Transformational Leadership Revisited:
Digitalization And Learning By Doing… What?

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Extended Abstract
A large part of leadership research has focused on transformational leadership. The research has focused on why this form of leadership is good. However, there are few, if any, studies on how to learn this way of leading. The research question is: *How do adults prefer to learn transformational leadership?*
Based on the theory of learning and learning style theory, this research paper discusses the findings from in depth interviews with 68 people before the completed executive courses in transformational leadership. The findings show in the learning process of transformational leadership, promoting intellectual stimulation and creativity perceives as difficult. Creating visions and being able to motivate their employees is a challenge. Learning by doing is a desired learning process, and a mixture of exercises and theory is preferred. When it comes to the way of learning, half of the informants want to learn with others, learn something new, and approach the new skills in a structured way. They also want to see what they learn from different perspectives. There is a positive attitude to learning transformational leadership, but a demanding context of learning by doing using the existing knowledge and experiences developed further by learning together by using actual problem-based situations.

What are the conclusions from the transformational learning experience?
The participants consider development in Intellectual stimulation to be difficult. Being a role model and to motivate seems to be a stretch for many. To create vision and make mental model helping their subordinates to handle change is not easy. Based on this empirical data, it would be appropriate to design a development program in transformational leadership the participants will prefer "learning by doing". Half of the participants want a variation with a mixture of theory and exercises, or only by practical exercises. Leaning on the empirical data, it looks like the learning process work better if one had it in short intervals between exercise and feedback on the performed. The participants find it difficult to be creative and innovative in the learning process. When it comes to learning styles, a majority prefer to learn something new together with others. Important though, 18 % prefer to learn alone. A little more than half of the leaders are curious and want to learn more of things where they have little knowledge. They also want to learn it a structured way. They also like look at the topic from different perspectives. Their learning process strengthens if there are short intervals on the feedback between the exercise and the performed. They do not have a self-image on themselves as role models as leaders. Some skills are necessary to have as a base, in order to be able to develop as a transformational leader (Conger & Benjamin, 1999). Among the skills are the ability to be able to: Evaluate critically; Track problems; Create visions which makes people in the organization better to handle change; Create mental models to make people better to handle change; To have the skill to share a vision. To which extent do the leaders have these skills? The course has adult students who want to learn something new. Therefore, a closer look at what it entails is necessary. As a rule of thumb for understanding adult learning, one can assume: adults learn what they want to learn, what is meaningful for them to learn, adults draw on their resources for the resources they have, adults take responsibility for their learning they are interested in taking (if they can get it), and adults are very unlikely to engage in learning they cannot see or have any interest in (Illeris, 2007).

A new executive school reality

The paper discusses how the learning transformational leadership in action also will be dependent upon a new learning reality that is different from the old reality. A new reality or a new way of doing business demanding digitalization, sustainability and internationalization might also give a new executive school reality demanding another sensemaking and learning than the old executive reality.

Key words for the old school reality are: Order, complicity, simple, best practice, closed rules and procedures, deductive, logical past, explain and control, slow facts, new public management and control. Within the Transformational leadership paradigm, these keywords have much in common with "the old way" of thinking leadership and are understood as a part of "Management by Exception Active". The intention of the intervention is to learn leaders to do less of this approach. This because it is less effective way of leading people (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Words often used by the new school reality are: unorder, complexity, chaotic, novel, open rules and procedures, inductive future, exploring and exploiting, fast facts, balance leadership and management. How to develop leaders to maneuver in such a context?

Adults and learning

When adults understand the learning is useful to them. They will be willing to learn, in order to use the new knowledge (Hermansen, 2006). They will do this and learn in their own way. Point two of the rules of thumb is: "adults draw in their learning on the resources they have" (Illeris, 2004). For some, the resource base will be a practical approach. What could be the reason for this? One way of looking at it is the benefit becomes clear by learning through doing or gaining experience with what one should do. Of course, this will apply when the things to learn are of such a nature that one can do so. Schön discusses how "reflected practitioners" manage different situations by combining and drawing on the relevant elements they have (2001: 31). Practitioners develop expertise through reflection in and through action. "When someone acts intelligently, they act their thoughts" (Schön, 2001: 53). One of the most fundamental aspects of adult human education programs is the starting point must be, no one can participate without having made the choice him/herself (Illeris, 2004: 167). This is central to the approach and design this leadership training has had. In the field of learning psychology, feedback is considered important in the process of supporting participants' learning (Dysvik, A. and Kuvaas, B., 2008: 158; Kluger and DeNisi, 1996). Feedback has both internal and external sources. The inner source expresses how the informant assesses their own process. If this feedback shall have any value, it is important the effort is related to the result (Karpatschof and Katzenelson, 2007: 218). It is therefore central that the feedback is accepted and is concrete, given shortly after the work has been performed or done (Campbell and Kuncel, 2002). Piaget operates with two processes in form formation: assimilation versus accommodation (Illeris, 2000). Assimilation is adding new information to an existing form. Accommodation is the restructuring of existing form. The psychologist Norman (1982) has emphasized there can also be a third main mechanism: They use the concept of tuning. This means defining and fine-tuning the form, adding further details. For the course participants, this will mean it is possible in their learning and development of new forms, the process will be within one or more of these three, whether it is assimilation, accommodation or form-fine-tuning. It all depends on how big or comprehensive their own form of change is.

How Do Leaders Prefer to Learn?

How do leaders prefer their own learning? Leadership course participants are motivated to participate and learn from courses, and to use the knowledge, skills, and abilities learned for use in their work, especially when they see the positive transfer from the course to the workplace will be for the benefit for them (Bass, 2008). There are four criteria for effective training (Burk and Day, 1986). The four criteria are: subjective learning, objective learning, subjective behavior and objective results. In this context, we are only able to collect data from subjective learning and subjective behavior. Data from the two others sort of training can only be collected after the course finish.

Learning style

The different styles of thinking are expressions of different ways of perceiving and treating different types of problems in the right context, are different mental processes. Sternberg and Zhang define learning style *as how an individual prefers to learn by reading, for instance, or by attending lectures*. (Sternberg and Zhang, 1988; Sternberg, 1997). This is the definition used here. Learning style is derived from the thinking style construct to be a profile of thinking styles that describe the individual's preferred way of thinking in a specific context of

leadership development learning and are called learning styles (LS). We have picked those six to be most relevant: the two leaning styles; the conservative (The well-known) and the liberal (The new). The two scope styles internal (alone) and external (with others). Of the Form styles the Hierarchic (prioritized way) and of the Functional styles the legislative (problem definition, goal setting and strategy making). For the Anarchic style (Ad-hoc), also one of the Form styles, it is preferred to have multiple ways to several solutions of uncertain importance.

Leadership development

Research distinguishes between three understandings of development: Change, unfolding and transformation (Niels Engelsted, 1989: 9). This intervention intends to have all three developments. However, it is the last one, transformation, most focused. This are done by changing behavior and attitude, so there is a change to a completely different qualitative relationship. A central point in a leadership development intervention is a specialized learning program (Lynham, 2000). Training to succeed and be effective in the different transformational leadership styles is important, so the leaders can cope with the style (Bass, 1990). The very core of leadership development occur through specialized leadership education programs and leadership training focuses on three areas: improving leader`s knowledge, skills, and attitudes; training in success and effectiveness as a leader; and, training and education on leadership styles (Lynham, 2000; Bass, 1990). It is within these points the intervention emphasizes promoting leadership development.

Method

Empirics are obtained from two leadership courses, both at the BI Norwegian Business School. Participants receive theory, behavioral and attitudinal training. The leaders have a semi-structured interview before the start and after the course. Of the 68 interviewed, 39 are women and 29 are men. They are given questions related to transformational leadership and learning. The average age of the intervention group is 38.7 years. The youngest is 26 years and the oldest is 53 years. 61 participants are leaders, seven are not. The interviews are semi-structured and coded in Nvivo (Gibbs, 2002).

Empirical results

The transformational leadership have five elements: Idealized Influence (Attribution), Idealized Influence (Behavior), Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individual Consideration (Bass & Avolio, 2011). The leaders are asked: "*Which of the five elements in transformational leadership do you consider to be the most difficult to develop in?*" The one most challenging is Intellectual stimulation; 26 % reported that. As number two, were Idealized Influence (Attribution)(Role model) and Inspiring Motivation, both with 25 % of the leaders each. Number three was Idealized Influence (Behavior) (Goal oriented), where 18 % of the participants find it difficult. The easiest leadership style to develop in are Individual Consideration; only six percent consider that difficult.

How do leaders prefer to be taught transformational leadership? Are their learning desires the same, or different in the discussion in the research (e.g. Illeris, 2007; Kolb, 1983)? This section presents the findings of the interviews related to different aspects of learning. One of the factors we wondered, was whether there would be major differences in the view of the transformational learning process itself. The participants are asked how they would set up the learning process themselves. There is a certain difference between the sexes when it comes to have a theoretical or practical approach to how one should learn. Two thirds of women have stated they learn best by doing exercises. For the men, a slightly smaller proportion had the same preference, a total of 40 %. A third of the women would have a mixture of theory and exercises, while the numbers for men were somewhat higher: 40 %. We therefore see it as a clear trend that a purely theoretical introduction to transformational leadership will be negatively evaluated. What emerged across age, was half wanted to learn transformational leadership through a mix of theory and practice. Participants are asked how they would set up the learning process themselves. The leaders find it demanding to be creative and innovative, and they have a developmental need in this area. Almost as many found it difficult to inspire and motivate others. Many of those who found motivation demanding did not feel they were trustworthy, or that people would listen to them. It is reasonable to interpret this as a lack of confidence in this area. In addition, to envision being a role model (Idealized Influence Attribution) is a challenge for many. To envisage setting standards and being one people look up to, is considered a difficult task for these leaders. It perceives as difficult in relation to their self-

image. The second least demanding thing to develop is Idealized Influence (Behavior) which is about how targeted and reliable one is. It clearly perceives easier.

There are some elements necessary to have as a base, in order to be able to develop as a transformational leader (Conger & Benjamin, 1999). The ratings are from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much). The leaders are questioned: *"The ability to evaluate critically. To which extent do you feel you can do that?"* They rate themselves to strong (8), which is quite high. They are on average to track problems (5). Interesting enough they are not very good at creating visions (4), or to create mental models to make people better to handle change (4). They rate their ability to have the communication skill to share a vision to be on average (5). On the other hand, they think they have rather an impressive leadership (7). Furthermore, they think they know when to give resources to a subordinate (7).

Learning style preferences

What are the findings on issues related to Sternberg's learning preferences (1997)? To uncover to which extent their scope styles are internal or external, we asked: *"When you shall learn something new, do you prefer to do it together with others, or do it alone?".* It is significant they "like to learn with others"; 54% answer this. This perceives as a high proportion. Furthermore, 27% have as their learning preference partly by being with others, and partly being alone. By posing as polarized questions, the nuances of people's preferences appear more clearly. A significant number of 18% prefers learning new things alone. One can note to what degree the participants prefer to learn alone or with others, to some extent appeared to be theme or context related. On the question of "learning something new or more about something you already can" has its background in the progressive (learning something new) and conservative learning style (learn more from what one knew already). Just over half, 54 %, have a desire to "learn something new". Here it was expected the proportion would be even higher, based on the nature of the intervention. 40 %, states "I like a mix of something new and something that I already can", which is a higher number than expected. Only six percentage of the respondents said they "like to learn more from something I already can". This percentage is somewhat weaker than assumed. A reasonable interpretation is learning something new is relatively strong among transformation leaders.

How does the participants view the relationship between acquiring something new by being impulsive (Anarchic learning), or more structured? To answer that, these two ways of learning were set against each other. Somewhat stronger than assumed, a significant proportion would have structured training; 56 %. Asked as a polarized question, many people say learning structured is a preferred form of learning something new. It was 25 %, who like to learn by the Ad Hoc (Anarchic learning) style alone. The percentage who wanted a mixture of being structured and learning according to Ad Hoc style is 19 %. Perhaps there is an element of creativity in learning according to the Ad Hoc learning style. How systematically does a leader prefer to learn something new? That is the background reason for the question: "Do you prefer to see what you are working on from all sides?". It is an aspect of mental flexibility in the question; being able to have more approaches to what one is working on. There is a large group of 54 % who have "yes, something" as an Ad Hoc preference. This is as expected. A group of 19 % will "very much" see it from all sides. This was somewhat larger than expected. A share of 27 % will hardly see what they are learning from different sides. This figure is higher than expected. This may indicate some rigidity in this way of learning. The reason for this is unclear. The result may indicate there is little ability to think critically among these leaders. It may also seem that they have a moderate to small ability to enter different perspectives on what they are learning. The findings indicate around half of the participants wanted to learn new things through a mixture of theory and practical exercises related to the learning. As choice number two, it desires the learning process centered on exercises. Only a few individuals want to learn transformational leadership more theoretically.

To uncover how the participants prefer to learn, they are questioned: *"In what way have you experienced you learn most effectively?"* The interviewed interprets the learning process is likely to strengthen if you add up to short intervals between exercise and feedback on the performed. The empirical data reveals a distinction between men and women to the role of exercises in the learning process; more women than men want exercises. Is it so women are more practical oriented? The tendency is also strong leaders in the 30s wants most exercises. Could this be an expression of uncertainty? Both these questions should be investigated further. The data also reveal other aspects of which learning process is preferred. The analysis shows over half of the leaders prefers this process to happen with others. A little under a third of the participants want a mix of being alone and being with others. Around one fifth wants to have this process alone. This discovery is important. The consequence must be one takes the differences into account and give these leaders time in

periods to absorb the learning alone, so their learning preference are met. This can be done through a differentiation of the learning process.

Discussion

Adult learning is they learn what they want to learn, and what is meaningful for them to learn. They draw on their resources for the resources they have (Illeris, 2007). They need to be interested in what they should learn. Those requirements fulfilled by the fact the leaders volunteer for this leadership course. They have made that choice for him- or herself, which is important for the learning process (Illeris, 2004). The form of the learning was in the term of Piaget, both assimilation and accommodation; they learned something new and they had to reconstruct some of their former knowledge. In addition, there was a process of tuning, adding in further detail of their understanding of leadership (Norman,1982). The participants want to have discussions and case as part of their learnings process. This is in line with what`s recommended (Bass and Avolio, 1992). We know the core of leadership development needs to be at a specialized learning program in leadership, and it mostly focuses on three areas: increasing the leader's knowledge, skills and attitudes (Lynham, 2000). In the leadership discussion on cognitive style and weather there are any patterns in being task – or human oriented. Armstrong and Priola (2001) finds the last one to be important for mastering interpersonal relationships. In this group of leaders, it was only four people who consider that a challenge. On average, they also feel quite good in knowing when to give resources to a subordinate. On the other hand, they had a less a task-oriented cognitive style (Tett, Guterman, Bleier, and Murphy, 2000), which make it somewhat more difficult for problem solving, decision-making and information management. In a scale from 1-10, the average was on five for these task – oriented styles. To be effective as a leader, the leaders must have training in different transformational leadership styles (Bass, 1990). If we look at the five elements central in transformational leadership, the two styles these participants report they will have the largest problems with, is Idealized Influence (Attribution) and Inspirational Motivation. For both these two factors 25 % of the leaders report they will have a problem to master this leader style.

The leader rate themselves high on the ability to be able to evaluate critically (Conger et al, 1999). If we lean on research, it might be the leaders are over-confident on this skill (Nutt, (2003); Tversky, A & Kahneman, D. (1974)) We also know the skills to create visions and communicating them is central in being a good transformational leader (Bass & Avolio, 2006; Yukl, 2012), and the low rating here is important to consider in a learning perspective. The qualitative pre-empiricism has elaborate sides of what kind of learning desires leaders have. When asked what kind of learning process desired to teach transformational leadership, leaders envision several ways to learn. The findings uncover around half of the participants wanted to learn new things through a mixture of theory and practical exercises. As the second choice, the learning process should be centered on purely doing exercises. Unsurprisingly, only a few individuals wanted to learn transformational leadership simply by having it communicated theoretically. The analysis showed more than half prefer this process to happen with others. A little under a third preferred to learn a mixture of being alone and with others. Around a fifth want to have this process alone. From the presented data, the participants on this intervention prefer not to learn transformational leadership on the terms of the old school. We can see they prefer to learn by experiencing it themselves, were they themselves have central control of the learning process. Central seems to be how power are distributed in the learning process; the participants can to a certain degree have large influence on *what* they shall learn and *how* they shall learn the topics by exploring. Based on their own needs. They will be more to maneuver in a fast-changing world.

Limitation and future research

There are limitations in this study. The sample size is one limitation. Another limitation is how precisely the participants can remember good enough the processes and development they have been through, nearly a year later. Future research should have a quantitively study looking for possible correlations between the Transformational leadership style and Sternbergs learning styles. The research question is to see if these two theories have any common basis.

Conclusion

The participants consider development in Intellectual Stimulation to be difficult. Also being a role model and to motivate seems to be a stretch for many. To create vision and make mental model helping their subordinates to handle change is also not easy. This type of development should be designed by "learning by doing". Based on the data, it is preferred to have the topics with a variation; by a mixture of theory and exercises, or only by practical exercises. It looks like the learning process work better if it had short intervals between exercise and feedback. The participants find it difficult to be creative and innovative in the learning process. When it comes to learning styles, many prefer to learn something new together with others. A little more than half of the leaders are curios and want to learn more of things where they have little knowledge. They also want to learn it a structured way and they like to look at the topic from different perspectives. In the aspect of transformational leadership, they do not have a self-image on themselves as role models.

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