

The Innovation Challenge: Transformational Leadership in Technological University Libraries

Charles T. Townley

New Mexico State University, U.S.A.

ctownley@nmsu.edu

Abstract

Technological university libraries exist in an environment of sustained and turbulent change. The general direction of change and the overarching issues have been consistent for almost two decades. Technological university libraries must continue to aggressively address these issues in order to prosper. Three common methods of addressing change have emerged: passive to active services; organization development and transformational leadership. Successful technological university libraries will use all three methods in order to meet the needs of their users and their universities. Transformational leadership is the least used of the three methods of addressing change. And yet it is the one change method which library leaders and workers can apply directly in any situation. This paper focuses on the use of transformational leadership in technological university libraries. I will argue that by mastering transformational leadership practices, technological university library personnel can make services and organizational development efforts effective in addressing change. Library case studies will be used to illustrate the salient points of each transformational leadership practice: (1) modeling the way; (2) inspiring a shared vision; (3) challenging the process; (4) enabling others to act; and (5) encouraging the heart.

Introduction

Technological university libraries exist in an environment of sustained and turbulent change. User needs evolve rapidly as scholars develop new knowledge and interact more with the global economy (Friedman, 2005). Developments in information technology enable librarians and other scholars to re-think how to use knowledge in the academy (Townley, 2003). Dynamic changes in relationships lead us to rethink the role of the university library and librarians (Reyes, 2006). The general direction of change and the overarching issues have been consistent for almost two decades (Riggs, 1997; Lewis, 1997). Technological university libraries must continue to aggressively address these issues in order to prosper.

Three common methods of addressing change have emerged. Academic libraries have revised their values about information and information services, shifting focus from artifact to content and from passive to active services (Saunders, 2009; Townley, 2001; and Walters, 2007). Academic librarians continue to develop their organizations to be more responsive to change, often creating strategic plans to guide development and learning organizations to identify and undertake responsive change (Gilstrap, 2009; Gieseke & Walter, 1997; Townley, 1999). Finally, transformational leadership is being used to guide the development of proactive initiatives and to support organizational development (Mavrincac, 2005; Needham, 2001; Riggs, 1997). Successful technological university libraries will use all three methods in order to meet the needs of their users and their universities.

Transformational leadership is the least used of the three methods of addressing change. And yet it is the one change method which library leaders and workers can apply directly in any situation. This paper focuses on the use of transformational leadership in technological university libraries. I will argue that by mastering transformational leadership methods, technological university library personnel can make services and organizational development efforts effective in addressing change. Five case studies will be used to illustrate the salient points of transformational leadership and how they apply to libraries.

Leadership

Leadership can be defined as mobilizing people to get things done. It involves motivating people and managing resources. Leadership takes place in an organizational context, in this case a technological university library and its environment, both in and out of the university. Leadership is a reciprocal process between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow on any given task(s). There may be times when one person or group leads and another time when someone else does. Leadership involves a subtle interplay of many factors, including: organizational goals, personal values, individual working preferences, organizational structure and rules. In any situation, some of

these factors are explicitly stated. Other factors are tacit and must be perceived or observed. In contrast to authority, leadership can not be transferred or assigned. It is reciprocal and voluntary; the leader chooses to lead and the follower agrees to follow. People with authority may or may not be leaders. People without formal authority can be leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

The literature of leadership recognizes the four broad leadership styles identified by Bolman and Deal (2003). Library leadership has traditionally focused on structural forms of leadership by creating organization structures that support organizational goals (Schwartz, 1997). In recent years there has been an influx of human relations leaders who focus on providing support and empowerment to library staff (Lamont, 1999; von Dran, 1993). And there have always been a number of political leaders who develop and use power relationships through coalition building and negotiation with followers (Birdsall, 1997). Transformational leadership has not been widely adopted in libraries to date (Riggs, 1997).

Transformational Leadership Practices

Transformational leadership is the act of getting extraordinary things done; often in extraordinary times - certainly a characteristic of today's technological university library world. Transformational leadership focuses on the relationship between leaders and followers. Kouzes and Posner (2007) have identified five practices that transformational leaders use to lead their followers: (1) modeling the way; (2) inspiring a shared vision; (3) challenging the process; (4) enabling others to act; and (5) encouraging the heart. Any practice may involve the use of structural, human relations, and political techniques found in the other leadership styles within the leader-follower relationship context. Each of the five following sections describes one transformational leadership practice and provides a small case study of an individual library leader.

Modeling the Way

Modeling the way involves earning the right and respect to lead through direct individual involvement and action. The first thing that a transformational leader does is to develop clear guiding principles and then follow them. Leaders articulate and stand up for their beliefs (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, pp. 43-98).

Jerry Campbell is one such leader. As Chief Information Officer and Dean of University Libraries at the University of Southern California, Campbell developed guiding principles to bring together all the university information resources in a new and innovative set of relationships, an information commons. His goal was to create seamless, user oriented information services with common access. He shared his views tirelessly with other librarians on his staff and in the broader community. And Campbell also set an example by creating one of the first information commons in the undergraduate library at the University of Southern California. Over time he and his colleagues used a dialog about principles to create a new paradigm to meet the changing information needs of students and faculty. Through steadfast effort and example, Campbell gained staff support for the information commons concept at USC and throughout the U.S. (TerHarr, et al., 2000). Today, he continues to model the way with innovative insights and practices (Campbell, 2008).

How does a transformational leader model the way? They make sure that the followers know the leader's guiding principles and can use them to create effective plans. As Kouzes and Posner say, "People follow first the person, then the plan." (p. 16). So, the first thing that transformational leaders do is engage in personal values clarification. A leader asks, "What do you, as a leader, believe?" There are many values clarification tools. I like to use the Myer-Briggs inventories (Shindler & Yang, <http://www.oswego.edu/plsi>) combined with the Tieger working preferences (Tieger & Barron, 2007). I reflect on professional values and what they mean to me. These tools help me understand the values that are important to me personally. Then I apply these personal values to the working environment to arrive at a clear understanding of guiding principles. Other methods are equally effective. Some leaders write a tribute or a credo. Still others keep a reflective journal. The intent should always be to constantly clarify your values, so that followers can understand your values and commit to them.

The second step in modeling the way is to affirm your values through action. A leader personifies their values by spending their time and attention addressing what is important to achieve your values. A leader audits the use of time to identify eliminate time wasters. Leaders use language to express what they value. They tell and re-tell stories that illustrate their guiding principles. They ask purposeful questions and seek feedback. And leaders teach others how to model the way by creating opportunities to discuss values.

Inspiring a shared vision

The second practice of leadership is to provide a sense of meaning and purpose by developing an exciting vision based on first personal and then organizational values. Vision demonstrates the leader's concern for creating long term value. By enlisting others in the vision, a leader provides a focus for human energy in the organization. (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, pp.103-159).

Carla Stoffle, Dean of the University of Arizona Libraries, is a visionary librarian who has helped her colleagues and many others understand the changing library environment. By focusing on her personal commitment to meet user needs, Stoffle and her leadership team have developed a compelling vision of the role of the library at a major public university. As part of a larger University program, the Library is focusing its development on meeting the needs of undergraduate students (Berry, 2002). This visioning process has been used in technological university libraries as well (Gerryts, 1999; New Mexico State University Library, 1996).

What makes Stoffle an archetype for inspiring a shared vision is her commitment to involve everyone in her organization. She enlists input to the planning process and creates innovative ways for staff to commit. For example, a biennial public conference encourages the staff to understand the vision by explaining it to others. Organization development at the University of Arizona focuses first on developing a shared vision on a specific theme, then developing and evaluating programs. Themes may begin with Stoffle and her management team, but everyone will have the opportunity to be involved before a shared vision emerges. To encourage this sharing process, the organization of the library has been flattened by creating multifunctional teams that can address key library objectives. The result is that the staff design and undertake initiatives in the full knowledge that they are addressing their shared vision.

Transformational leaders practice vision sharing using two commitments: (1) envisioning the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities, and (2) enlisting others to create a shared vision. Envisioning the future is a process that involves inter-relating your values as a leader with the environment and your workers. Ask yourself about your passions and your experiences. What are the patterns that stand out? These strengths are areas that you can use to support the vision. What is the environment in which you work? What are the critical issues? How do these relate to your strengths and your weaknesses? What possibilities look most promising? Once you have an idea of your personal vision, you need to share it with the staff by describing an organizational destination and by creating a clear and exciting image of the future.

Enlisting others is the process of gaining commitment to a shared vision so that work can be done. Leaders need to identify and publicly recognize the ties that bind their library together. A leader must then motivate staff to change, modify and adopt the vision that the leader has proposed. To develop staff support, leaders listen deeply to understand the concerns of the staff and how they relate to each other. Leaders then identify and appeal to a common purpose that all the staff will accept as their own. And finally, leaders communicate the shared vision to gain commitment. Visioning is an iterative process. It requires constant attention and reinforcement. While it is unlikely that most of us can be as effective in inspiring a shared vision as Martin Luther King, every leader must strive to gain commitment by developing advanced communication skills.

Challenging the Process

Challenging the process is the third practice of transformational leadership. Challenging the process involves taking the initiative by supporting good ideas and encouraging change. Leaders challenge the process by taking risks, working on the cutting edge, and refusing to accept the status quo. Transformational leaders see change as an opportunity to achieve the shared vision of the organization (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, pp. 161-219).

James Duderstadt demonstrates this commitment to challenging the process. While he was President of the University of Michigan, Duderstadt challenged information services throughout the University to respond to the changing nature of public support, scholarship, and technology. An engineer by profession, he tirelessly sought new, often outside ideas that could result in meaningful change in the academic process. He found many of these in the information services. He seized the initiative by packaging these ideas into meaningful challenges for others. He gave Dan Atkins the challenge of developing the concept of knowledge management in what became the School of Information. Like Campbell, Duderstadt was an early proponent of an information commons, experimenting with a 25,000 square meter media union to change the nature of library and information services at the University (Duderstadt, 1999). And when he returned to the faculty, Duderstadt became the Director of the Millennium Project, seeking new models for American higher education through technological and organizational change.

Searching for opportunities is the first commitment of challenging the process. A transformational leader looks for ways for individual staff to change, to grow, and to improve so that they may get extraordinary things done. Leaders seize the initiative, look outward for new ideas, and make challenges meaningful. You treat your job as an adventure and accept suggestions and criticism. To encourage innovation you question the status quo, seek and encourage others to seek new ideas, and restructure to permit the adoption of innovation. A leader makes challenges meaningful by demonstrating how a follower can contribute to achieving the shared values of the organization.

Experimentation is the bedrock of challenging the process. It involves three essential processes, creating incremental steps and small victories, learning from mistakes, and promoting psychological hardiness. Having the confidence to change is a key requirement for experimentation. By breaking change into small steps that build on each other, changes that look impossible can be accomplished over time. And as success builds on success, staff confidence grows and the probability of success increases. A type of guided autonomy emerges, giving workers a sense of independence while remaining focused on the shared vision. In every experimental process, there are failures. Indeed, failure is the likely outcome of most changes, regardless of how well they are planned. Leaders use mistakes as an opportunity to grow, realizing that there is much more to be learned from failure than from success. Learning is achieved by confronting areas of concern, questioning assumptions, sharing ideas, and challenging others. Transformational leaders develop psychological hardiness by managing levels of stress at productive levels. Leaders promote build confidence, provide rewards, and encourage everyone in the organization to see problems as opportunities.

Enabling Others to Act

Enabling others is making possible for others to do good work through teamwork, development, and trust. Enabling others involves encouraging people to work together in learning communities and empowering individuals to succeed. Transformational leaders create situations which lead to organizational and personal growth. Appropriately enough, a leading example of empowering others is a team,

Charles Lowry, Dean of Libraries, and Sue Baughman, Assistant Dean for Organizational Development, at the University of Maryland Libraries. Together these leaders promote enabling others through the development of a learning community built on teams (Lowry, 2005, Baughman, 2008). Using the Senge learning community model, Lowry and Baughman have created cross-functional teams that use team dynamics like trust and interdependence to develop more consistent user services (Senge, 2006). They have strengthened the individuals on these self-directing teams to take the initiative in developing appropriate services. And they foster confidence and accountability within each team. Baughman and Lowry use six principles to enable their colleagues to act:

- Valuing the importance of learning and education that will lead to improved service to customers
- Assessing and improving work processes through process re-engineering
- Fostering shared decision-making and accountability among library staff
- Forming self-managing teams
- Developing shared leadership by strengthening the leadership skills of all library staff
- Changing the culture of the organization by creating and nurturing a shared vision and set of values by which all staff can live (Lowry, 2005)

As Kouzes and Posner say, "Leadership is not a solo act; it is a team effort." (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, p.224). In a world that is doing more with less, competitive strategies lose to collaborative strategies. As a transformational leader you foster collaboration by creating a climate of trust, facilitating positive interdependence and supporting interpersonal relations. You are the first to trust others. You make yourself vulnerable and open to influence by listening and acting on what you hear. Leaders use team structures to encourage the development of cooperative goals and reciprocity. You change reward structures to reward collaboration at least as much as individual effort. Leaders support the development of strong interpersonal relations by improving their human relations skills and sustaining ongoing interactions within teams.

Strengthening others is essential if teams are to succeed in achieving their goals. Transformational leaders turn followers into leaders by creating a climate where participants are involved and important. Staff who know that they control their own actions will feel empowered. Paradoxically, the best way to create powerful teams is for the leader to give away their power. Power in teams is not a zero sum game; the more people believe they can influence an organization, the greater the organizational

effectiveness. Leaders provide choice and encourage staff to use it. They distribute resources and responsibility. Leaders develop the confidence to take the initiative by providing training and practice. They encourage data sharing, practice problem solving and encourage the development of self-esteem. Leaders compel action and demand accountability by creating group work rules and encouraging people to take action

Encouraging the heart

Encouraging the heart is about supporting individuals and groups to achieve their vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, pp.248-333). Transformational leaders are cheerleaders for the people in their organizations. They acknowledge the contributions of individuals and groups. And they celebrate the victories in the organization. From my point of view there has been far too little use of this leadership practice in academic libraries. This chronic absence makes it more difficult to achieve our goals and realize our mission.

Bonnie Juergens, Executive Director of Amigos Library Services encourages hearts among academic, public and special librarians throughout the southwestern United States. Leading a voluntary collaborative organization for more than 20 years, her success is based on her ability to encourage the best from her members and recognize when those members are achieving extraordinary things. She has successfully developed a spirit of community through public celebrations of member accomplishments supporting Amigos goals. Like any good Texan, she uses stories to define Amigos and what it means to be a member. And she cheers everyone as they seek to accomplish their goals.

Recognizing contributions to excellence is one of the two key components of encouraging the heart. Transformational leaders shape the organization so that everyone's contributions are noticed and appreciated. A leader does this knowing that, while most library people work long and hard, followers need the encouragement that comes from recognition if they are to excel. As a leader you work from clear standards based on shared values and aspirations (Baughman, 2008). This keeps the recognition meaningful and the values always before the workers. Leaders provide regular feedback on the personal goals of followers. You use personal encouragement to increase motivation. Leaders expect the best. Leaders use positive images to develop positive possibilities and encourage followers to achieve more than they ever thought possible. And leaders pay attention, catching followers doing things right in order to praise positive efforts. Finally as a leader, you recognize contributions by personalizing the recognition to make it meaningful for the worker. If a follower responds best to a quiet word, that is what they get. If the worker likes a public ceremony, that is what they get.

Libraries are slowly getting better at celebrating their values and victories; group activities intended to proclaim and renew the sense of community. Transformational leaders use public celebrations to maintain team spirit and to provide social support during times of stress. Celebrations result in increased participation, more information exchange and celebrations remind individuals that they are part of a group and that their participation is needed for success. Leaders also celebrate by using stories to define and put a human face on the organization. And finally leaders set the example, modeling the way by cheering people on, as well as showing passion and compassion. For a transformational leader, celebrations are important ways to develop the organization and the people in it.

Mastering Transformational Leadership: The IATUL Role

As technological university libraries continue to evolve, the need for transformational leadership will continue to grow. Along with active, user focused services that address changing needs and along with organization development, leadership will continue to be a critical component of library success. Successful leaders will master the five practices of transformational leadership, developing new and innovative techniques that are most appropriate for our technological university library environments.

To me the question is how to make as many leaders and followers as successful as possible. Most important, inside each individual technological university library we can encourage the incorporation of transformational leadership development as part of ongoing organization development efforts. Leaders in each IATUL member library should strive to make this happen. Second, IATUL member libraries should set up the means to share experiences about transformational leadership and learn from each other. Creation of a bulletin board and regular chat opportunities would help disseminate useful ideas about leadership development.

And finally, mastering new leadership practices is essential if transformational leadership is to be broadly adopted. Prospective leaders must have the opportunity to experiment, succeed or fail, and

learn leadership practices in a safe environment away from the daily demands of work. Developing some workshop experiences, perhaps based on the Association of College and Research Libraries or the Association of Research Libraries MRAP model, would be a useful addition to the IATUL repertoire. I encourage you to consider creating periodic IATUL workshops to sharpen your own leadership skills and to develop the new leaders we will need in the future.

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