

College Teachers as Transformational Leaders: A Change in Perception

Melanie Andrade

ABSTRACT

“The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers. “ - Peter Drucker

A leader is one who inspires change. College teachers, for decades, have been exhibiting leadership skills in some form or the other. Be it in curriculum design or in mentoring. Having said this, teachers are still perceived as instructors and lecturers rather than leaders, and students are perceived as customers rather than followers. Can this age-old connotation given to a teacher be redefined?

Could this changed perception bring about positive changes in college-going youth? College teachers engage themselves with young adults, who are exposed to a plethora of information in the world of changing technology. This points out to the need for a change in perception from a teacher as one who shares knowledge to a teacher as one who shares vision.

This paper seeks to understand transformational leadership in the light of a few traits of servant-leadership. It attempts to redefine a teacher as a transformational leader. Does this call for greater risk-taking and initiative on the part of the teacher-leader? Can this perception help a college teacher to deal with the Millennials Generation? The paper seeks to define a transformational teacher-leader as one who, through a shared vision, shared responsibilities and outstanding dynamism, is instrumental in taking his/her followers/students to higher levels of personal achievements, taking the organisation/college to greater educational heights and also focusing on ongoing self-improvement. A leader is one who leads from the front. A transformational teacher-leader is one who leads from the back.

‘The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.’ - Ralph Nadar. The paper attempts to show how transformational teacher-leaders can best serve this function of leadership.

Keywords. *College teachers, transformational leader, servant leader, teacher - leader, millennials generation, radical change in perception*

Leadership means different things to different people and understanding what makes someone a leader can depend on

their profession and their leadership style.”Leadership is the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to

accomplish any task, objective or project.” - William Alan Cohen, the Art of a Leader.

Transformational leadership:

There are various styles of leadership practised by leaders throughout the decades. These include autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, etc. One among them is the Transformational style of leadership. According to Professor Bernard Bass, Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that occurs when leaders “broaden and elevate the interests of their people, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of their group, and when they stir their people to look beyond self-interest for the good of the group.”

Transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms individuals. It is often associated with ethics and involves long term goals. It focuses on the process by which the leader engages with followers, and they together create a connection that raises each of them to higher levels of motivation and morality. A transformational leader must be attentive to followers’ needs and motivation, and try to help followers reach their full potential. The leader transforms and motivates followers by making them more aware of the importance of task outcomes, inducing them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organisation or team and activating their higher order needs.

These transformational leaders possess charisma, vision, intellectual stimulation and inspiration. Transformational leadership is concerned both with the performance of followers as well as developing them to their full potential.

Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers through personal vision and energy. They identify themselves as courageous change agents. They believe in people and are value - driven. They are life- long learners and visionaries and have the ability to deal with complexity and uncertainty.

Traits of Servant leaders:

A servant leader has a deep commitment to listen to his/her followers. He/ She assumes good intentions of co-workers and does not reject them as people even when one cannot accept their behaviour or performance. A servant leader searches for wholeness in everything he/ she does and seeks to convince others rather than coerce compliance from others. He/ She assumes a commitment to serving the needs of others. Servant leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. They constantly try to identify means to build communities. Servant leadership is not a quick- fix approach. Rather it is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work - a way of being - with the potential to create positive change. Servant leadership is proactive leadership rather than reactive.

Changing perception of college teachers as transformational leaders:

A teacher has a huge responsibility of moulding the future generations. They assume various roles in fulfillment of their duties. The key roles of a college teacher can be summed up as Teaching/ Instructional activities, Extra/Co-curricular/ Creative activities, Research/ Scholarly activities, Consultancy, Community activities, Administration, Mentoring and Service to the institution.

College teachers, for decades, have been exhibiting leadership skills in each of the above roles that they assume. Be it in curriculum design or in mentoring or in any other role. Having said this, teachers are still perceived as instructors and lecturers rather than leaders, and students are perceived as customers rather than followers. There must be a radical change in this perception.

Transformational teacher- leader:

The concept of transformational leadership and servant leadership is blended to coin the term '*transformational teacher-leader*.'

Why servant leadership? Students are the customers of educational institutions and are served by teachers through their teaching and mentoring.

College teachers can be perceived as transformational teacher - leaders. A teacher stirs his/ her student through motivational one-liners all the time. A teacher, through career guidance and

teaching activities, guides and motivates the student to achieve their full potential. Teaching being a noble profession, a teacher must be highly associated with ethics. Through counselling, a teacher is always attentive to her student's needs. Through guidance in projects/events, the teacher motivates the students to work in teams. By encouraging healthy competitions, a teacher teaches the students to drop the 'I' for the interest of the entire group. A teacher, as a leader, is well planned, has a set vision and priorities and chalks out long term goals for her teaching and other activities. Teachers are agents of change because their followers are the future of the nation. A teacher takes time out to listen to his/her students and help them ride over their difficulties. This, in leadership terms, is 'empathy' and the academic parlance is 'coaching' or 'mentoring'. A servant leader assumes the role of a steward. A teacher-leader too, deals with her students as her own children and is his/her caretaker within the limits of her profession. A teacher, like a transformational leader, engages with her students/followers on a regular basis and therefore has the power to inspire change. A teacher shapes and shares a vision with her students. A teacher takes initiative to organise various extra and co-curricular activities for her students. A teacher-leader exhibits charisma in all that he/she does. A teacher leader involves doing things differently with vision and priorities. The teaching profession being one that

commands respect, a teacher can easily mobilise the strength of all his/her students in the accomplishment of goals. *A leader is one who leads from the front. A transformational teacher-leader is one who leads from the back.*

Need for change in perception:

A) Development of the profession and the teacher:

Teaching is a flat profession. The 20-year veteran's responsibilities are essentially the same as those of the newly licensed novice. In many settings, the only way for a teacher to extend his or her influence is to become an administrator. When the leadership element is added to teaching, it makes it a dynamic profession.

College teachers may sometimes become complacent, because they have to teach the same portion year after year. Transformational teacher-leadership challenges the teachers to be innovative and enthusiastic, constantly seeking change amidst a stagnant educational system.

A teacher-leader must be well planned and have a set vision and priorities and chalk out long term goals for herself. He/She must be high on energy, fueled by the thirst for learning. A transformational leader is a life-long learner. A transformational teacher-leader must grow in values and ensure an ethical behavior in all walks of life. Teacher-leadership can also bring out productive relationships among colleagues. A teacher-leader is not problem oriented

but opportunity oriented. This rules out unnecessary blame games and bickering among colleagues. Teacher leaders possess a genuine caring for their colleagues. A heartfelt desire to support the excellence of other teachers is an unselfish and visionary goal, enhanced by a spirit of love and care for their fellow humans, both children and adults. A teacher - leader must be willing to take risks and initiative and welcome challenges for her own career progression. He/ She must always aim at excellence. Teacher leaders are ignited by a common passion. These leaders understand when a potential is not being realized, and set out to develop the leadership skills to realize those possibilities. In many cases, the teachers may have been left on their own to grow and develop, without formal support or guidance and still bloom beautifully. Teacher leadership cannot be an isolated task, and one of the most important roles of the teacher leader in any pathway is to make connections with others (both teachers and other stakeholders) to strengthen their resolve and help them meet their goals. Those who lead do so not just for self-development and self-actualization; they are committed to helping others achieve their potential and take the risks that could lead to desired results. Teacher leaders also share a deep care for the teaching profession. Regardless of where they find themselves in these competencies, they share a foundational passion for teaching and a desire to improve it. A teacher-leader is

open to change, is humble to accept feedback for self-knowledge and to courageously act on it for self-growth.

B) Organisational good:

Teachers often hold the institutional memory; they are the custodians of the culture of the educational institution. As leaders, they have a very important role of carrying forward the organizational culture to generations. There is a need for strong organisational culture in educational institutions. A strong culture is characterised by the organisation's core values being intensely and widely shared. The teacher-leader creates and sustains this strong culture. Educational institutions too must shift to the concept of 'learning organisations'. Teacher-leaders can work best in learning organisations. Learning organisations are characterised by empowerment, learning flowing throughout the institution at all levels, new ideas are encouraged and mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities.

C) The challenges of dealing with students of the new millennial generation:

The new millennials generation is a generation having greater expectations, looking for versatility and flexibility. Educational sociologist Andy Furlong described Millennials as optimistic, engaged, and team players. Millennials have a can-do attitude about tasks and look for feedback about how they are doing, frequently - even daily. Millennials want a variety of tasks and

expect that they will accomplish every one of them. Positive and confident, millennials are ready to take on the world. They seek leadership, and even structure, but expect that you will draw out and respect their ideas. Millennials seek a challenge and do not want to experience boredom. They are a generation that is used to balancing many activities such as projects, study, work, friends, and philanthropic activities. They want flexibility in scheduling their life. Millennials need to see where their career is going and they want to know exactly what they need to do to get there. Millennials await their next challenge - there better be a next challenge. Millennials are the most connected generation in history. Tech-savvy, millennials are connected all over the world by email, instant messages, text messages, and the Internet. Millennials are individualistic, innovative, creative, celebrators of diversity, multi-taskers, and write their own rules. They appreciate a structured, supportive work environment with personalized assignments and interactive relationships with their supervisors. Millennials work well in a team environment and prefer to have close relationships with their supervisors to help them feel more confident and supported. Millennials may lack commitment in tasks that do not attract their interest. Millennials do value achievement and are confident in their abilities to give best results. Millennials

look to work in meaningful tasks where they can make an overall contribution to the bottom line of the organization while feeling like they are really helping them meet their overall objectives and goals.

Transformational teacher-leadership impact on the students of the new millennial:

Students of this generation are more observant than they are obedient. Observing a teacher will make them greater future leaders more than merely listening to a lecture on leadership. Instead of giving the student the task and telling them how to do it, as in transactional leadership, a teacher can explain to the students the various designated outcomes and ways to reach each and give them flexibility to choose. Instead of simply satisfying their primary need to score well, a teacher can motivate the student to move up the hierarchy of needs so as to make each activity more challenging for them.

Transformational leaders believe in their subordinates. A certain amount of trust in the students will make them feel even more driven to excel because it instills in them a sense of responsibility. Research finds that transformational behaviour augments the impact of transactional forms of leadership because followers feel trust and respect toward the leader and are motivated to do more than they are

expected to do. (Yukl, 1989) When a student sees a well-planned teacher, they are automatically motivated to plan well in advance, for they see the results of planned activities in the successes of their teacher-leaders.

Transformational leadership focuses on learning and creating an environment for learning and engaging in learning dialogues. The teacher-leader can meet these needs by incorporating student-friendly teaching-learning aids and also by taking regular feedbacks from students. A servant leader accepts the person even when one cannot accept their attitude to work. This is very important for a generation that is hungry for love and acceptance. A teacher-leader must convince the student that the undesired behaviour is detested but not the person.

A servant leader does not coerce compliance from others. A lecturer's tool for discipline is distancing. A teacher-leader's tool for disciplining is building a rapport. A teacher-leader must always have a 'can-do' attitude. This matches with the characteristics of the new millennials and makes the student believe that they can do all things with hard work and perseverance. The traditional teacher certainly inspires through motivational talks but inspiration cannot be synonymised with transformation. A teacher-leader does not simply inspire but he/she walks the talk with his/her life and perseveres to ensure that the

inspiration bears fruits of transformation. This calls for a lot of patience and sacrifice on the part of the teacher-leader. College teachers engage themselves with young adults, who are exposed to a plethora of information in the world of changing technology. They may not see the need for an instructor and thus, need to be given something what technology cannot give. This generation is constantly on a look-out for role models. This is precisely what a teacher-leader has to offer. A teacher-leader is perceived as one who shares vision and not merely as one who shares knowledge.

A teacher-leader encourages shared leadership with the students, which gives them a sense of belongingness and increases their span of interest. Shared leadership can be made possible by involving them in planning of various activities and giving them flexibility, wherever possible, in matters concerning them. Shared leadership could also be appraised through regular feedback systems like the concept of MBO (Management by Objective). Shared accountability can act as a stimulus to make the students self-disciplined and ensure transparency throughout the organisation. Students also imitate behavior when they see their teachers taking risks, extending boundaries, and stretching their capabilities. A teacher who tries new teaching models or uses new technology

in her or his classroom takes risks very publicly. However, teachers who are not complacent, but who are excited about learning and expanding their skills through managed risk-taking, provide role models for students venturing into new areas. The only thing constant in life is change. A teacher's response to change will go a long way off in determining the student's response to change when he/she faces it in the future and the realities of the world after college-life. A teacher-leader teaches through example and humility how to accept mistakes and makes quick changes.

Emotional intelligence is an indispensable tool for a transformational teacher - leader and will bear great long term results in altering the behaviour of the students of the millennials. Great leadership works through the emotions. Even if they get everything else just right, if leaders fail in this primal task of driving emotions in the right direction, nothing they will plan will work as well as it could or should. The impact of emotions goes beyond what a leader says. Even when leaders do not talk, they are watched more carefully than anyone else in the group. When people raise a question for the group as a whole, they would keep their eyes on the leader to see his/her response. Group members model their own reactions on the reactions of the leader. All the students watch the reactions of the teachers when any undesired

behaviour is displayed by one student in the class. Once they study his/her response, they model their behaviour accordingly. There must be a conscious effort on the part of the teacher-leader to respond in such a way so as to get desired responses from the students. Not all "official" leaders in a group are necessarily the emotional leaders. When the designated leader lacks credibility for some reason, people may turn for emotional guidance to someone else who they trust and respect. This de facto leader then becomes the one who moulds others' emotional reactions. This is the major reason for the growing impact of peer pressure. The teacher-leader has the power to reverse the effect of peer-pressure by exhibiting emotional intelligence. 'If you want to know why someone did something, do not ask. Analyse the person's immediate environment until you find the reward or punishment.' (Schwartz and Lacey, 1982, p. 15) To be able to change the behaviour of the students of the new generation, the teacher-leader has to first understand their behaviour. This is best done through an analysis of their environment rather than an analysis of their reactions.

CONCLUSION

In this paper the various traits of leadership are exhibited and how aptly a teacher fits in each of the traits. On the basis of the study, college teachers can be termed as transformational

teacher-leaders. A transformational teacher-leader is one who, through a shared vision, shared responsibilities and outstanding dynamism, is instrumental in taking his/her followers/students to higher levels of personal achievements, taking the organisation/college to greater educational heights and also focusing on ongoing self-improvement. It can be derived that true transformation in any country lies in the hands of its teacher-leaders who create good servant leaders in various industries.

From this study it can be understood that the term 'transformational teacher-leader' holds great relevance for college teachers who deal with the dynamic new millennials. Data collected through observation and secondary data analysis helps the reader to see how transformational teacher-leadership can be used as an effective tool to alter the behavior of the millennials.

It is hence concluded that there must be a change in the way a teacher is perceived -No longer simply as a lecturer but rather as a transformational teacher-leader! The study shows that this change in perception can bring about self-development of the teacher-leader, a strong organizational culture and a positive impact on the millennials generation of college students.

Like servant leadership, transformational teacher-leadership is not a quick-fix; it is

a way of life. This concept offers great powers to those who are open to its challenge. 'The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.' - Ralph Nadar.

No one can do this better than a transformational teacher-leader!

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