interests, and thus creates lasting change at both individual and organizational levels (Northouse, 2022).

Transformational leadership, which can be defined as the ability to create fundamental change (Erkuş & Günlü, 2008), differs from traditional approaches especially in terms of ethical values, visioning, and encouraging innovation. Unlike transactional leadership, transformational leadership focuses on internal fulfillment, inspiration, and meaning-making processes rather than external and commodity-based rewards. The interaction between leader and follower represents a trust-based and mutual development-oriented relationship that goes beyond short-term performance expectations or increases, and takes leadership to the next level. Transformational leadership involves creating a common vision and goal for an organization or unit, acting in line with this vision and goal, generating innovative solutions to potential problems, and developing the leadership capacities of followers by both challenging and supporting them through coaching and mentoring (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2022).

### **3. Development of Transformational Leadership**

The concept of transformational leadership was first mentioned by sociologist James W. Downton (1973) in his book "Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process" and laid the foundations of the transformational leadership concept by addressing the leader-follower interaction on the axis of charisma and commitment (Erden, 2023). However, the roots of the concept of transformational leadership were shaped by the work of James MacGregor Burns in the 1970s. Based on examples of political leadership, Burns (1978) examined leadership behaviors under the headings of transactional leadership and transformational leadership. According to the author, transactional leaders focus on maintaining the existing order and interact through reward and punishment mechanisms. In other words, it is a type of leadership in which the leader

rewards or disciplines followers in line with the adequacy of their behavior or performance (Avolio, 2011). Transformational leaders, on the other hand, go beyond these limits and unite their followers around a broader purpose by raising their morale and motivation levels. Transactional leaders are more compliant with rules and their implementation, or are guided by external conditions. Transformational leaders are more introverted, while transactional leaders are more extroverted (Avolio & Bass, 1995). Burns' approach is closely related to the political and social transformation environment of the period. Increasing civil rights movements, democratization processes, and changes in organizational structures in the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for a reinterpretation of the concept of leadership. This process showed that leadership is not only about the exercise of authority but also about social influence and ethical responsibility (Goethals, Sorenson & Burns: 2004).

In sum, early work on transformational leadership was informed by the findings of military and political leadership research. However, over time, this approach has expanded its scope to include leadership styles in the business world and leadership practices in public institutions, education, health, and non-profit organizations. Although most of the research was initially conducted in the United States, subsequent studies have been conducted in different countries and cultural contexts. This diversity reveals that transformational leadership is a universally applicable model. As a matter of fact, the existing literature shows that this leadership style produces effective results in different geographies and sectors (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Crede et al., 2019; Northouse, 2022).

Bernard Bass (1985) developed an approach in the organizational context by making Burns' theory a more comprehensive model. The author defines the transformational leader as an actor who enables followers to exceed their expectations, encourages innovative thinking, and transforms organizational vision into concrete actions. This approach encompasses both cognitive and affective dimensions of leadership and argues that the interaction between leader and follower mutually creates transformation (Bass, 1990).

In the 1990s, Avolio and Bass (1991) introduced the Full-range Leadership Model to examine the abilities and behaviors of leaders in different working conditions. The full-range leadership model, which also includes transformational leadership, evaluates leadership in a holistic approach with both transformational leadership behaviors and transactional and laissez-faire leadership behaviors. The model is based on Burns' (1978) trait-based leadership approach, which Bass (1985) also utilizes extensively. In the model, all leadership approaches are examined with a focus on

motivation, encouragement, and influence (transformational leadership); management by exception; contingent reward (transactional leadership); and actual denial of leadership responsibility (passive-avoidant or laissez-faire leadership behaviors) (Serrat, 2021).

#### 4. Components of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders strive to create and communicate a vision of where their group, unit, or organization should go, rather than focusing only on the status quo and ways of managing day-to-day operations. They focus on seeing problems as opportunities and take an active interest in the individual development of followers. Transformational leaders are keenly interested in expanding the boundaries of their followers' and their own ideas, helping them to move from concerns for existence and security to higher-order concerns for achievement and growth. They strive to increase their followers' awareness of the needs of the organization and their own individual needs. Awareness of needs will ultimately form the basis for raising these needs. Accordingly, the salient characteristics exhibited by transformational leaders are categorized under the components or dimensions of transformational leadership (Avolio, Waldman & Yammarino, 1991).

While the first studies on the Transformational Leadership model were shaped by the dimensions of idealized influence/charisma, intellectual stimulation/mental stimulation, and individualized attention, later studies added the leader's inspirational behavior to the model. In the current literature, the transformational leadership model is explained through four basic dimensions: idealized influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation (mental stimulation), and individualized attention (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994):

***Idealized Influence/Charisma:*** The idealized influence dimension, which is based on the creation of values that inspire followers, give meaning, and instill a sense of purpose (Sarros & Santora, 2001), refers to the charismatic role modeling behaviors of transformational leaders. Since transformational leaders act as role models for their followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), followers admire and respect their leaders and trust them because of their exemplary behavior (Behling & McFillen, 1996). Followers identify with their leaders, want to be like them, and believe that their leaders have extraordinary abilities, patience, and perseverance. Therefore, idealized influence has two aspects: the leader's behaviors and the elements attributed to the leader by followers or other employees. In this context, leaders with high levels of idealized influence are trusted to do the right thing and to

have high standards of ethical and moral behavior. In this respect, Özalp & Öcal (2000) argue that the idealized influence/charisma dimension is one of the factors that make transformational leaders effective, and that mobilizing the energies of followers in the direction of radical changes depends to a significant extent on the charismatic characteristics of the leader that are valued by the followers.

***Inspirational Motivation:*** Increasing the level of awareness of the followers about the mission and vision of the organization and encouraging them to understand and adopt this vision is a fundamental element of inspirational motivation (Sarros & Santora, 2001). Transformational leaders exhibit behaviors that motivate and inspire their followers and create a team spirit. This situation brings enthusiasm and optimism (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991). Leaders, together with their followers, present an impressive, attractive, or thought-provoking vision of the future, show commitment to this vision, and serve as role models for their followers. Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge their followers with high standards, convey optimism about achieving future goals, and give meaning to current tasks (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

***Intellectual Stimulation:*** It refers to the leader challenging assumptions, taking risks, and asking for ideas from followers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Transformational leaders redefine problems by questioning possibilities and assumptions. Existing situations are re-evaluated from a new perspective, and followers are encouraged to be innovative and creative. In this process, an environment of psychological trust is created as followers are not criticized for their different ideas (Ogola & Sikalich, 2017).

***Individualized Consideration:*** Individualized consideration, which is related to coaching and mentoring behaviors of transformational leaders, is related to leadership behaviors that involve treating followers as important contributors to the organization (Sarros & Santora, 2001). Transformational leaders act as coaches or mentors, paying special attention to the success and development needs of each follower and allocating time to their followers. This dimension enables followers to reach higher and higher levels of potential. Leaders acknowledge individual differences in needs, wants, and expectations and personalize interactions with followers. For example, some followers are given more incentives, some are given more autonomy, and some are given more assignments. Accordingly, “management by walking around” is practiced in workplaces, and leaders communicate with followers as effective listeners.



## 5. Organizational Reflections of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders can be defined as leaders who manage the change process in organizations that need to rebuild the existing understanding in a structural sense. However, they are also considered as those who can convince followers of the necessity of change and ensure that the desired transformation becomes institutionalized and collective (Lin et al., 2022). Transformational leaders help reorganize the values and norms of organizations and support and encourage both internal and external change when necessary (Avolio, Waldman & Yammarino, 1991).

The transformational leadership approach, which is related to the long-term perspective, focuses on the interaction between the leader and the follower at the organizational level and focuses on directing the efforts of employees towards a vision instead of short-term goals based on commodity exchange. The transformational leader is aware that the goals to be realized in the long term will be realized as a result of revealing the talents and skills of the followers, increasing and developing the self-confidence of the followers (Erkuş & Günlü, 2008). In this context, it can be stated that transformational leadership style can positively affect the creativity of followers, and employees with increased creativity can mobilize innovation in the organizations they are members of (Shin & Zhou, 2003; Pardes, 2024). Indeed, Antonakis & House (2014) point out that transformational leadership is important for motivating followers and mobilizing resources to fulfill the mission of the organization and is indispensable for organizational innovation, cohesion, and performance. Transformational leaders can help employees to make valuable contributions to their organizations by intellectually stimulating their followers, encouraging them to think differently, in other words, stimulating their creative thinking in a supportive and free platform where they are not criticized, which will enable them to go beyond routine thought patterns and classical business processes (Pardes, 2024; Eraslan, 2004).

Because followers respect and trust transformational leaders, they align their values with those of the leaders and surrender power to them (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004). Transformational leaders motivate followers to do more than they initially intended and often even more than they originally thought, setting more challenging expectations and often achieving higher performances. Moreover, because transformational leaders care about empowering their followers and pay attention to their individual needs and personal development, they also help their followers develop their own leadership potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The leader directs the development of followers by delegating tasks and then monitoring



these tasks unobtrusively. They check whether they need additional support or guidance. The salient effect of individualized attention and other transformational leadership behaviors is the empowerment of followers (Behling & McFillen, 1996). Avolio argues that transformational leadership also strengthens the environment of psychological trust in organizations, increases the courage of followers to take innovative initiatives, and has a positive contribution to organizational commitment levels (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Avolio, 2007).

Transformational leadership also exhibits strong relationships with criteria reflecting followers' satisfaction and motivation (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). When followers' values are aligned with those of the transformational leader, they are expected to shift the focus of their motivation from self-interest to considering the interests of the group or organization. By presenting a desirable vision, leaders are able to influence followers' views of their positive role in achieving the mission/vision, and to achieve a higher level of commitment to a common goal for the group (Jung & Avolio, 2000). As a result, transformational leadership behaviors increase the commitment of the followers to the organization and bring about changes in the beliefs, needs, and values of the followers beyond their compliance (Çetin, 2020).

Transformational leadership is not only about thinking, questioning, and taking risks, but also about instilling certain ideas in followers through their own behavior. Transformational leaders have a high level of energy and create an organizational climate suitable for both entrepreneurship and self-development in traditional bureaucracy (Çelik, 1998).

Idealized influence in leadership includes honesty in the form of ethical and moral behavior (Tracey & Hinkin, 1998). In this context, it will be inevitable to observe positive changes in organizational culture as a result of followers taking their leaders as role models.

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