

# **Transformational And Transactional Leaders In Higher Education**

Lloyd Moman Basham

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Abstract

This paper discusses the following issues: (1) the climate, environment, challenges, and issues in higher education; (2) an overview of leadership and its application to education; (3) transformational leadership as the current focus on concepts relating to organization leadership; (4) transactional leadership as being management by exception; and (5) a comparison of transactional and transformational leadership.

## **Climate, Environment, Challenges, and Issues in Higher Education**

The growing consensus among educators and policy-makers is that the current process of education must change dramatically. A different approach is needed to prepare today's leaders to meet tomorrow's challenges. The new structure should enhance preparation, allowing for innovation and futuristic thinking in a collaborative setting (Rodriguez, 1999).

Americans, at all levels, have had great faith in the power of education to improve their quality of life. Education has been viewed as an escape route from poverty, an antidote to intolerance born of ignorance, a primary source of national prosperity, and the foundation of democracy (Swail, 2003). Scientific and technological advances have intensified in the past two decades and for the first time in human history created a truly global community. Modern telecommunications have linked all the corners of the planet as never before. Like the technology that helped create the emerging worldwide marketplace, the global community is in a dynamic period of change. Business communications, capital and financial services, research, and educational programs increasingly move across national borders. The pace of change will accelerate, and the urgent need for highly educated men and women who possess competence, perspective, human values, and political courage will increase (New England Board of Higher Education, 1991).

Amid drastic changes in society and the economy, higher education has also undergone changes, associated with post-industrialism, which have had a major impact on leadership. The question that needs to be considered is how higher education institutions and their leaders can best cope with and prepare for the many uncertainties and complexities, and support learning for the future about which very little can be predicted (Gous, 2003).

A higher education institution that will succeed in achieving a twenty-first century version of academic excellence is one that creates the kind of learning environment and campus community that supports continuous learning of all of its members. Such institutions will, where necessary, take risks

and design radically new approaches to embracing the imperfection of change (Roberts, 1994). This process begins with the higher institution's presidents and their willingness to embrace transformation leadership.

Astin's (2000) perceptions included that every day American society is observing or experiencing the characteristics related to lack of quality within the realm of leadership. If leadership is not a born trait then one must look to the educational process to explain why this lack of quality is prevalent. Although not totally responsible or accountable for this weakness, institutions of higher education have to accept their level of involvement in creating the problem and thereby begin the process of identifying and implementing changes in curricula, teaching practices, reward system, governance process, institutional practices, values, and beliefs in order to become part of the solution to the problem (Astin,

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2000). Therefore, the situational analysis may demand a critical need for transformational leadership traits by presidents of higher education institutions who can introduce and apply these qualities.

A core characteristic of the lack of quality leadership presents itself in the attitude presented by some representatives of higher education that the lack of resources hamper or create hurdles that cannot be overcome, and thus results in an incapability to change. This initial belief within representatives of higher education becomes a limitation and barrier to change amongst their colleagues and within the institution itself.

Colleges and universities are different from most other kinds of complex organizations. Their goals are more ambiguous and contested, they serve clients instead of seeking to make a profit, their technologies are unclear and problematic, and professionals dominate the work force and process (Knight & Trowler, 2001). The leaders of these institutions are normally viewed as academic statesmen.

However, during the past two decades, commercial and political forces have transformed many aspects of higher education's academic environment. Corporate funding of university research is growing, and these monies arrive with strings attached. Universities themselves are starting to behave like commercial entities, while university presidents and professors are behaving like businessmen. Even the presidents of four-year institutions are beginning to use the corporate America title of chief executive officer.

Many colleges and universities have entered into the endeavor of preparing educators in the field of school administration. A goal of this preparation should be to instill in these professionals that to lead, one must first learn to serve. Therefore, professors who teach this preparation should decide whether the primary goal is to prepare individuals for real work experiences or prepare researchers in preparation for becoming higher education faculty. This quandary may require the university president to provide transformational leadership by articulating and leading the way with a clear descriptive vision of the institution.

In an empowered institution, system-wide communication, and all academic, administrative, and support staff members understand the “bigger picture” and feel that they are significant to others and are contributing to the success of the institution. Inherent and vital in the process is the inclusion of trust in order for the empowerment process to be effective (Rodriguez, 1999). Top-down management is exchanged for a moral community built upon shared purposes, and the belief culture is one of respect and trust, and the work force has a sense of significance, competence, and commitment but not one of compliance.

This set of circumstances has increased higher education’s rise in importance, and an increased scrutiny has raised the bar for high performance. The heightened visibility has resulted in demands and requests for accountability within the curriculum for colleges and universities. Qualitative objectives and goals that are still expected have been complemented with measuring results quantitatively. This situation is displacing the traditional measurement metric for expenditures. Now academics are

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expected to define and set goals, which have criteria and results that can be evaluated while at the same time identifying costs that can be eliminated or reduced (Alexander, 2000). This criterion might require a visionary leader with transformational traits.

This need for change identification and implementation may require a transformational leader who continually weighs the impact of change on all stakeholders. Policymakers and educators have been struggling for decades to come up with measurements for educational accountability (Silins, 1994). Their progress has been slow, resulting in yet to be identified and generally acceptable approaches and methods design for improving performance. Also, the continuing internal resistance to focusing on institutional results has led to criticisms by business and government (Brown, 2002).

A new definition of accountability has emerged, which perceives higher education as a “strategic investment” that should earn returns (Sanchez & Laanan, (1998). Traditional accountability concepts centered on a model of higher education as a kind of “public utility.” The primary benefits to individual citizens were in the form of increased social mobility and quality of life. Under this conception, the principal focus of accountability was access and efficiency (Sanchez & Laanan, (1998). With the shift in perspective to higher education as a “strategic investment” came a new kind of accountability based on demonstrated return on investment (Sanchez & Laanan, (1998). Therefore, a new measure of both student and institutional outcome and output has been established.

The investment metric is based on a commonly held belief that formal education has a strong positive association with life long earnings. Although post-college earnings are only one of several potential outcomes or performance measurement, they appear to be an important and critical one. Further extensive review, while not the focus of this study, should include evaluation and analysis to measure the long term effects on students and the institution and calculate their “strategic investment” and economic return. But, this concept of strategic investment is the root of the substitution by higher education presidents’ viewing the institution’s objectives as resources to be managed instead of a learning center for creating knowledge (Sanchez & Laanan, (1998).

The current prevailing view of management theory is that highly centralized management is generally ineffective and inefficient in the face of rapidly changing environments, such as those faced by organizations in the “knowledge industry.” Rather, those closest to the market and production processes are likely to have the best information and ideas about what directions to take or changes to make and how to do this in a timely fashion. Their efforts can be usefully guided by budget discipline, that is an overall spending target, and by indicators of movement toward desired results. But such indicators should be oriented toward measuring total spending and its results (outcomes), rather than toward counting how many of a particular input are used or how resources are deployed by the units, (e.g. colleges and departments), who are nearest to the market and the productive process (Feinberg, 2005). A possible environment created by the transformational leader as president of the institution.

The president, as the chief executive officer of an institution of higher education, is measured

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largely by his or her capacity for institutional leadership. The president shares responsibility for the definition and attainment of goals, for administrative action, and for operating the communications system which links the components of the academic community. The president represents the institution to its many publics. The president’s leadership role is supported by delegated authority from the board and faculty. This degree level of delegation is the key element for establishing leadership (Crawford, 2003).

As the chief planning officer of an institution, the president has a special obligation to innovate and initiate. The degree to which a president can envision new horizons for the institution, and can persuade others to see them and to work toward them, will often constitute the chief measure of the president’s administration (Leithwood, 1992).

The president is expected, with or without support, to infuse new life into an institution. The president may at times be required, working within the concept of tenure, to solve problems of obsolescence. The president will necessarily utilize the judgments of faculty but may also, in the interest of academic standards, seek outside evaluations by scholars of acknowledged competence (Leithwood, 1992).

It becomes the duty of the president to insure that the standards and procedures in operational use within the college or university conform to the policy established by the governing board and to the standards of sound academic practice. Also incumbent on the president is ensuring that faculty views, including dissenting views, are presented to the board in those areas and on those issues where responsibilities are shared. Similarly, the faculty should be informed of the views of the board and the administration on like issues (Leithwood, 1992).

The president is largely responsible for the maintenance of existing institutional resources and the creation of new resources, has ultimate managerial responsibility for a large area of non-academic activities, is responsible for public understanding, and, by the nature of the office, is the chief person who speaks for the institution. In these areas and others, the president’s work is to plan, organize,

direct, and represent. Transactional presidents perform these functions of management. At the same time they focus on keeping the institution running smoothly and efficiently. In contrast, the transformational president will also perform these functions with empowered and authoritative delegated teams while being visionary and concerned about charting a mission and direction. Thus, the president's position, by its responsibilities, is the key strategic source within a higher education institution from which leadership, and more specifically, transformational leadership should originate (Leithwood, 1992).

Higher education is at a crossroads where it must redefine its mission accompanied with measurement standards as to how it is going to meet the needs and obligations to citizens demanding higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Higher education should take into account the impact of globalization/internationalization, the development of information and advance communicative technologies, the rapid change in demand in employment, and the critical need for highly qualified

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educators who have practical experience in their discipline. As higher education continues to realize enrollment expansion, educators, state governments, and business should begin working in a partnership atmosphere (Alexander, 2000). This might begin with transformational leaders as presidents of institutions of higher education who comprehend the situation and provide visions of the changes and directions that will be necessary to achieve this atmosphere.

### **Overview of Leadership and Its Application to Education**

Historically, organizations have been viewed as learning systems in which success depends on the ability of leaders to become direction-givers and on the organization's capacity for continuously learning (Garrat, 1987). Transformational leaders tend to have the attributes to learn across their specialist discipline. Transactional leaders are usually at the top of their functional specialty and have limited perspective to see that change is needed and what the consequences may be for continuing the same practices (Bass, 2003).

Elements of quality leadership are existent within every functional activity with representatives serving in any capacity that can influence change. Quality leadership is demonstrated if effective results are recognized and realized. Traits that define effective leadership are included in either a category of group or individual. Group traits include collaboration, shared purpose, disagreement with respect, division of labor, and a learning environment. Individual traits include self-knowledge, authenticity/integrity, commitment, empathy/understanding of others, and competence (Astin & Astin, 2000). (See Table 1)

Table 1

*What is Effective Leadership?*


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Group Qualities	Individual Qualities
Shared purpose—reflects the shared aims and values of the group’s members; can take time to achieve.	Commitment—the passion, intensity, and persistence that supplies energy, motivates individuals, and drives group effort.
Collaboration—an approach that empowers individuals, engenders trust, and capitalizes on diverse talents.	Empathy—the capacity to put oneself in another’s place; requires the cultivation and use of listening skills.
Division of labor—requires each member of the group to make a significant contribution to the overall effort.	Competence—the knowledge, skill, and technical expertise required for successful completion of the transformation effort.
Disagreement with respect—recognizes that disagreements are inevitable and should be handled in an atmosphere of mutual trust.	Authenticity—consistency between one’s actions and one’s most deeply felt values and beliefs.

A learning environment—allows members to see the group as a place where they can learn and acquire skills.

Self-knowledge—awareness of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate one to seek change.

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Source: Astin & Astin, (2000)

Note. From “Leadership Reconsidered: Engaging Higher Education in Social Change,” by A.W. Astin and Helen S. Astin, 2000, Non-Published Report, Chapter II, p. 10-15.

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People in different roles and at all levels of organizations are increasingly being called upon to be leaders in their own right. The particular characteristics of higher education institutions as knowledge-intensive organizations mean good leadership is usually naturally distributed across a team or workgroup. Therefore, the distributed character of leading in which the focus is much less on the leader as an individual seems particularly compatible within higher education contexts (Knight & Trowler, 2001). The leader is conceived as first among equals and the characteristics of the group being led are carefully considered. The approach of dispersed leadership takes the spotlight off the leader and the team is highlighted. The focus is on leading others to lead themselves, either through dispersal of power or through liberating team members so that their abilities can be fully utilized (Kouzes & Posner, (2003). What emerges is more productive than simply good leadership from the top. Leadership is much more diffuse than traditionally believed. It should be exercised at all levels within organizations and by all participants capable of practicing it in some way. By focusing only on the behavior of senior people, one runs the risk of losing sight of those aspects of human behavior in organizations that lead to effectiveness and consistently high quality. Especially in a higher education institution, which is knowledge-intensive and in which the quality of the institution is largely dependent upon the quality of its human resources, relying on good leadership only from the top is not possible. Democratic, empowering leadership involves “power-with” than “power over,” and the teams within such an empowered community become leaders themselves (Knight & Trowler, 2001).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is the current focus of concepts relating to organizational leadership. These concepts are based on vision statements that provide the directional path for the organization. In addition, the vision statement should be supplemented with a mission statement that energizes and inspires all members of the organization as they pursue obtainable organizational objectives. The vision and mission statements establish the long term goals of the organization and are

the basis for the organization's strategy and identification of methods for implementation of the strategy.

Transformational leaders who develop and communicate a vision and a sense of strategy are those who "find clear and workable ways to overcome obstacles, are concerned about the qualities of the services their organization provide, and inspire other members to do likewise" (Swail, 2003, p. 14). Transformational leaders encourage development and change.

Historical definitions of transformational leaders have depicted the leaders as heroes, with accompanying charismatic personalities expressing and promoting a mission of major organizational change. Heightened scholarly attention surfaced in the 1990s addressing the merits and theories of transformational leadership. This increased interest by society in transformational leadership was driven by two major undercurrents. The first was the evolution of cynicism and disillusionment with the very idea of leadership and the changing climates of opinion endorsing various versions or types of leadership. The second was the constantly changing leadership styles that were the "order of the day"

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as attempts to adapt to the wider cultural and economic shifts and development occurring in society. Therefore, interest and research in transformational leadership began to boom (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The transformational leader is still a long way from being the leader for every situation and, as a result, few empirically documented case examples of capturing the transformational leaders' acumen exist.

Transformational leadership is value driven. The leader sets high standards and purposes for followers, engaging them through inspiration, exemplary practice, collaboration, and trust. Transformation leadership aims at responding to change quickly and at bringing out the best in people. Such leadership is change-oriented and central to the development and survival of organizations in times of environmental turmoil, when it is necessary to make strategic changes to deal with both major threats and opportunities. It derives its power from shared principles, norms, and values. Leaders who encourage and support transformation share power are willing to learn from others, pay specific attention to intellectual stimulation, and equate the individual's need for achievement and growth (Ramsden, 1998; Caldwell & Spinks, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1993).

The transformational leader may be needed in the scholarly community (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Leithwood, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1990; Silins, 1994). A key factor is the introduction of entrepreneurialism to the public sector. This is due to higher education institutions attempting to adapt to the economic and organizational shifts in their environment. The last two decades declining support for higher education from its traditional sources of funding emphasizes this point. As a result, major short term goals have been established, and day-to-day focus has shifted to an environment of institution marketing or business development, and the focus is not on students.

Transformational leadership is essential within higher education so that adaptation can be completed to meet the constantly changing economic and academic environment. Leaders who



encourage and support transformation leadership share power, are willing to learn from others, and are sensitive to each team member's needs for achievement and growth (Gous, 2003).

### **Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership is centered on exchanges and based on two factors: contingent rewards and management by exception. Contingent rewards are the exchanges between leaders and subordinates in which effort by subordinates is exchanged for specific rewards, such as salary and benefits, bonuses, or other incentives. A job description, which becomes the understanding of the leader and subordinates, states the job to be executed and what benefits the employee will receive in the performance of the duties of that job. The other factor that is prevalent, management by exception, is the oversight that involves corrective criticism, negative feedback, and negative reinforcement. The common method is applying the evaluation of the job performance with the stated proposed corrective performance that is presented as the solution, the prevention of an occurrence of something not wanted, or desired different actions in the performance of the job (Connor, 2004).

Transactional leaders control by their interest in and need for output, and utilize this output to

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maintain the status quo. Transactional leaders demonstrate a passive style when utilizing management by exception with their interface with employees or subordinates. This passivity is present when employees do not receive recognition for their positive contributions to the organization but instead become the focal point of attention when errors/disconnects occur or when a problem presents itself. Transactional leaders provide clear goals and objectives with a short term scope or application and do not have a major interest in changing the environment or culture except when or where problems occur. The relationship that develops between the transactional leader and the subordinate is primarily an unwritten agreement that the purpose of the follower is to carry out the wishes of the leader (Burns, 1978).

Transactional leaders outline very specifically and clearly what is required and expected from their subordinates. This type of leader and their subordinates usually share a common understanding of the goals and expectations. The environment is highly structured with an emphasis on managerial authority. This creates a climate of non-creativity and lack of creative expansion of the organization due to the assumption that people are largely motivated by simple rewards for specific job performance. In many cases this results in lack of improvement in job satisfaction. The major disadvantage of utilizing this model is that it does not take into account people's desire for self-actualization (Dollak, 2008).

### **Comparison of Transactional and Transformational Leadership**

The detailed, side-by-side comparison set out in Table 2 reveals some of key points of difference between transformational and transactional leadership described in the extensive extant literature (Hay, 2007). To some degree – and as alluded to earlier – transactional leadership might be characterized as a leadership of the status quo. Leaders draw authority from established power

relationships. Transformational leadership by contrast is a leadership of change – change within leaders themselves, within their subordinates, and within the organization of which they are a part.

Transactional leaders provide subordinates with something they want in return for something the leader seeks. To be effective, a transactional leader must be able to realize and respond to subordinates’ changing needs and wants. Kuhnert and Lewis (1987), as cited in Carlson and Perrewe, (1995) suggest that there are two levels of exchange: lower order and higher order. The former is based on the exchange of material goods and privileges, such as performance-based pay bonuses and paid access to airline lounges for business travelers. The latter are less common and maintain follower performance through exchanges of trust, loyalty, and respect.

Transformational leadership draws from deeply held personal value systems. Transformational leaders bring followers together to pursue collective ambitions by expressing and disseminating their personal standards. While transactional leadership can most certainly bring about constructive outcomes within an organization, transformational leadership is held to promote performance beyond expectations by drawing from charisma, consideration, motivation, and stimulation (Carlson & Perrewe, 1995).

Table 2

***Comparison and Contrast of Contemporary Understandings of Transactional and Transformational Leadership***

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Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Leadership of the status quo. Effective in stable organizations and contexts. More likely to be observed in a well-ordered society.	Leadership of change (within leaders, followers and organizations). Important in times of distress and rapid and destabilizing change.
Focuses on social and economics exchanges between leaders and followers, using contingent rewards and administrative actions to reinforce the positive and reform negative behaviors.	Focuses on organizational objectives and organizational change by disseminating new values and seeking alternatives to existing arrangements.
Leader-follower relationship sees each exchange needs and services to satisfy their independent objectives	Leader-follower relationship sees purposes of both become fused, leading to unity and shared purpose.
Motivates followers by appealing to their own	Attempts to raise follower needs (following

self-interest (for example, pay, promotion).

Maslow's hierarchy) to higher levels (for example, self-esteem) and to develop followers into leaders.

Based on directive power acts

Based on interaction and influence

Follower response based on compliance.

Follower response based on commitment.

Supervision likely to be important.

Supervision may be minimal.

Leadership "act" takes place but leaders and followers not bound together in mutual pursuit of higher purpose.

Leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.

Founded on people's need to make a living by completing tasks.

Founded on people's need for meaning.

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Table 2 cont.

#### Transactional Leadership

#### Transformational Leadership

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Focuses on situational authority, politics and perks. Involves values, but typically those required for successful exchange relationships (for example, reciprocity, integrity).

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Focuses on personal power, values, morals and ethics. May be demonstrated by anyone in an organization in any type of position.

Emphasis on day-to-day affairs, business needs, short-term goals and quantitative information.

Transcends daily affairs, concentrating on long-term issues.

Leader-follower relationship may be established quickly. A relatively impersonal relationship maintained only as long as benefits outweigh costs.

May take time for leader-follower bonds to develop. A personal relationship that may persist when costs outweigh benefits.

Tends to be transitory. Once a transaction is completed, relationship may need to be redefined.

Tends to be enduring.

Emphasizes tactical issues.	Emphasizes missions and strategies for achieving them.
Typically involves working within current systems.	May involve redesigning of jobs to make them more meaningful and challenging. Emphasizes realization of human potential.
Supports structures and systems that emphasize outcomes.	Aligns structures and systems to overarching values and goals.
Follower counseling focuses on evaluation.	Follower counseling focuses on personal development.
Atomistic worldview and moral altruistic motives based on teleological perspective (that is to say, based on consequences).	Organic worldview and moral altruistic motives based on deontological perspective (that is to say, based on promises).

*Sources:* Barnett (2003); Bass, Avolio, Jung & Berson (2003); Brown & Moshavi (2002); Cox (2001); Crawford, Gould & Scott (2003); Feinberg, Ostroff & Burke (2005); Gellis (2001); Kanungo, (2001); Lussier & Achua (2004); Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (undated); Sanders, Hopkins & Geroy (2003); Spreitzer, Perttula & Xin (2005); Stone, Russell & Patterson (2003); Yukl (1989).

Source: Hay (2007)

Note. The data in Table 2 are from “Leadership Stability and Leadership of Volatility: Transactional and Transformational Leaderships Compared,” by I. Hay, 2007, *Academic Leadership, The Online Journal* 4(4), p. 5. Copyright 2007 by Academic Leadership. Reprinted with permission.

This current study highlights the identity of effective leadership in higher education by applying a matrix of group qualities and individual qualities to an expert panel of leaders in higher education. A Delphi study was used to obtain consensus and to determine if leadership utilized, either transformational or transactional or both, has in fact been effective or can be effective. (See Table 1).

The beneficiaries from the delivery of this process will be the citizens and society, as education and knowledge are the cornerstone of society’s growth, development, evolution, and continuance. The provider of this delivery is the presidents who can individually apply a combination of transformational and transactional leadership in his/her application of direction, decision making, and management. This study adds to an understanding of the traits needed in an academic leader and what may be his/her personal motivation.

This study is concerned with the traits and characteristics of presidents of institutions of higher education who are considered transformational and transactional leaders. The study adds current data to the published and perceived characterization of leaders in higher education and their approaches to changing the learning environment at their institutions. This study addresses the significance and current widespread appeal of transformational leadership and its practical application to higher education. But, equally importantly, it profiles the group and individual qualities that are necessary for individuals to have as their acumen in order to introduce a climate of change utilizing transformational and/or transactional leadership.

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