

You Can Drag a Horse to Water but You Can't Make It Drink Unless It Is Thirsty

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Executive Summary

This paper reviews preliminary results of a field study that examined the impact of a leadership development program on pre- and post-ratings of the multifactor leadership questionnaire. Emphasis in the training program was placed on developing transformational leadership. Results indicated that there were some positive effects of the training program on increasing ratings of transformational leadership.

Introduction

“You can drag a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.” The adage may explain why the effects of many programs to train participants to be more effective leaders evaporate once participants are back on the job. We believe that for training to produce lasting changes in attitude or behavior, participants must be ready, willing, and able to change. They must understand the whys and wherefores of the training, must be cognizant of their own needs to change, and must want to make the change. Along these lines, Posner and Kouzes recently stated, “The belief that leadership can't be learned is a far more powerful deterrent to development than is the nature of leadership itself.”¹ Equally important, the change must also be supported by the readiness of the organization for the change advocated by the program.²

This paper focuses on the particular importance of electing to make a change in a particular aspect of one's leadership style, and planning for the change following a training workshop intervention. In this regard, we operationalized “readiness,” based on the participants' completing and implementing a detailed leadership developmental plan of action for changing their leadership styles following a three-day training program. We believe that intentions to implement are required to have a successful training effort. Indeed, Gollwitzer found that 62 percent of participants completed a past due difficult task if they had formed a spe-

cific plan to do so. Conversely, only 22 percent complied with their goal if they had not developed a plan.³

Many past leadership programs have taught lessons that had some practical value for participants. The Grid posited one best way to lead across different situations: showing an integrated concern for production and people.⁴ Situational Leadership argued for aligning one's leadership to the demands of each of four designated situations.⁵ Leader Match assumed task-oriented leaders performed better in one type of structure, while relations-oriented leadership style was better for other situations.⁶ Here, we assume a broader array of possible leadership styles can be developed through training, resulting in efforts to improve some but not necessarily all components of leadership, including charismatic or idealized leadership.⁷

An Increasing Importance Assigned to Leadership Development

Over the last decade, advocates in the movement for total quality and reengineering have repeatedly emphasized the need to develop leadership to facilitate the changes associated with these organizational interventions. The opportunity for leadership training to have a “real” and positive impact in parallel with these efforts has never been greater. As depicted in the Malcolm Baldrige criteria, leadership represents the “driver” in the overall change process. One then must ask the question, “What type of leadership framework will contribute most positively to the changeover processes that many organizations are currently undergoing these days?”

Our contention is that the leadership framework must include a broader range of styles and leadership behaviors than the transactional exchanges emphasized in the Grid, Situational Leadership, or Leader Match. Attention also is needed to styles of transformational leadership.⁸ By adding

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transformational leadership, Cascio argues that individuals will have a broader range of styles from which they can contribute to development most needed in organizations today, to survive in the complex rapidly changing, social, political and economic environments.⁹

A Closer View of a “Full Range” of Leadership Styles

Social science has long recognized that leadership went beyond a simple exchange relationship between leaders and their followers.¹⁰ Nonetheless, most leadership training has focused on leadership as a transaction, where goals were clarified, agreements were made, and contingent reinforcement was provided to followers for carrying out their assignments. These kinds of transactions were constructive when they provided a clear delineation of the paths and the goals of those led.¹¹ Less effective leadership also used contingent correction, threats and discipline, when followers failed to meet standards and agreed-upon expectations.

Since 1983 transformational leadership training has been completed by participants from industry, educational administration, health care, and government agencies in the United States and abroad. The present paper reviews preliminary findings from one evaluation project showing modest pre-post training effects on the job.

Transformational Leadership: The Upper End of a Range of Leadership Styles

Transformational leaders motivate others (followers, colleagues, clients, and supervisors) to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible. They set challenging expectations and typically motivate and enable others to achieve higher levels of performance.¹²

Transformational leaders earn credits with others by considering others' needs over their own personal needs. Their behaviors, values, and principles are consistent with their espoused beliefs. They can be counted on to do what's right, demonstrating high standards of ethical and moral conduct. Impressions are managed for the good of the organization and its members, not for the purpose of deceit and/or subterfuge. The “pseudo-transformational” leader may create the impression of doing some of the “right things,” but actually fail to do so when it conflicts with his or her personal interests.

Transformational Leadership Components

Prior research by Bass identified four components of transformational leadership.¹³ Leadership is *idealistically influential* (II) when followers have confidence and faith in the leader. They seek to identify with the leaders and emulate them. Such leaders set high moral and ethical standards. The leadership is *inspirationally motivating* (IM), in that it furnishes followers with challenges, persuasion, meaning, and understanding for shared actions and objectives. The leadership is *intellectually stimulating* (IS) in that it

enhances followers, innovation, and creativity, and expands their use of abilities to take on a broader range of problems and opportunities. Such leadership questions basic assumptions and helps people to abandon outdated strategies of operating. Finally, transformational leadership is *individually considerate* (IC), providing followers with support, mentoring, and coaching, while demonstrating an understanding and acceptance of individual differences among the followers. Altogether, transformational leadership is predicted to develop exemplary followers who trust their leaders, who anticipate a more optimistic future, who are willing to question their leaders, and who focus on continuous improvement and development in themselves, as well as their colleagues.¹⁴

Each of the components comprising transformational leadership is measured in the current study by Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5).¹⁵ We see each of the four I's of transformational leadership as relevant to corporals as well as generals, to teachers as well as superintendents, and to production workers as well as CEOs (see Bass & Avolio, *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership*, 1994, for a more detailed discussion of transformational leadership). All four I's are contained within House's and Conger and Kanungo's single complex term, *charisma*.¹⁶

Transactional Leadership: The Lower End of a Full Range of Leadership Styles

Transactional leadership occurs when the leader practices *contingent reward leadership* (CR), and specifies goals and rewards, or corrects colleagues depending on the adequacy of their performance. Transactional leadership depends on behavior/performance being linked with recognition or rewards, or with active or passive corrective discipline where performance falls below some acceptable standard.

When leadership effectiveness is measured by the objective performance of those led, according to two separate meta-analyses, contingent reward (CR) leadership has been found to be effective, although not as effective as the transformational components, in motivating others to achieve a higher level of development and performance.¹⁷ With this constructive exchange, the leader assigns or negotiates agreements on what needs to be done and may link rewards and commendations in return for the followers' achievements.

Corrective transactions are generally less effective than the constructive ones described above. However, even these corrective styles are appropriate in situations which require active and corrective oversight, such as where threat of accidents or disasters are ever-present, or where careful accounting and auditing are mandated in financial transactions. The corrective transaction may be *active managing-by-exception* (MBE-A) or *passive managing-by-expectation* (MBE-P). In MBE-A, the leader arranges to actively monitor deviances from standards, mistakes, and errors in follower's assignments and to take corrective action as necessary where devi-

ations are expected or actually occur. MBE-P implies waiting passively for deviations, mistakes, and errors to occur and then taking corrective action. Passive MBE is likely to be less effective than active MBE. The passive MBE attitude is characterized by “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” and is typically inadequate for most organizations where there is a proactive focus on continuous quality improvement.

Nontransactional or laissez-faire leadership. The “full range” of leadership includes the possibilities of the absence or avoidance of leadership, the *laissez-faire* (LF) style. It is mostly ineffective according to prior research. As contrasted with transactional leadership, laissez-faire represents a non-transactional leadership style. Yet it must be distinguished from delegation and empowerment of colleagues. The laissez-faire leader shows he or she doesn’t care about what happens and fails to follow up when delegation and empowerment processes are implemented.

Objective of Training

The purpose of our training effort was to enhance the trainee’s use of the leadership styles at the upper end of the full range. We expected to bring about increases in the frequency of displaying the four components of transformational leadership, and decreases in the corrective and laissez-faire leadership styles. Stated another way, the objective of the training was to increase the frequency of use of transformational leadership relative to transactional and nontransactional leadership since over a broad array of situations, transformational leadership has a more positive impact on collegial motivation and performance.

In the current investigation we hypothesized that through training we could enhance the frequency of participants’ exhibiting transformational leadership, while also decreasing the use of less effective styles, for example, management by exception. These results were expected if the components to be changed were identified in advance, selected for further development, and planned by the trainee for pursuit over time. The willingness of participants to establish a plan of action for improving their leadership style was used as an indirect means of assessing participants’ readiness to make a change in their leadership style. Preliminary evidence to support these expectations has been provided by Barling, Weber, and Kelloway.¹⁸ They reported an increase in several MLQ transformational scales following feedback sessions on how to interpret and use the feedback from the MLQ, comparing an experimental group that received MLQ feedback versus a control/comparison group.

Full Range Leadership Development Program

The program ordinarily requires three basic workshop days and two to three advanced workshop days with on average, a three-month interval between the two workshops. Follow-up activities are planned between the basic and

advanced training, which may continue over one or more years following the completion of the advanced training workshop. At the outset, we felt that extending the program over time and through follow-up activities would be a better way to accommodate the different degrees of participants’ readiness to change their own profile of leadership. This strategy also provided opportunities for participants to make adjustments throughout the duration of the training intervention while they practiced new styles and orientations towards leading others. By design, the program gave opportunities for improving participants’ approaches to influencing others by practicing new styles, behaviors and orientations.

Program Processes and Components

The core program focused on education as well as skill-based training. The philosophy of leadership involved in being transformational, transactional, and nontransactional were presented early on, and discussed in terms of how the styles related to participants’ implicit theories and models of leadership. The program was intended to broaden participants’ implicit theories and perspectives within a broader range of leadership styles, methods and practices.

The program contained simulations and exercises, with a heavy emphasis on action learning that dealt with issues, dilemmas, and problems faced back home by participants. We stressed there were numerous ways to be transformational, transactional, and nontransactional. Emphasis was placed on establishing how participants saw themselves as leaders as well as how they were perceived by participants in the basic workshop and their colleagues at home.

After receiving computerized feedback from the MLQ Form 5 ratings from themselves and their colleagues in their work organizations, trainees were asked to identify the components in their profile they wanted to develop further. For their individual leadership development plan, they were asked to write personal goals and activities for improvement, which they then discussed in small groups. They also considered the support and constraints in the organization that would help or hinder such changes in their leadership styles. A typical plan involved proposing to be more individually considerate by becoming a more active listener, and learning to be more attentive to the needs of one’s colleagues. The plan also included how progress was to be measured, who would provide support for the change, and so forth.

The program proceeded from (1) increasing awareness of one’s leadership model with which participants came to the program based on prior life experiences, (2) learning about alternative strategies to improve their impact on others, and (3) adapting, adopting, and internalizing some new ways of thinking and behaving through the use of reflective learning, skill building exercises, individuals plans for change based on feedback, and an articulation of the desired future context and culture participants hoped to create in their units over time. Participants were also encouraged to consider which

behaviors and/or styles they needed to either eliminate or reduce to be a more effective leader.

Program Schedule

The total program assessed here had 13 modules, eight in the basic and five in the advanced workshops, respectively. The interval of three months between the basic and advanced programs provided opportunities for participants to practice for planned changes, to collect and receive data on their profile, and to modify plans before returning for the advanced workshop.

The program modules progressed from an internal individualistic focus to an organizational one, ending with each participant creating a vision of a desired future state for his or her respective unit. Considerable emphasis was placed in the workshop on coaching participants on how they could increase or reduce the frequency of styles with a plan for leadership development to be implemented and revised over time.

Personal Feedback

After learning in the basic workshop about the behaviors present in the components of a full range model of leadership, participants received the results of the MLQ survey obtained from themselves and their colleagues. Results were presented at the scale level as well as on an item-by-item basis (10 items per component). Thus, the feedback provided in relative terms how often participants were exhibiting each of the styles along a full range of leadership based on self and others' ratings about them.

Facilitators explained the meaning of the results to participants in groups and for some participants in one-to-one sessions. Comparisons were drawn: how the participants' scores compared to the general norms for other participants inside and outside of their organization and how participants' self-ratings compared with MLQ ratings by their colleagues. Participants then were asked to identify specific factors and behaviors they regarded as strengths or weaknesses in their profiles, which were discussed with facilitators as well as with other participants in the workshop.

Since each MLQ item did not necessarily identify all of the actions or behaviors that resulted in the ratings, participants identified events or experiences to aid in their interpretation of the ratings. They were asked general questions such as, "What other factors may have contributed to the profile of ratings which were obtained?"

A detailed *Leadership Planning Guide* was provided to help participants proceed systematically through the process of developing an individualized plan for improving one's leadership style. The plan guided participants in how to use their awareness of a range of leadership components measured by the MLQ in developing their full leadership potential. Participants developed personal ideas for self-improvement and specific goals and objectives to be achieved for enhancing the effectiveness of their leadership potential. They were coached in this process by facilitators. Priorities

and the methods to be used to achieve the objectives and the ways to assess progress were set. Participants used each other in small groups to test their ideas for change. They counseled each other on the components of their respective plans.

Attention in the leadership development plan was placed on building the target leader's ability to function as a more active transactional and transformational leader. For instance, those initially high in laissez-faire leadership and passive managing-by-exception, could consider how much and in what way they could reduce such styles of behavior.

Participants were told that to be effective, their developmental plans should be periodically revised. The plan should become a "living" document for participants. Once developed, the plan was revised at least twice over the course of three days in the basic workshop, and then again at least twice in the advanced workshop.

Before the basic workshop ended, the plan was revised based on the organizational and personal obstacles that needed to be taken into account. The emphasis placed on obstacles or barriers to effective leadership development was intended to provide a realistic picture of both constraints and opportunities in the participant's home organization.

Example of a Leadership Development Plan

Among the components of transformational leadership, proposals most likely to be included in the plan were to increase one's individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. The focus on individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation fit with appreciating that one's self-development is consistent with increasing one's emphasis on developing others to their full potential. The skills and insights regarding self-improvement mentioned are many of the same skills and insights important to helping others to develop, be more motivated, and innovative at work.

A secondary goal that derived from this effort was to set an example for colleagues and to provide a role model of a leader who was willing to work at improving his or her own performance before asking others to do the same. Development was viewed in terms of how it could improve the individual as well as in terms of its contribution to colleagues and to the organization.¹⁹

Practice Period

During the several months that followed the basic workshop, participants pursued their personal development goals and plans.

Advanced Workshop

The advanced workshop began with participants reporting on the successes and failures of their attempts to change and the extent further revisions might be needed in their plans. Common experiences and implementation problems were discussed in small groups, and processed in the larger

workshop group. Those who did not try to implement their plans usually indicated they did not have the full support of their supervisors and that they themselves were not ready to work on their leadership potential. The next series of modules dealt with ways of becoming more intellectually stimulating to individuals and groups using real “back home” problems. These modules built on work that had already been done on individualized consideration in the basic workshop. Participants then discussed the extent to which their “back home” organizational culture was transactional and transformational and ways they could make changes in it through transformational leadership. In the culture-change module, particular emphasis was placed on developing the inspirational leadership needed to change one’s organizational unit to a more transformational culture. The advanced workshop ended with participants envisioning their organization and work setting in two to five years with emphasis on aligning the interests of the organization, its other members, and themselves. Here, participants practiced inspirational strategies to create more desirable future scenarios for their organization. Stressed also was the articulation of espoused beliefs and values that are associated with idealized influence. Work on these last modules became part of the participants extended individualized leadership plan.

Follow-up Activities

Specific evaluations following the advanced workshop after six months included assessing progress on the implementation of the leadership development plans, as well as readministering the MLQ.

In sum, a periodic reinforcement schedule was implemented after receiving feedback from the MLQ and learning

about the possibilities for improvement. Individual development plans were established, redefined, and reinforced by colleagues in training as well as back on the job over an extended period of time. In the next section, we examine preliminary effects of the training process with respect to changes in leadership style.

Evaluation

Available for study were the results from 66 out of 489 participants who after being preassessed with the MLQ Form 5 by their followers “back home” had completed the Full Range Leadership Development Program. Then these 66 participants attended a half-day follow-up session to discuss the impact of the training program. The follow-up for 42 participants was within a year after the end of their advanced workshop; for 11, within two years; and for 13 after more than two years. Six months to two years later, after the participants’ training was completed, post-assessed MLQ scores were obtained from their followers.

The 66 follow-up session attendees were a self-selected sample from the original participants. However, they were similar in terms of gender (45 percent versus 44 percent), age (43.8 years versus 44.3 years) and the same level of graduate education (62.4 percent versus 69.3 percent).

Specify of Gains Depending on Proposed Plans

The plan for improvement allowed for each participant to try to make changes on four factors. The 66 participants proposed to try to improve themselves on a total of 76. When we examined the 76 proposals, as shown in table 10, eight of the plans proposed increasing one’s idealized influence, 18

Table 10
Changes in MLQ-Follower Ratings According to Whether the Change Was Proposed in the 66 Participants’ Personal Leadership Development Plans

Factor Score	Proposed in Plans				Not Proposed in Plans				Total Sample of Participants		
	N	Pre	Post	Change	N	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change
<i>MLQ Transformational</i>											
Idealized Influence	8	3.10	3.26	+0.16*	68	3.02	3.03	+0.01	3.03	3.06	+0.03
Inspirational Motivation	18	2.69	2.76	+0.10	58	2.74	2.86	+0.12	2.73	2.83	+0.10
Intellectual Stimulation	19	2.62	2.87	+0.25*	57	2.72	2.76	+0.04	2.70	2.79	+0.09
Individualized Consideration	22	2.75	2.84	+0.07	54	2.96	2.99	+0.03	2.90	2.95	+0.05
<i>MLQ Transactional</i>											
Contingent Reward	8	2.31	2.37	+0.06	2.41	2.34	-0.07		2.40	2.45	+0.05
Management-by-Exception							Not in plans		1.88	1.87	-0.01
MLQ Laissez-Faire							Not in plans		1.08	1.00	-0.08

Statistically significant Changes at p<.05

proposed increasing inspirational motivation, 19 proposed increasing intellectual stimulation, 22 proposed increasing individualized consideration, and eight proposed increasing contingent reward leadership. None proposed increasing management-by-exception or laissez-faire leadership.

Significant gains appeared for idealized influence and intellectual stimulation as shown in table 10 if the factor had been included as a goal in the participant's Leadership Development Plan as originally designed and revised in the basic and advanced training programs. Comparing the means pre- and post-, idealized influence rose from a mean of 3.10 to a mean of 3.26 among those participants for whom increasing idealized influence was a *stated goal of the Leadership Development Plan*. For those for whom idealized influence was not a stated goal, it remained relatively unchanged at 3.02 before and 3.03 at the follow-up evaluation. Similar effects appeared for intellectual stimulation, which showed a gain of +.25 ($p < .02$) if planned, and +.04 ($p < .25$) if not planned. Inspirational motivation rose whether planned (+.10) or unplanned (+.12); however these effects were not significant. If planned, contingent reward rose (+.07). If unplanned, it fell (-.07), but these results also were not significant. In all, we concluded that planning made some difference in whether improvement on a factor could be observed over time.

Motivation and Constraints on Efforts to Change

A plurality of the 66 participants in the follow-up meeting stated that implementation of their Leadership Development Plans was aided by their own motivation (38 percent), by their colleagues (34 percent), by knowledge obtained (13 percent) and through feedback (12 percent). Lack of self-discipline (22 percent) and time pressures (25 percent) were mentioned as the factors most inhibiting to the implementation of the leadership development plans.

Conclusions and Implications

Generally speaking, follow-up resurvey of participants indicated that improvements in leadership such as increases in idealized influence and intellectual stimulation appeared to depend on whether the trainees became aware of the need for improvement and created a plan to do so. Where the personal development plans did not include a goal for improving transformational leadership, little change was recorded from six months to two years after the training effort. Most participants showed at least some improvements in one or more components, although the components differed among trainees, and the changes were not large. It is possible that participants in some circumstances might have wanted to increase a component such as individualized consideration, but felt constrained from doing so by their organizational culture, supervisor, associates, and/or their tasks.

Some indirect support for our conclusions that benefits of the effort depended on the needs and goals set by the indi-

vidual participants appeared in an evaluation study of another leadership development program reported by McCauley and Hughes-James.²⁰ McCauley and Hughes-James reviewed the results of a six-day training program for 38 public school superintendents who attended the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). This program was built around feedback of personality assessments and coworkers' perceptions of their skills and abilities. As with the current leadership development efforts reported here, individual goals were set and projects to improve the organization were designed by participants. McCauley and Hughes-James reported that keeping journals promoted self-analysis and reflection among participants. Impact of the superintendent's leadership program appeared to depend on the emergence of self-awareness that gave rise to reflective thinking on better strategies for leading their respective school systems. Most likely to benefit from CCL's leadership development program were those who were more highly motivated, who experienced a greater need to resolve conflicts in their lives, and who were supported in their learning efforts.

In the McCauley and James study, those already experienced and at top levels of administration were less reflective, received less feedback from their coworkers, and were less affected by the training effort. The authors concluded that awareness, developmental readiness, and reflective learning were considered critical components for obtaining a positive training impact with participants.

The current results provided here can only be seen as preliminary. Although trends for improvements in components of transformational leadership were in the predicted direction, the small shifts involved small numbers of participants. And, there are other plausible alternative explanations which might be entertained. For example, trainees may have informed followers about their plans, and followers responded accordingly by increasing their ratings of the target leader at the second administration of the survey. Since we have no experimental control group to compare our findings against, we can not rule out these alternatives interpretations. Nevertheless, these preliminary results call attention to the impact on leadership training programs of the readiness and willingness of participants to engage in their own leadership development. The results are consistent with the idea that management development involves in a direct sense, self development,²¹ that self-planning may be implemented more effectively than plans devised by others, and that for goal fulfillment, goal setting should be accompanied by mapping out in advance how the goal will be fulfilled.²² We believe that implementation intentions are important in the training process and its effects over time.

Implications for Human Resource Development

Three further implications can be drawn from this article: (1) attention needs to be focused on a broader or fuller range of leadership development at all levels of organizations; (2) training efforts and their evaluation should be conducted with

greater controls over alternative interpretations of program impact; and (3) the evidence reported here provides some preliminary support that if the goals in development plans are focused and measurable, and if the context to which leadership is to be exercised is considered in the planning process and its implementation, then training may positively affect leadership development. Preparing the context and providing facilitation for trainees are possibly two critical roles that human resource practitioners can play in improving the impact of leadership training efforts in their organizations.

In our opinion, leadership training must place greater emphasis on including not only a focus on developing leadership styles and behaviors, but also on the surrounding conditions in which the behavior is to be embedded. By considering the context, its constraints and opportunities in the training program, we are more likely to provide a realistic picture of the trainee's challenges and opportunities following the training program. Indeed, we would argue that both the organizational setting as well as the participant himself or herself must be readied for change for the training program, to have the intended impact on development.

We would suggest that much costly training is likely wasted where assessment, counseling, preparation of trainees, and individualized planning is inadequate. Revenue spent on providing prospective trainees with opportunities to make realistic decisions and plans about what it is they need and want to achieve may save a dollar's worth of time spent fruitlessly in training. Finally, we are advocating that leadership training will be more successful to the extent that follow-up interventions are built up front into the planning process. More attention to such follow-up activities may have also boosted the training effect observed in the current study.

In sum, preliminary evidence provided here suggests that training at the upper end of the leadership style continuum is possible. Results here are preliminary in that the field evaluation in this report did not include untrained control groups, participants were not randomly selected, and the impact of training on ratings was at best, modest. Nonetheless, the results suggest that training in transformational leadership should include trainee involvement in the development of plans, opportunities for practice, attention to context and adequate follow-up.

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