

Bass' transformational leadership theory

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership provides a framework and foundation for managers and leaders in human services organization to develop a contemporary approach relative to the roles, relationships, and resource capacities that drive their professional positions and sustain the respective institutions. In fact, there is quite a bit of scholarly research extolling the benefits of such a leadership style.

Interestingly, leadership theories much like any other epistemological debate have evolved over time in alignment with the variant demographic, economic, technological, political-legal, and social-cultural environments that dictate trends and alterations in research methods and practice. Hence, this paper will analyze some of the empirical research studies that have been utilized to test and validate Bass' Theory and it will also point towards embracing a blended approach in future theoretical application.

Strategic management represents a significant part of an organization's lifeline to growth, success, and prevalence. In the global world of changing economic conditions, heightened levels of competition, and rapid technological change, organizations must always be ready and positioned to be innovative and adaptable. This is especially true in the nonprofit sector where not only do the aforementioned marketplace characteristics prevail, but where there is also the existence of legal, regulatory, and pressing trends that beckon higher social responsibility upon these public benefactors.

Ultimately, strategic management can only come from the leaders and managers of the organization itself. Given this reality, studying what defines

leadership and what theoretical constructs pave the way for adopting effective strategies and approaches for strategic nonprofit management can yield to targeted interventions in designing and implementing key policies and understanding into the facets of leadership styles that are conducive to a dynamic marketplace. Truly, as Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe contends in Torquato Tasso, Act I, sc. (1790) that “ a great person attracts great people and knows how to hold them together” (“ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,” 2010). In positioning itself with this declaration, Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership is one prevalent theory that offers a theoretical future for strategic nonprofit management methodologies. Historical Development of Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership The concept of leadership has been around for centuries and yet it is still evolving in ideology and application.

Transformational leadership, explicitly, is a notion of leadership that is applicable in organizational management and its theoretical formulation began in the early 1900s with the “ great man” theories (Coz, 2007). Through the commencement of study into leadership theory during this time frame, it was initially believed that great leaders coincided with the political, financial, military, or social elites (Cox, 2007). Also, the great man theory coincided with “ Aristotelian philosophy” which suggested that leaders had the innate ability to lead others (Marquis & Huston, 2008, p. 7). Throughout the 30s, 40s, and 50s, charismatic and innovative leadership definitions emerged from the elitist and oftentimes sexist associations to one that paralleled group and trait theory implying that a transformational leader has the power to lead others by sake of inherent trait characteristics (Cox, 2007).

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Max Weber in 1947 pioneered a model of transactional and transformational leadership that integrated charismatic, bureaucratic, and traditionalistic principles (Boje, 2000). Weber's focus was on leaders' wielding of legitimacy in their pursuit of power and influence.

Essentially, Weber was inductive in his approach to ascertain how legitimacy was authenticated in leadership roles and he observed it combined a blend of bureaucratic, traditional, and charismatic authority with " gradual transitions between these types of leadership and authority systems" (Boje, 2000, p. 3). Altogether, these years formulated the roots and foundation into the study of leadership. During the 60s and 70s, behavioral theory and contingency theory materialized as prominent theories of leadership (Cox, 2007).

Behavioral theory departed from trait theory in that it assumed leaders could be made instead of born with inherent leadership capabilities. Contingency theory also believed that effective leadership was situational. However, this theory became very difficult to research and measure in practice considering the difficulty in matching which particular behavior patterns would consistently result in effective leadership " in specific contexts or situations" (Cox, 2007, p. 9).

Hence, these years furthered the path in a continuum of evolving leadership ideas to establish the goal of leadership as indicative of transforming people and organizations in a literal, practical approach to achieve success. Combined, this compilation of traits, behavioral patterns, innovative strategy, knowledge integration, and diversity practices continue to enrich

an understanding of leadership. The actual term “ transformational leadership” had its etymological birth by J. V. Downton in 1973 as specified in his book, *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in a Revolutionary Process* (Cox, 2007). Just five years later, James MacGregor Burns introduced his concept of transformational leadership in his book, *Leadership*. Burns was influenced by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model in ascertaining how individuals are motivated by leaders; this transcended previous scholars' “ power” leadership thinking (Boje, 2000, & Cox, 2007).

Overall, Burns is well-known in the academic world for advancing a model of leadership that encompassed a moral dimension and, likewise, integrated how leadership equates to environmentally achieving goals and bringing dynamic change. To exemplify, Burns' emphasis on the moral leader as pivotal to his rationale for transformational leadership and as brought into unification with Maslow claims the leader always emerges and returns to the “ fundamental wants, needs, aspirations, and values of the followers” (Boje, 2000, p.). This clearly separated Burns from Weber's view of leadership and permitted a flow of leadership that embodies liberty, justice, equality, and collectivist well-being values (Boje, 2000). Bass came to the forefront in 1985 as a disciple of Burns expanding on his perspective of transformational leadership. Bass' theory of transformational leadership defines leadership as how it affects the followers.

This is similar in nature to the moral ideology of Burns but ascribes the nature of a transformational leader as one who revolutionizes not only the organization, but also the followers in their execution of tasks and alignment

with the organizational vision as opposed to pursuing their own personal fulfillment (Hay, n. d.). Ultimately, Bass integrates four components into his theory of a transformational leader: charisma or idealized influencer, inspirational motivator, intellectual stimulator, and one who respects and cultivates individualized talents and contributions (Cox, 2007).

According to Homrig (2001), Bass's theory of transformational leadership is paramount in strategic organizational management considering its theoretical focal notion that collaboration between leader and follower happens in a manner that develops and shares an inspiring image of the organization's future resulting in the development of a powerful, meaningful environment for leadership effectiveness and success. Philosophical Assumptions of Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership Theories provide opportunities to bring insights and scientific knowledge into the social world.

Specifically, they serve " to explain and predict" (Disch, 2010). As a result, every theory is foundationally undergirded in philosophical assumptions that form its paradigmatic structure. The epistemology of Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership, or the characteristics of knowledge that socially construct and define it, asserts that transformational leaders possess the ability to garner trust and respect from their followers in a focused and motivated manner to achieve the organizational objectives (Cherry, 2010).

Ontologically, the theory assumes a positive correlation between transformational organizational leadership and follower attitudes, behaviors, and performance which posits a social reality in which collaboration between

leader and follower occurs in a harmonious blend (Li & Hung, 2009). Related to an axiological stance, it can be seen that the theory's value system encourages a leader and follower exchange in which the needs of the followers are transcended to a higher collective purpose, i. e. , the organization's mission.

In this regard, the leader abandons a self-interest pursuit for the good of the organization and this is accomplished by instilling a “ shared vision” (Hay, n. d.). Therefore, the methodological postulations used to approach and validate Bass' theory from a scientific standpoint incorporate Bass' Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The MLQ is an instrument “ intended to measure transformational and transactional leadership behaviors” and it has “ emerged as the primary means of quantitatively assessing transformational leadership” (Hay, n. d. , p. 5). It has been utilized in innumerable research studies related to military, educational, and commercial organizational strategic management and the outcome derived from the studies indicates that transformational leadership incorporates Bass' four precepts of idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Hay, n. d.). Thus, these assumptions holistically comprise the theory's foundation.

Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership & Strategic Nonprofit

Management The goal of Bass' theory of transformational leadership is to perpetuate momentum-building leadership that permits an organization to evolve through dynamic economic environments. Therefore, the scope and problem areas addressed by Bass' theory look at how the influence of

transformational leadership affects workplace relationships, job performance, and achievement of organizational objectives.

It is pointed out by Li and Hung (2009) that members in a transformational leadership context interact in a manner that fosters identification, trust, support, and encouragement in the relationship between leader and member. This results in a workplace environment that embraces diversity and an inclusion of innovative strategic management with knowledge integration amongst the leader-member exchange. This type of leadership is necessary in the nonprofit sector where volunteerism represents a majority of the human capital (Pegram, Booth, & McBurney, 2003).

Essentially, the past ways of doing business and leading people will not work and operate effectively in today's marketplace. Hence, Bass' theory offers a solution to stagnant leadership styles and urges an adoption of an adaptive, integrative approach where the leader is a vibrant participant in motivating staff performance to achieve organizational strategies and directives. This ultimately provides a fertile breeding ground for components of effective and strategic nonprofit management and leads the way for greater research processes and intervention strategies in the field of nonprofit management.

Intervention Strategies & Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership

Intervention strategies as influenced by Bass' theory are dictated by how members in an organization observe the leader as possessing the characteristics of a transformational leader. Pointedly, as aforementioned, the scope of the theory focuses on the ability of leaders to foster creativity,

bolster supportive relationships, develop a shared vision and commitment to the organization, and lead by example (Cherry, 2010, & Hay, n. d.).

Empirical results, according to Li and Hung (2009), affirm this intervention that the greater the actualization of a transformational leader is perceived, the greater the leader-member relationship. Therefore, perception is the buzz word for intervention strategies. Overall, the intervention strategies rest in certain conditions being met. First of all, " leaders must inspirationally motivate employees by clearly articulating an appealing vision of the organization's mission and future" (Wright & Pandey, 2010, p. 76).

Secondly, the transformational leader must then be able to encourage and facilitate an environment in which followers strive towards that ideal and this is correlated to the leaders' influence of being an active participant towards that end with the organizational followers (Wright & Pandey, 2010). Thirdly, transformational leaders must stimulate their followers to break out into the innovation box or urge them to challenge old assumptions and ways of doing things to continually revolutionize the organization to meet the dynamic marketplace conditions (Wright & Pandey, 2010).

Thus, the conclusions and recommendations derived from this theory indicate that developing and maintaining astute relations between leader-member align positively and correlate to better task performance as well as enhanced organizational commitment. Effectiveness is a continuous process in intervention techniques as these strategies balance the needs of the organizations against the roles and responsibilities of the workforce necessary to achieve organizational efficacy and future relevance.

Philosophical Paradigm of Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership

Philosophical paradigms and assumptions unfold into research science.

In fact, each paradigmatic structure beckons an epistemological commitment to an assured foundation for analytical application into observing phenomena. Illustratively, social constructivism as an interpretive epistemology is a unique philosophical model and Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership develops a layer of foundational tenets in design and approach that undergird this epistemological lens which ultimately drives the systematic process of building and validating scientific knowledge about phenomena.

It is believed that social constructivism parallels this theoretical construct due to its paradigmatic worldview that lived experiences and social reality occur in individuals' natural settings and knowledge is gained through understanding the meaning of the experience (Simon, 2001). Furthermore, the philosophical distinction apparent in social constructivism asserts that change is an inevitable process "around us, between us, within us" and this fundamental tenet is structured in relationships which derives its epistemological application to Bass' theory (Cottone, 2007, p. 94).

Thus, reality and knowledge comes from dynamic interpersonal consensual relationships (Cottone, 2007). Given the above proposition of the alignment between social constructivist research philosophy and Bass' theory, its major theoretical tenets can certainly be linked to the epistemological paradigm. To begin, the ontological assumptions of philosophical paradigms question the fundamental nature of social reality and human beings. As a social

constructivist, reality is based on the notion that there are multiple realities constructed by individuals.

In essence, “ meaning given to experience is coconstructed through human relationships and communicative interactions” (Armour, 2002, p. 373). This is positively linked to Bass' ontological presupposition that leadership principles must be dynamic given the various trends that affect organizational environments and the “ social reality” that leadership styles must equally be empowering and progressive with respect to the individualized roles apparent in the organizational culture to develop meaning and value (Homrig, 2001).

The axiological perspective of a paradigm regards the nature of values in the scientific research process. Basically, the social constructivist researcher takes an active part in interpreting the individual's experience in a mutually inclusive manner which supports a certain reflexivity in the strategic process (Armour, 2002).

In a similar fashion, Bass' theory premises its value system on “ the positive association between transformational leadership and follower attitudes, behaviors, and performance” (Li & Hung, 2009, p. 1129). Subsequently, methodological premises come into play as to how the epistemological paradigm and major principles of the theory are married to build reliable practice knowledge in the field of human service organizational management.

To demonstrate, social constructivism theory utilizes a qualitatively based approach such as phenomenology, case study, observation, and grounded theory. Interestingly, Bass' theory uses a quantitative approach, the Multi-factor Questionnaire (MLQ), but doesn't limit itself to this traditional empirical study as there is an aspect of phenomenology and case study that have been integrated and tested by research studies.