Exploring Transformational and Pseudo-Transformational Leadership

With Three Leader Examples

Abstract

Are Gandhi and Hitler both transformational leaders? Pseudo-transformational leaders impact

followers in much the same way as transformational leaders but with different motives,

behaviors, and outcomes (Christi, Barling, & Turner). This classroom activity uses examples of

three diverse leaders from the United States, India, and Kenya and asks students to evaluate each

as either a transformational or a pseudo-transformational leader. Session participants will engage

in the student activity and receive all the materials to use the activity in their classes. Students

who have participated in this activity have been able to clearly differentiate transformational

from pseudo-transformational leader behaviors.

Keywords: Leadership, Transformational, Pseudo-transformational

Introduction

This session will engage participants in exploration of three leader examples that provide a contrast between pseudo-transformational and transformational approaches to organizational leadership.

When teaching the Transformational Leadership theory, there are always examples of leaders who are visionary and transformational but in a way that promotes a negative vision that is self-serving and autocratic (e.g. Hitler). In today's environment, it is even more important to develop student understanding of this kind of leadership from a theoretical and research-grounded approach. This activity provides an excellent contrast between transformational and pseudo-transformational leadership by exploring three leader examples in the organizational context using current research as a guiding lens.

This activity has been used in undergraduate leadership classes and would be appropriate for other classes, both graduate and undergraduate, in online, hybrid, and face-to-face class settings.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Transformational leadership is a foundational theory, yet very little comparison is done between current leaders who are transformational but unethical. To explain and explore the idea of a leader who is transforming but in a negative way, Bass introduced the term "pseudo-transformational leadership" (Bass, 1998). Further research provided more specific differentiating behaviors between these approaches.

Transformational leadership is defined as leadership that inspires others to internalize a vision of the future that appeals to their values (Burns, 1978). Bass and Avolio further identified behaviors associated with this inspirational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Pseudo-transformational leaders use these behaviors to inspire a vision that serves their own interests. They are self-absorbed, often narcistic, and use exploitation and power to urge others to follow their lead. Their actions focus on their own self-oriented benefit and not for the benefit of others.

Understanding the difference between these two approaches is increasingly important. More leaders are attempting to motivate followers through fear, lying and threatening to get their vision adopted, while all along the motive is to serve the leader at the expense of the greater good. This activity provides students an opportunity to reflect on the difference and how subtle it can be. The example of Hitler seems obvious; the examples in today's world are much more insidious.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this activity students will:

1. Have a greater understanding of the Transformational Leadership Model

2. Be able to differentiate Transformational from Pseudo-transformational leadership

3. Have the ability to apply these models to current organizational leaders

Exercise Overview

- **Introduction**: The activity involves comparing and contrasting three leaders using the

  Transformational Leadership Model, including the conceptualization of pseudo-

  transformational leadership. This includes providing the following:

  - An overview of the Transformational Leadership Model

  - Defining Pseudo-transformational Leadership

- **Introducing the three leaders:**

  - **Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy, Founder and CEO of Aravind Eye**

    Hospitals

  - **Adam Neumann, Founder and former CEO of WeWork**

  - **Dr. Wangari Maathai, Founder and leader of the Greenbelt Movement**

- **Pre-session preparation:** To prepare for the activity, students read two online articles

  and review one online website about the three leaders.

  - Overview of Aravind Eye Hospitals and Dr. Venkataswamy's

    vision: https://www.insightnews.com.au/how-mcdonalds-inspired-the-success-of-

    an-extraordinary-eye-hospital/

  - Overview of We Work and Adam Neumann's evolution as a leader:

    https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/02/business/adam-neumann-wework-exit-

    package.html

  - Website providing an overview of the Greenbelt Movement and Dr. Maathai's

    vision: https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai

- **Activity:**
  - Show four videos so students can see the leaders in action (20 minutes total video time).
  - Assign students to breakout groups so that there are the same number of groups assigned to each leader. This could be only 3 breakout groups, but for a large class, there could be 6 or 9 breakout groups.
  - Each breakout group is assigned one of the three leaders. A 10-minute discussion answers the following discussion questions about the leader the group is assigned:
    - Discuss whether this leader is transformational or pseudo-transformational.
    - What behaviors does the leader engage in that are transformational?
    - What behaviors does the leader engage in that are pseudo-transformational?
  - A large-group discussion will include reports from each breakout group regarding their conclusions related to transformational and pseudo-transformational behaviors.
  - The concluding discussion will focus on the consequences of both transformational and pseudo-transformational approaches.
    - Ask for other examples of both types of leaders.
    - Ask for how people can challenge pseudo-transformational leaders to reduce their influence.
    - Ask how people can support transformational leaders to achieve their vision that benefits the greater good.

- Potential to integrate concepts of Servant Leadership, Altruism, and Ethical Leadership.

Session Description (60 minutes)

- **Introduction** (5 minutes): Provide theoretical background and rationale for activity, including learning objectives.

- **Brief introduction of each of the three leaders** (10-25 minutes): We have three web-based articles and four videos to provide more in-depth information on the leaders. We could provide the videos ahead of time, but then there is some risk that people will not attend because they did not have time to watch the videos, or that people will attend and not be able to engage fully if they did not watch the videos. The preference is to show the videos during the session.

- **Breakout groups** (10 minutes): Each breakout group will be assigned one of the three leaders with the following discussion questions:
  - Discuss whether this leader is transformational or pseudo-transformational.
  - What behaviors does the leader engage in that are transformational?
  - What behaviors does the leader engage in that are pseudo-transformational?

- Large group discussion (15 minutes):
  - Each breakout group will share their conclusion regarding the leader as transformational or pseudo-transformational, providing examples of behaviors consistent with their conclusion.

- o This will provide an opportunity to compare and contrast the three leaders in terms of transformational and pseudo-transformational leadership.

- o Ask for other examples of transformational and pseudo-transformational leaders in society today.

- Conclusion (5 minutes): Key take-aways of the session.

References

Bass, B.M. 1998. The ethics of transformational leadership. In J. Ciulla (Ed.), *Ethics: The heart of leadership* (169-192). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Bass, B.M. & Avolio, B.J. 1993. Transformational leadership: A response to critiques. In M.M. Chemers & R. Ayman (Eds.), Leadership theory and research: Perspectives and directions (49-80). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Burns, J.M. 1978. *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.

Christi, Barling, & Turner. 2011. Pseudo-transformational leadership: Model specifications and outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *44*, 12:2943-2984.

Appendices

Transformational vs Pseudo-Transformational Leaders Exercise Overview

Description:

This activity engages students in an analysis of three diverse leaders who provide a contrast

between pseudo-transformational and transformational approaches to organizational leadership.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this activity students will:

1. Have a greater understanding of the Transformational Leadership Model

2. Be able to compare and contrast Transformational from Pseudo-transformational

   leadership

3. Be able to apply these models to current organizational leaders

Timing: 50-90 minutes

Materials:

   a. Article and videos describing each leader

   b. Handout of the comparison checklist

Class size:

Any size broken up into multiples of 3 groups (one for each of the three leaders). Assign

students to breakout groups so that there are the same number of groups assigned to each leader.

This could be only 3 breakout groups, but for a large class, there could be 6 or 9 breakout groups

<u>Steps:</u>

1. Assign students to read about each leader prior to class

2. Lecture on the differences between transformational and pseudo-transformational leadership (10 minutes or in previous class)

3. Show videos of each leader (20 minutes or before class)

4. Break into group to discuss each leader:

    a. Each breakout group is assigned one of the three leaders for a 10-minute discussion.

        i. Discuss whether this leader is transformational or pseudo-transformational.

        ii. Complete the transformational vs pseudo-transformational comparison checklist

            1. What behaviors does the leader engage in that are transformational?

            2. What behaviors does the leader engage in that are pseudo-transformational?

5. A large-group discussion will include reports from each breakout group regarding their conclusions related to transformational and pseudo-transformational behaviors. (10 minutes)

6. The concluding discussion will focus on the consequences of both transformational and pseudo-transformational approaches. (15 minutes)

        i. What other examples of both types of leaders can you identify?

ii. How can people challenge pseudo-transformational leaders to reduce their influence?

iii. How can people support transformational leaders to achieve their vision that benefits the greater good?

iv. How does transformational leadership compare to other approaches to leadership such as Servant Leadership, Altruism, and Ethical Leadership?

Materials:

Adam Neumann and WeWork

- Article: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/02/business/adam-neumann-wework-exit-package.html

- Interview video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOb_ogQJWeI

- Bloomberg reporters on WeWork fall: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2LwIiKhczo

- WeWork Employee perspective: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tj25cD9m-zQ

Dr. V and Aravind Eye Hospitals

- Article: https://www.insightnews.com.au/how-mcdonalds-inspired-the-success-of-an-extraordinary-eye-hospital/

- https://www.hbs.edu/forum-for-growth-and-innovation/blog/Pages/default.aspx?post=51

- https://crstoday.com/articles/2006-sep/crst0906_05-html/

- Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cjnNPua7Ag&feature=related

Wangari Maathai

- Greenbelt Movement website: https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai

- Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koMunNH1J3Y

Transformational vs Pseudo-Transformational Leaders

Leader Name: _____

Check the box next to the leadership characteristic that best describes your assigned leader.

		Transformation		Pseudo-transformational
	X		X	
Idealized influence		Create visions that are based on the collective good and align the values and aspirations of followers Examples:		Create visions that are driven by self-interest and exclude the best interests of followers Examples:
Inspirational motivation		Influence followers to envision and work toward future goals by expressing a clear vision of the future Examples:		Influence followers to envision and work toward future goals by expressing a vague vision of the future, often through deception Examples:
Intellectual stimulation		Encourage followers to examine problems in different ways, think critically, and find creative solutions Examples:		Discourage opposing viewpoints, independent thought, and critiques from followers, often through punishment Examples:
Individualized consideration		Consider the individual needs of followers, acting as a coach or a mentor Examples:		Exploit followers, using them as a means to an end Examples:

Source: Adapted from Christi, Barling, & Turner (2011). p. 2949.