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Transformational Leadership Theory
and Cultural Feminist Theory:
Examining and Assessing the Value Of Incorporating
Transformational Leadership in the Leadership Style of Both
Women and Men Who Are
Leaders of Nonprofit Organizations

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Transformational leadership theory and cultural feminist theory:

Examining and assessing the value of incorporating transformational leadership in the

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by:

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Background

Transformational leadership and cultural feminist theories share similarities that make them important to organizations and to society. Kark (2004) points out that both transformational leadership theory and cultural feminist theory use the status quo as the foundation from which to create change in organizations and to effect reform in society.

Change is difficult but is often necessary in order for an organization to continue moving forward. Change (or transformation) can be a mandatory, calculated effort that is undertaken in order for an organization to survive. Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012) describe transformations as extreme and revolutionary. Bass (1985) points out that, in order to effect change, certain components are important -- and necessary -- including: inspirational leadership, inclusionary participation, individualized attention, confidence and vision. These attributes are among those that can be found in advocates of cultural feminism and practitioners of transformational leadership.

This paper begins with a discussion of early Greek philosophers on emerging leadership concepts and their view of male-female roles. That historical introduction is followed by a discussion of women in professional settings and the implications associated with practicing transformational leadership. The discussion also compares the characteristics associated with cultural feminist theory and transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership style is a good fit in the management of nonprofit organizations, so discussion follows about nonprofit organizations, their place in society, their impact, and how transformational leadership can be used to advance their missions. The value of incorporating transformational leadership in the style of both men and women who lead nonprofit groups is assessed.

Definitions

Throughout this discussion the following three theories are addressed:

Cultural Feminist Theory. This theory builds from the foundation of feminist theory that acknowledges the belief that women and men are equal in all aspects: economically, politically and socially. Cultural feminist theory recognizes the biologic and personality differences between the sexes. Cultural feminist theory also acknowledges that modern society is disadvantaged and damaged by traits of masculine behavior, and it recognizes how society could benefit by encouraging feminine behavior. The cultural feminist is sympathetic to and aligned with issues surrounding the equality of both women and men. The cultural feminist believes that society will improve when behavior reflects true equality.

Transactional Leadership Theory. This theory (also known as managerial leadership) is based on the traditional top-down definition of supervisor-subordinate role responsibilities (Leaders, 2008). Through a kind of give-and-take exchange or 'transaction,' the supervisor meets the needs and wants of the subordinate (salary, benefits and promotions) in exchange for the subordinate's compliance, action and performance. Transformational leadership theory builds on common elements it shares with transactional leadership.

Transformational Leadership Theory. This theory recognizes the ability of leaders and their followers to 'not just meet, but exceed' performance expectations. Transformational leadership is a catalyst for creating positive and valuable change in individuals, in organizations and in society. 'Outside-the-box' thinking, visioning and mentoring are traits common in transformational leaders.

A Bit of History

In the fourth century BCE, the Greek philosopher, Plato (427-348 BCE), introduced three leadership theories, the genesis of which were the actions and the teachings of his mentor, Socrates (470-399 BCE). Plato called the leadership theories The Rule of Reason, The Rule of Desire and The Rule of Spirit, and he discussed them in his work, *The Republic*. Plato's student and mentee, Aristotle (384-322 BCE) believed his mentor's views were as impractical as they were overly ideological. So, Aristotle used his work titled *The Politics* to advance his own opinions. One of his views held that the role of the female was to be deferential to and ruled by the male. Aristotle's 'King of the Castle' mindset included the belief that women were chattel – just like the other property the male owned. Years later, Aristotle developed the Golden Mean, in which he attempted to moderate his earlier opinion regarding the female's role. In the Golden Mean, Aristotle's new view was of a maternal and loving woman who was a wife and mother (Ronald, 2014).

In western culture today, some twenty-five hundred years later, Aristotle's notion of male superiority and female subservience is, for most, a mere memory.

Implications of Transformational Leadership Theory Practiced by Women
in Professional Environments

In his research, Kark (2004) found that women in management positions use a style of leadership that is more inclusive, more open and which encourages co-worker engagement. Rohmann and Rowold (2009) concur and point out that female leaders show concern for the well-being of their followers and the goals of their followers. The care and concern female leaders display, coupled with their commitment to 'going the extra mile,' is returned by

their subordinates. For example, followers of a transformational leader are more willing to put forth extra work effort to complete a special project or meet a looming deadline.

Transformational leadership is reciprocal. It is a special relationship between the leader and the follower that has the ability to cause change – or transformation – within each person and within their respective environments (like work and home). Transformational leadership also can transform society (Bailey, 2001).

An example of a transformational opportunity is the office brainstorming session. In addition to generating good ideas and beginning the process of 'buy-in' or taking ownership, there is another, more subtle, value. Much like the cultural feminist theory espouses, the brainstorming process is a great equalizer: it puts all participants of the team on an equal footing. In a brainstorming session, there is no 'pecking order' about who is at the head of the conference table and who is not. It does not matter whether the accounting assistant sits next to the receptionist who sits next to the vice president who sits next to the computer technician. Brainstorming is a valuable technique used by savvy leaders to reach out to followers and create an environment that encourages non-traditional, unbounded, positive thinking. It is a conduit to build positive relationships among the members of the team, and between the team leader and the team members. There are a number of transformational opportunities in nonprofit organizations in addition to brainstorming sessions. Those opportunities include annual planning sessions of the board of directors, annual planning sessions of committees, and planning sessions for events and programs.

Kark (2014) further acknowledges the value of transformational leadership, because it points to positive relationships and it increases effectiveness. Successful women – whether they are in business, government, academia or nonprofit organizations -- have learned from education and experience that their leadership styles work. The reason their leadership styles are effective is because women make the effort to integrate the principles of cultural feminism and transformational leadership and to use those styles in their work environments.

Transformational leaders work to ensure that their interactions are positive, that their power is shared, that their followers have the opportunity to contribute, and that those followers are acknowledged for their contributions (Rosener, 1990).

Cultural Feminist Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory: A Comparison

Cultural Feminist Theory

Feminism came about because for centuries women have been outsiders, excluded from a predominantly male-centric world. Business, government, sports, academia, finance, religion, politics, even nonprofit clubs and

organizations have shut out women at one time or another. For a very long time, women have been knocking at the doors of the 'good-old-boys clubs,' seeking not just recognition, but demanding inclusion and positions of leadership.

As a subset of feminist theory, cultural feminist theory addresses the inequalities between women and men, and it advocates for a female-male equilibrium (Ponzanisi, 2007). Ermarth (2000) believes feminism is defined as women who treat each other with respect (p. 113). Further, she acknowledges that men can (and do) sympathize with the equality challenges that women face, such as equal pay for equal work. Ermarth believes 'good-old-boys clubs' continue to exploit women by encouraging them to participate in society by doing things that have, in the past, been female gender-traditional, like volunteer work instead of working as business leaders.

Cultural feminist theory (see Table 1) advocates that, in recognizing the special qualities of women, sexism can be overcome. Cultural feminist theory embraces the concept that the world of women is special because of their values and virtues. It is through those values and virtues that cultural feminism should be more than mere lip-service. Cultural feminism should be recognized and accepted, and it should be celebrated (Alcoff, 1988).

In a letter to her husband, John, who would eventually become the second United States President, Abigail Smith Adams urged him and the members of the Continental Congress to "Remember the Ladies. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands" (State Department, 2008). The future First Lady's letter, written in 1776, is said to be the first written call for equality in the history of the United States.

Almost two hundred fifty years after Abigail Adams penned her plea, western society continues to seek out common ground in order to further level the equality playing field.

The Cultural Feminist

The descriptive word (or title) of 'feminist' is not a moniker used to exclusively identify women. Women's issues, women's rights, women's status, and equality are of interest to both women and men. In fact, in 1837 it was Charles Fourier, a French socialist and an early supporter of women's freedoms, who initially defined and used the term 'féminisme' (New World, 2015). Fourier used the word 'féminisme' to describe individuals who are sympathetic to or aligned with issues surrounding women's equality. 'Féminisme' translates from French to the English word 'feminist.' So, men as well as women can be feminists.

Cultural feminists (see Table 1) are variously described as open minded, intelligent, independent, and career focused, but they are also described as radical, angry, opinionated, rigid, bra-burning women's libbers

(Alexander and Ryan, 1997). So, that raises the question: What is it that feminists really want? Stivers (2008) answers: "Feminists don't just want a place at the table, we want to join with others in making a new table" (p. 387).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformation is the process of causing change in individuals, in organizations and in society. Transformational leadership, (see Table 1) then, is the ability of leaders to motivate people and, by extension, to create change in other individuals, in organizations, and in society (Huang, 1993). Transformational leadership also creates change in leaders.

Bringing about change in society is the reason that most nonprofit organizations exist (Drucker, 1990). There are many ways to effect change -- or transformation -- within organizations. As employers, nonprofit organizations can be an important factor in the career advancement of women. This is especially true of key professional positions like director of membership, director of communications, lobbyist, in-house counsel, and executive director.

Because they work to answer many societal issues, nonprofit organizations are not as driven by 'the bottom line' as are their for-profit corporate cousins. Rather, nonprofit organizations are motivated to work for the 'greater good,' filling the needs of society. So, that is a reason nonprofit organizations are more likely to have positive work environments that are more 'employee-friendly' (Mastracci and Herring, 2010).

Transformation can occur on a personal, professional level. An example is the lobbyist who works closely with the leaders of the nonprofit group that advocates for a particular cause. Over time, through observation and by participation, the lobbyist is transformed by gaining knowledge about management of nonprofit organizations. Through 'on-the-job-training,' the lobbyist has learned to handle the operational and organizational functions. The lobbyist has become qualified to fill the nonprofit's top staff position when the executive director moves on.

The Transformational Leader

Transformational leaders (see Table 1) have vision, charisma and the ability to inspire and motivate people. They are energetic and enthusiastic. They view obstacles and difficulties not as problems but as opportunities to cultivate and as challenges to meet (and exceed). Transformational leaders continually seek out and identify opportunities that help their followers grow professionally and personally. Transformational leaders also actively create opportunities for their followers.

Transformational leaders are coaches and motivators. They encourage their followers not only to perform but to perform optimally. Transformational leaders empower followers by helping them improve their skills and talents. Transformational leaders are outside-the-box thinkers who inspire those around them (Tschirhart and Bielefeld, 2012). Transformational leaders tend to have a global view, meaning that they see 'the big picture.' Transformational leaders also have the ability to communicate that global vision and create 'buy-in,' thereby instilling a sense of ownership in the people working with them.

The transformational leader is a person who understands the value of synergy and uses it to create 'special teams' by bringing together followers with specific organizational skills to address a particular issue. Once the team is in place, the transformational leader begins by describing the assignment, "Our challenge is to build a bridge across the river. Let us all sit down and figure out our plan." This approach opens the door to discussion which creates buy-in and instills ownership of the project by each individual team member as well as the team as a whole. Then the transformational leader steps back, enabling the team (as a unit) to address the assignment, develop strategies, and produce a recommended plan of action. It is at this point that the role of the transformational leader becomes one of an advisor, a coach and a cheerleader, available to suggest and guide while functioning as a 'safety-net' should the team encounter unanticipated challenges.

Managerially, the method of operation that transformational leaders use is to reach out, encourage, coach and suggest rather than use the more aggressive reward-punish transactional approach of issuing directives or orders to employees. Transformational leaders are energetic, charismatic, flexible and empathetic change agents. Their style is to create emotional and relationship bonds, build confidence and craft an environment of collaboration.

Transformational leaders empower and challenge their teams not merely to succeed but to surpass performance expectations. These leaders are accessible, open, and they treat their fellow workers with respect. Transformational leaders instill pride and loyalty. They motivate their teams not just to do an adequate job; they motivate their teams to do an outstanding job.

Identified behaviors that are common among transformational leaders include having and sharing a vision, being a standard-bearer, having the ability to integrate, and being a developer (Bottomley, Burgess and Fox, 2014).

The Value of Incorporating Transformational Leadership into the Leadership Style

of Both Women and Men Who are Nonprofit Organization Leaders

Transformational Leadership Styles of Women and Men

Do transformational leadership styles of women and men differ? A study by Carless (1998) found that women's leadership style tended more toward that of transformational while men's leadership style tended toward transactional, or a combination of transactional and transformational.

Reuvers, van Engen, Vinkenburg and Wilson-Evered (2008) recommend that organizations must ensure their leaders are demonstrating that style. Wolfram and Gratton (2014) concur and recommend that both women and men leaders use career management programs to enhance their management abilities and their leadership skills. Reuvers et al (2008) went on to suggest that, as organizations recruit new management talent, their employee orientations should include specific training on transformational leadership behavior and how to use those skills effectively within the organization.

Transformational Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations

Causing change that results in societal transformation creates self-satisfaction. That is why there are so many people interested in the work of nonprofit organizations around the world.

In order to understand the complexities of nonprofit organizations, it is helpful to recognize that for-profit corporations such as Microsoft, Toyota, General Electric and Wal-Mart exist to provide products and services that result in a revenue stream that produces a profitable bottom line. Also, for-profit corporations rely almost exclusively on their paid employees and paid contractors to accomplish their goals.

On the other hand, the mission of nonprofit organizations is to improve quality of life. This distinction of missions is important, because it crystalizes why transformational leadership is applicable in the operations and management of nonprofit groups. A sample of nonprofit organizations working to improve quality of life include:

Charities. Charities such as the YMCA work to bring about lasting personal and social change (YMCA, 2015)

Charitable Foundations. Charitable foundations such as the Ford Foundation that support visionary leaders and organizations on the frontlines of social change worldwide (Ford, 2015)

Business Leagues. Business leagues such as the American Bar Association that defend liberty and deliver justice as the national representative of the legal profession (ABA, 2015)

Fraternal Organizations. Fraternal organizations include civic clubs like the Rotary Club that work to advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace (Rotary, 2015)

To accomplish their goals, nonprofit organizations use a combination of volunteers and paid staff (see Table 2A). There are two primary reasons why nonprofit groups integrate paid staff members with volunteers. First, the nonprofit organization can accomplish more when it augments paid staff with volunteer help. Second, using volunteers increases the visibility of the nonprofit within the community.

Opportunities for transformational leadership can be found in most nonprofit groups, particularly those organizations that operate on very limited budgets and those that have a small number of staff members. For example, a small town Chamber of Commerce or a local crisis center may need to find additional sources of revenue to keep its doors open. A solution might be a fund raising event. However, with a total of one or possibly two staff members who are already overloaded with other administrative duties, the only way a fund raising event will happen is if volunteers step forward. This scenario is ideal for the organization's transformational executive director, chairman/chairwoman of the board, or committee chair who has the ability to build a team of volunteers, outline the situation, share the vision of the project, and then step back and enable the team to work through the process.

Transformational leadership does not stop at the event or the committee level. Nonprofit organizations are governed by boards of directors and are populated by committee members from throughout the community or region (see Table 2B). They volunteer their time and talent with the selfless intent of making a difference inside and outside of their communities by improving quality of life

Results of Nonprofit Organizations Embracing Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership can be identified at every level in nonprofit organizations: paid staff as well as volunteers. The organizational structure of a nonprofit begins with its members. Those that lead nonprofit organizations are staff members and volunteers. Working with volunteers is much like working with a corporate project team, because, in the nonprofit sector, committees are composed of volunteers who are ready, willing and able to address the tasks of the organization. The difference between for-profit corporate project team members and nonprofit organization volunteers is that corporate employees get paid for their time and for the value that their efforts bring to the corporation. In contrast, although the efforts of volunteers also bring value to the nonprofit organization, volunteers are not paid for their efforts. Nonprofit organization leaders understand that the volunteers who sit around the meeting table are there by choice. Volunteers engage because they choose to engage. If volunteers believe they are treated poorly, they will simply not show up at the next meeting, or the next, or the next. Their absence is a loss for the nonprofit organization.

Transformational leadership is a key component of the culture of the nonprofit organization. Leaders that deploy the concepts of transformation will find their organization staff and volunteers energized and actively engaged.

Conclusion

Early Greek philosophers discussed and advanced leadership, leadership concepts and male-female roles – often to the detriment of women. Some twenty-five hundred years later, women are populating professional organization settings along with men.

Elements of cultural feminist theory and transformational leadership theory are, in some ways, quite similar. Transformational leadership transcends gender and embraces a style that is inclusive, participative, nurturing, enabling, energizing and visionary. Cultural feminism embraces this style, too. There is personal as well as professional value in incorporating transformational leadership in the styles of both men and women as they progress in their careers.

The transformational leader is one who mentors co-workers and helps them grow. However, the benefits of transformational leadership do not accrue exclusively to the follower or the organization. The transformational leader is also a beneficiary of rewards such as promotions and managerial advancement. Perhaps the greatest reward for transformational leaders is personal satisfaction in knowing they are instrumental in creating the changes that happens to followers and the changes that happen to organizations.

These characteristics are particularly suited to leadership in nonprofit organizations. Because volunteers are not paid for their work, they respond to the energizing characteristics of transformational leaders. Because women tend to be transformational leaders, they tend to be well suited to work in nonprofit organizations as executives or volunteer leaders.

<div align="center">**References**</div>

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Table 1

Common Characteristics between Cultural Feminist Theory / Cultural Feminism and
Transformational Leadership Theory / Transformational Leadership

Common Characteristics	Cultural Feminist Theory and the Cultural Feminist	Transformational Leadership Theory and the Transformational Leader
Enabling	Celebrates the differences between women and men Society could benefit by encouraging feminine behavior	Power is shared Embraces and uses the enabling method with followers and co-workers
Energizing	Believes women have special qualities, values and virtues	Charismatic Energetic Enthusiastic Challenges followers to not merely accomplish the task but to exceed expectations Catalyzes positive change
Confident	Recognizes that there are biological differences between women and men Recognizes that women and men are equal economically, politically and socially	Increases effectiveness Creates high organizational commitment Views obstacles as opportunities
Inspiring	Concern for subordinates is reciprocated	Encourages high level performers to continually exceed expectations Builds positive relationships
Visionary	Open minded Recognizes that men and women are equals in work, politics, and socially	Embraces nontraditional thinking
Nurturing	Focuses on the positive-ness of women Concerned with the well-being of followers	Mentoring is a key skill Gives regular feedback Seeks positive interactions
Participative	Encourages feminine behavior rather than masculine behavior	Uses participative decision making
Individualized Attention	Intelligent Independent Encourages and mentors subordinates with their careers	Fosters interpersonal relationships between the leader and the follower / co-worker Seeks out opportunities for subordinates
Inclusive/ Collaborative	Instills a cooperative working environment	Fosters a collaborative spirit

Table 2-A
Model Depicting Opportunities for Transformational Leadership and Volunteer Engagement within the Hierarchical and Organizational Structure of a Nonprofit Organization
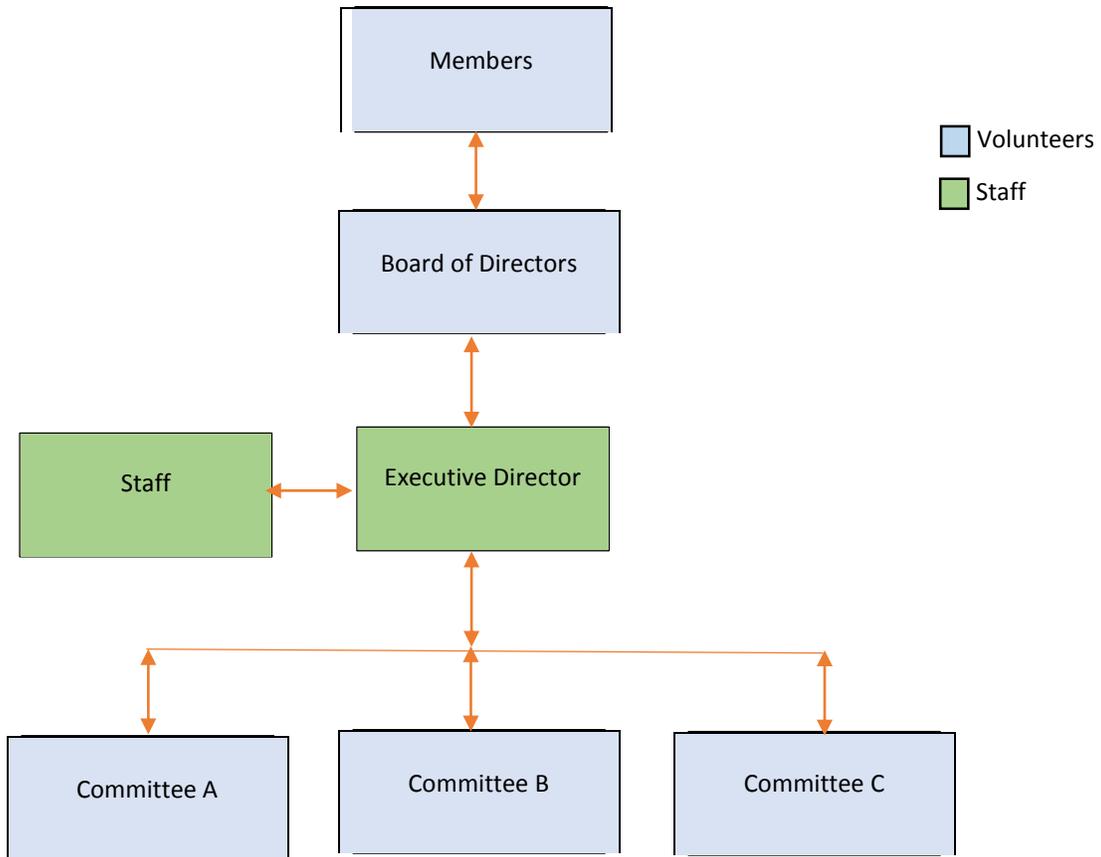

Table 2-B
Model Depicting Opportunities for Transformational Leadership and Volunteer Engagement within the Hierarchical Committee Structure of a Nonprofit Organization