

# THE ROLE OF LEADERS IN ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this paper is on the role of leaders as transformation agents in the management of change in organizations. Change is a shift or alteration in the present environment; it may be perceived or real. Transformation refers to systematic re-designation of an organization in such a manner as to give the firm competitive advantage in dealing with threats and opportunities in the external environment. Transformation is the vehicle for realization of change. The elements to be changed could be physical setting, technology; structure or people. The work re-affirms that every behaviour in a transformation is a result of equilibrium between driving and restraining forces. The acid test lies in the ability of the manager to suppress the resisting forces without hurting the system, and sustain the change. To achieve enduring transformation, the Lewin three steps model of unfreezing existing behaviour patterns; identification and internalization of new attitudes, values and behaviour; and unfreezing to lock in acceptable new behavioural pattern is recommended. To achieve this, communication and education play major roles. The work concludes that the role of the leader as a facilitator in the face of transformation has to be decisional, interpersonal and informational. However, to command the required influence, he has to be fair and firm, taking into cognizance the organization's need for the change and the workforce welfare.

## **Introduction**

Societies achieve their goals through organizations. However, management is the engine room of organizations. Management is a problem solving process of efficiently and effectively determining, and achieving organizational goal (s) through the use of scarce human and non human resources (man, money, machines, materials and methods) in a dynamic setting. This process is not only goal oriented but people focused, and it exerts influence.

In managerial philosophy many classifications of the functions exist, however, the four classical functions include-planning, organization, directing and controlling. It is a continuum, one leads to the other. It will be an exercise in futility to discuss one outside the others. It is like a chain.

The directing function is also called the actuating. It is the third function of management. It focuses on getting the members of the organization to move in a specific manner that will lead to the achievement of pre-determined objectives as specified in the plan of action. Effective direction is achieved through communication, leadership and motivation.

Leadership is the process by which managers exerts influence over their subordinates through inspiration towards desired organizational ends. Effective leadership influences the attitude and behaviours (performance) of the workforce towards the desired organizational goals and objectives.

Organizations exist within a supra-system that is dynamic. Consequently, the organizations themselves are equally dynamic. This calls for changes and transformation in order to remain alive and competitive in the business environment. Transformation is systematic re-positioning of an organization in such a manner that gives the firm a competitive advantage in confronting threats and opportunities that manifest from time to time in the supra-environment of the organization. Managerial leadership ability of the manager is measured in terms of

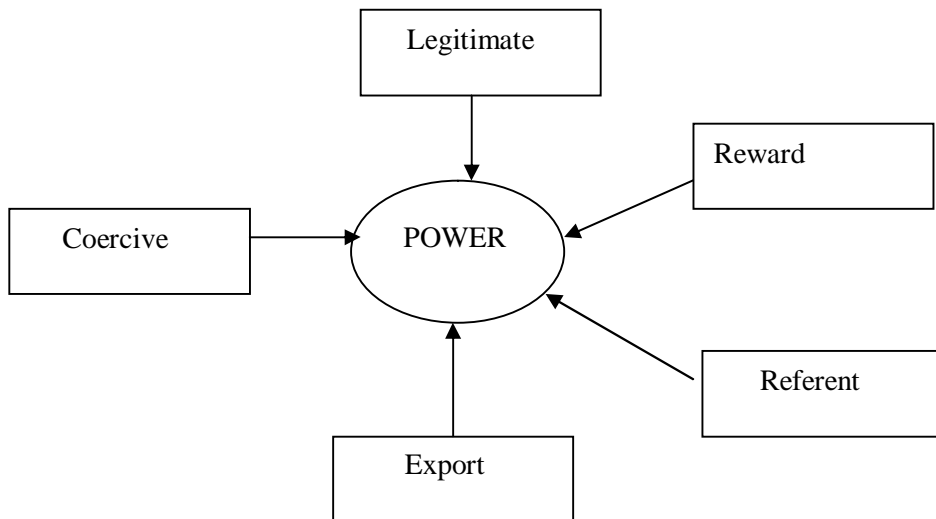
The leadership ability to suppress the restraining forces and bring to the fore the driving forces in the management of change and transformation.

### **The Need for Leadership.**

Katz and Kahn (1966:89-332) observe that leadership in organizations, in particular during changes and transformation is important as a harmonizing force due to:

1. The incompleteness of the organization design
2. The changing environmental conditions
3. The internal dynamics of the organizations and
4. The nature of the human membership in organizations.

To give direction to organizations, leader exerts influence on organizational relevant matters. The power of influence of the leaders could be legitimate, reward, referent, expert or coercive.

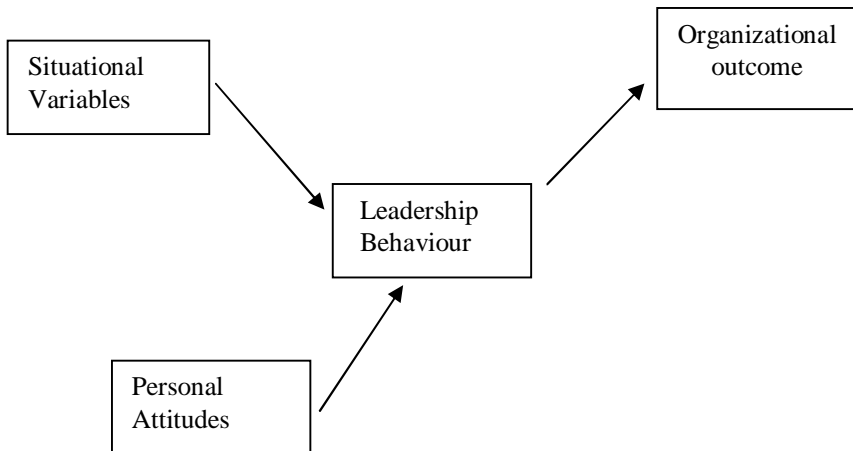


**Figure 1: Five Sources of Influence of Leaders**

**Source: Garet and George (2003)**

**Contemporary Management 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., United States, McGraw Hill. P. 446**

Leadership is contingent on the properties of the situation and the people led. This is as demonstrated below by



**Figure 2: Factors that Influence Leadership Power**

**Source:** French and Ravam (1966:322): Business Administration and Management, London, See Publishers, . P. 322.

### **Approaches to the Study of Leadership**

Recent studies tend to identify three basic models of leadership, trait, behaviour, and contingency. A model is a simplified representation of key properties of a real world, object, event or relationship. The three models are hereby summarized.

The trait models seek to find the personal characteristics that are responsible for effective leadership. However, no traits were found to consistently distinguish leaders from non leaders. The exercise ended up as an academic exploration.

The behavioural model generally focuses on leadership functions and styles. The leadership styles are also categorized into task oriented, authoritarian or initiating structure on one hand, and employee centred, democratic or participative style on the other. The effectiveness of any of them depends on the circumstances. A manager's choice of any leadership style is normally influenced by forces in the manager, the subordinates and the work situation.

The contingency model attempts to identify and predict which leadership style will be most appropriate in a given situation. Heresy-Blanchard situation model suggests that leadership style should vary with the maturity of the

subordinates. Maturity here relates to the subordinate's skill, knowledge of the work and personal confidence. On the other hand, the Fiedler approach concentrates on the leader member relations, task structure and the leader's position power as the most important situational variables in the work situation.

The three leadership models so far discussed could be grouped under transactional leadership. The understanding here is that leaders determine what their subordinates need to do to achieve organizational objectives, classify them and assist the subordinates to develop self confidence in order to actualize the organizational goals. However a more recent study tend to cast skeptical eye on this class of leaders, in favour of a more dynamic and charismatic leadership called transformational leaders.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformation leadership motivates the work force to work harder than they originally would have done by raising their sense of importance and the value of their assignments. This enables the subordinates to transcend their self interests for the sake of the organization. This simultaneously raises the need level of the subordinates to higher need such as self actualization. Transformational leaders are often charismatic by intellectual stimulation of their subordinates, in addition to encouraging development of their subordinates. Further, they are also transactional in nature by using their reward and coercive power to encourage and sustain performance (Jones and George, 2003:265-266, Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert 2005:470-488).

Transformation leadership is the main focus of this discourse. These leaders are effective managers of organizational change and transformation. What then is transformation, and how does a transformation leader achieve this maneuvering.

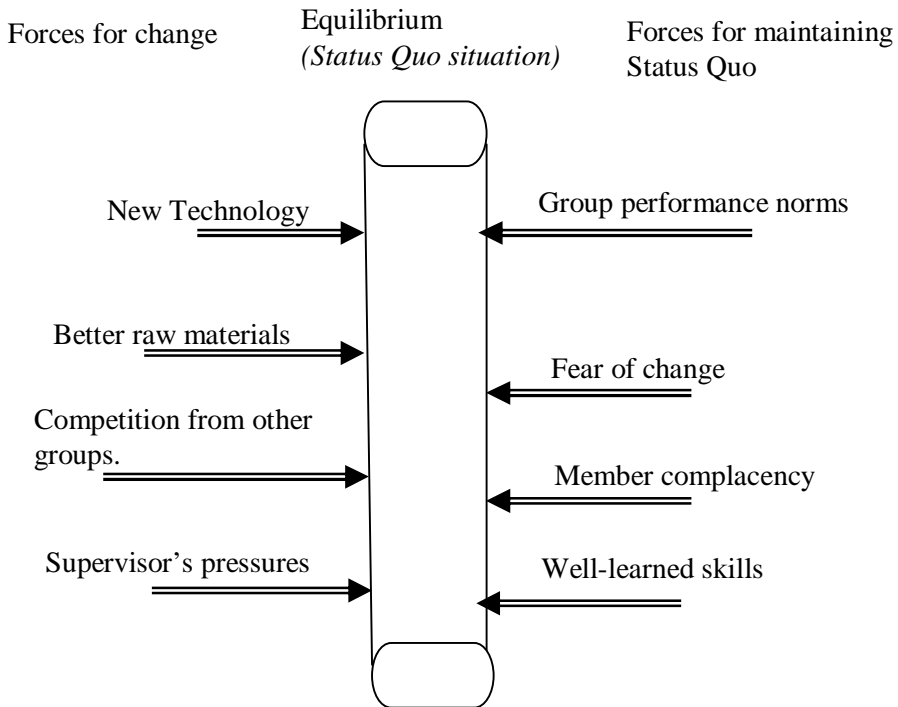
### **Transformation**

This is a dynamic world, a world of constant flux. Today we live in an age of discontinuity. This is because organizations face dynamic and changing environment. Organizational activities are usually planned. Planned change refers to change activities that are intentional and goal oriented. There are two types of change:- first order change and second order change (Levy, 1986:4-20). The first order change is linear and continuous. It implies non-fundamental shifts in the organizational assumptions and functioning. It is an act of gradual and incremental transformation. In contrast, the second order change is multi-dimensional, multi-levels, discontinuous and radical. It involves reforming of the assumption about the organization and the environment in which it operates. It is a strategic and drastic maneuvering into the future. Change and transformation constitute a problem.

Kurt Lewin force field theory opines that every behaviour in a change situation is a result of multiple forces for change, and against change. The driving

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forces push for change while the restraining forces push against it. An increase in one diminishes the other. The change agent/transformation leader makes effort to reconcile the two sets of forces in line with the new demands of the organization. The Lewin model is as shown below:



**Note:** The length of the arrow is equal to the degree of the force.

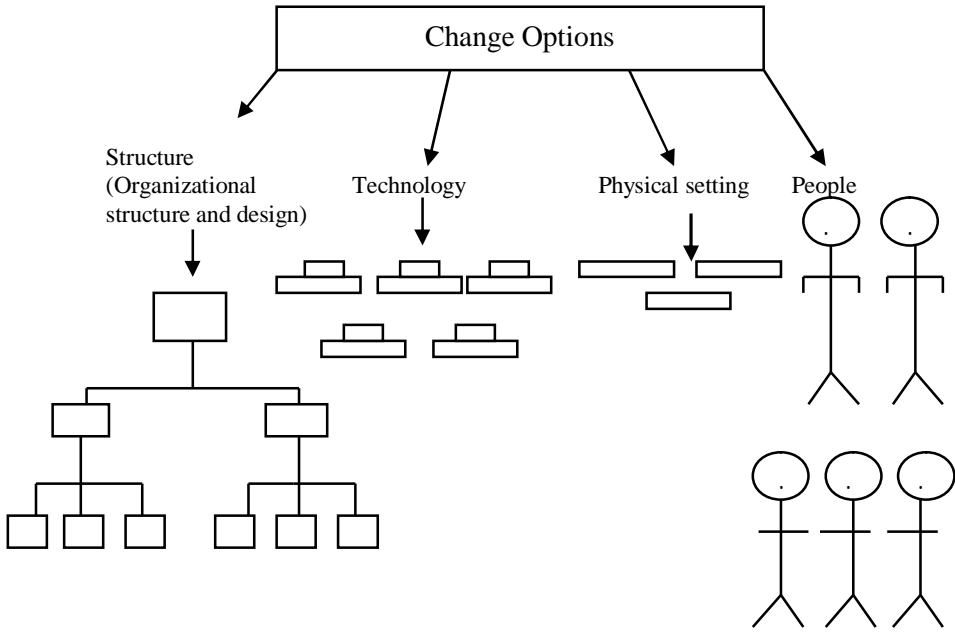
**Figure 3:** Visual representation of Force Field Model showing the restraining and striving forces for change in an organization.

**Source:** Edgar F. Huse and Lummings T.G. (1985): Organization and change 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., U.S.A, West Publishing Comp. P.73.

The restraining forces are sources of potential resistance to planned change.

To successfully achieve a planned change, the leadership has to address their underlying concerns. In very broad terms, the sources of resistance could be grouped into three sub-classes, namely; existing organizational culture, individual self interest and perception about the organizational goals and strategies for the change.

What does a change agent attempt to change in a transformation process in order to reposition the organization? The transformation leader needs to change/transform one or a combination of the organization factors below:



**Figure 4:** Possible change options in transformation process.

**Source:** Robins (1998): Organizational Behaviour, Jersey, Prentice Hall  
P. 626  
-638.

### **Transformation Process**

Transformation process using the Lewin model as subsequently improved upon by Edgar H. Schein and others provides model for lasting changes (Plunkett and Attner, 1986:446-447). The model has three distinct phases; unfreezing, changing, and refreezing.

Unfreezing involves making the need for the change conspicuous and compelling that the organizational member will willingly accept the change. Changing deals with uncovering and adopting new values, attitudes and behaviour. The role of the transformation leader here will be to foster new values, attitude and behaviour. These identified new ways will also be internalized. This is followed by refreezing. Refreezing means making the new organizational behaviour pattern a norm by the process of locking them in by process of supportive and reinforcement mechanism. With this a lasting transformation is achieved.

### **The Role of Leadership in Organizational Transformation**

In specific teams, the role of leaders in transformation is to over-come resistance to change without undue hardship to the organization, and achieve the envisage economically. This could be problematic and complex. It is done through careful diplomatic and strategic game plan. Specific roles involved

include: education and communication, participation, facilitation and support, negotiation, manipulation and co-optation, politics and coercion as the case may be.

### **Education and Communication**

He educates and communicates the need/logic for the change. This is simplified, if the leader is seen as trust worthy and credible.

### **Participation**

The leader coopts those likely to oppose the change into the decision-making process. By this, he gains their commitment and reduces resistance

### **Facilitation and Support**

Change agents can offer a range of supportive efforts to reduce resistance. When employees' fear and anxiety are high, employee counseling and therapy are needed. The employees could be sent on short paid leave or training to acquire new skills, or leave of absence. These may facilitate adjustment and compliance.

### **Negotiation**

The transformational leader plays the role of a negotiator. He negotiates with powerful individuals resisting the change. By so doing, a compromise is reached, resistance reduced, compliance and achievement of transformation objectives realized.

### **Manipulation**

Manipulation has to do with covert influence attempts, twisting and distorting facts to make them appear more attractive, withholding undesirable information and creating false rumors to get employees to accept a transformation and enlist willingly their support and energy in the change. Co-optation on the other hand, is a form of manipulation and participation. It seeks to "buy off" the leaders of the resistance group by giving them key roles in the transformation process and decisions. This could backfire if not properly handled, and the change agent credibility may drop to zero.

### **Coercion**

This is least used, and the last in the list. It involves direct application of threats or force upon the resisters. It must be done with caution, if it must ever be used.



This discussion cannot be complete without mention of politics of change and leadership style. Transformation threatens the *status quo*. It connotes political activity. This involves determination of who gets what and who is stopped from getting what, when, where and how, in the allocation of transformational resources within the organization. The handling may facilitate support or otherwise in the organization. The leader may need to play some politics in the face of change management without necessarily over doing, it, for the extremes are dangerous.

Fielder (1979:456) opined that there is no best leadership style, in this regards and that the leadership role vary with the situation. Path (1971:102) in his “Goal theory of leadership”, using the two dimension of consideration and initiating structures, argued that when the task itself provides direction, the leadership role changes to provision of social and emotional support. When the task is ambiguous, strict leadership direction is considered effective. He further averred that the effectiveness of any act of leadership must be assessed in terms of some specific criterion of organizational functioning (for example, tenure and growth rate) and must be stipulated with respect to some specific time period. He thus opined that each leadership act can have intended and unintended effects and both should be assessed. Anchoring on the contingency theory of leadership behaviour, House Path developed his goal theory. This theory prescribed the underlisted functions of leadership.

- a) Recognizing and/or arousing subordinates needs for outcome over which the leader has some control.
- b) Increasing personal pay off to the subordinates for goal attainment;
- c) Making path to those pay offer easier to travel by coaching and direction;
- d) Helping subordinates clarify expectations;
- e) Reducing frustrating barriers; and
- f) Increasing opportunities for personal satisfaction, contingent on effective performance.

According to Galbraith (1975:85), the most important function of leadership is that it “assigns tasks to committees, sub-committees, groups and individuals from which decisions emerge and it selects men who comprise the group that make decisions, and it constitutes, and reconstitutes the groups in accordance with changing need”.

Therefore, decision-making is the most important role of leadership given the complexity arising from,

- a) The technological requirement of our modern society;
- b) Need for planning because of environmental complexities; and
- c) Need for coordination. He concluded that leaders need to draw on and appraise the information of numerous individuals. This role has been amply recognized by Vroom and Yetton (1973:274) in their Normative Model of Leadership Style.

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For the purpose of this research, we shall subscribe to Katz and Kahn’s (1966) typology of leadership roles as listed below:

- 1) The introduction of structural change or policy formation;
- 2) The interpolation of structure, that is, piecing out the incompleteness of existing formal structure or improvisation, and
- 3) The use of structure formally provided to keep the organization in motion or effective administration.

S/N	Type of Leadership Process	Appropriate Organizational Levels	Abilities and Skills	
1.	Organizational change. Creation and elimination structure	Top Echelons	System Perspective	Charisma
2.	Interpolation, supplementary and piecing out structure	Intermediate levels: Pivotal roles	Sub-systems perspective two way orientation	Integration of primary and secondary relation skills.
3.	Administration use of existing structures	Lower levels	Technology knowledge and understanding of system rules	Concern for equity in the use of rewards and sanctions.

**Table 2: The summary of Katz and Kahn’s Leadership Proposition**  
**Source: Katz and Kahn (1966) the Social Psychology of Organization; Cliffs, Wiley and Sons P. 54.**

- **Development of Structures**  
 Leaders assert freedom from the requirements of existing structure. They propose to use structure for the achievement of organization goals.
- **Interpolation or Improvisation**  
 This refers to the development of ways and means for implementation of existing policies and organizational goals.
- **Administration**  
 This is the least of the levels of leadership, but it must be well executed as to be efficient and effective.

**Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

**Summary**

Organizational environments are never static but dynamic. This causes changes and transformation from time to time. Change is a shift or alteration in the present environment. It could be real or perceived. On the other hand

transformation refers to systematic re-designation of an organization in such a manner as to give the firm complete advantage in dealing with threats and opportunities in the external environment. Transformation is the vehicle for realization of change. Forces for change are usually new technology, better raw materials, competition and pressure from supervisors. On the other hand forces that resist change include group performance norms, fear of change, members complacency, and well learned skills. The role of the leadership in actualizing effective transformation is highly diplomatic and strategic.

### **Conclusion**

The paper concludes that the success and failure of transformational leadership is determined by the degree of its effective and efficient accomplishment of the designed organizational goal. Transformation is not a straight jacket. The leader as a transformation agent changes one or a combination of certain organizational elements, which include – the organizational structure and design, the technology, the physical setting, or the human element (people). The human element is the most difficult to handle. The difficulty in transformation is basically because it challenges the existence of the *status-quo*.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that for leaders to effectively act as transformational agents, they need to acquire certain skills which include human relations, analytical, and conceptual skills. In addition, they have to command respect and confidence of the workforce they intend to transform. In the transformation process, the leaders have to be fair and firm as moderators bearing in mind the ultimate aim of the envisaged transformation.

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