Industrial and Commercial Training

Developing transformational leaders: the full range leadership model in action

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Emerald

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Abstract

Purpose – To explain and illustrate the innovative full range leadership (FRL) model from Bass and Avolio and to demonstrate how this model can be utilized within organizations to develop transformational leadership.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper describes in detail the FRL model and shows how the transformational leadership styles identified within the model are highly correlated with leader performance. Drawing on extensive personal consulting experience, the paper then outlines how the model, and the associated multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ), can be used successfully in training/development interventions in organizations.

Findings – The FRL model is probably the most research and validated leadership model in use world-wide today. The transformational styles described by the model are highly correlated with leadership success. Transformational leadership can be successfully taught by a development process which utilizes a combination of 360 degree feedback using the MLQ, structured workshops, and one-to-one coaching sessions.

Practical implications – This paper offers a very practical leadership path approach to developing transformational leadership competence, drawing on extensive experience of delivering such programmes with large client organizations world-wide.

Originality/value – The originality of the FRL model lies in the concept of a "range" of leadership behaviors which all leaders demonstrate. Rather than insisting that one must lead "like this", the FRL model makes the point that what is required is a change in the balance of leadership behaviours, away from the more transactional and more towards the transformational. The value of the paper lies in the description of a tried and tested methodology for applying the FRL model in an organizational setting.

Keywords Transformational leadership, Leadership, 360-degree feedback, Coaching

Paper type Case study

Bernie Bass (1990, 1999), perhaps the doyen of leadership research, was one of the first to argue for a new transformational style of leadership to replace transactional forms. Put simply, transactional leadership encompasses fairly traditional managerial styles where managers or leaders gain compliance and performance by either offering rewards or punishing deviations from standards. These styles are useful for stable state situations but are less useful for organizations undergoing environmental turbulence or rapid change. Here transformational styles are required. Transformational leadership involves the provision of a compelling and clear vision; the mobilizing of employee commitment through personal identification and involvement; and the institutionalization of organizational change.

All this is easily said, but how can leaders in organizations be developed in transformational leadership? In this paper we will attempt to share our experiences of both using the full range leadership model (Bass and Avolio, 1998; Avolio, 1999) to develop transformational leadership and methodologies regarding how to apply the model in organizational settings.

The full range leadership model

The full range leadership model, as the name suggests, attempts to depict the whole range of leadership styles from non-leadership to the more transformational styles (Figures 1 and 2).

The leadership styles identified are shown in Table I.
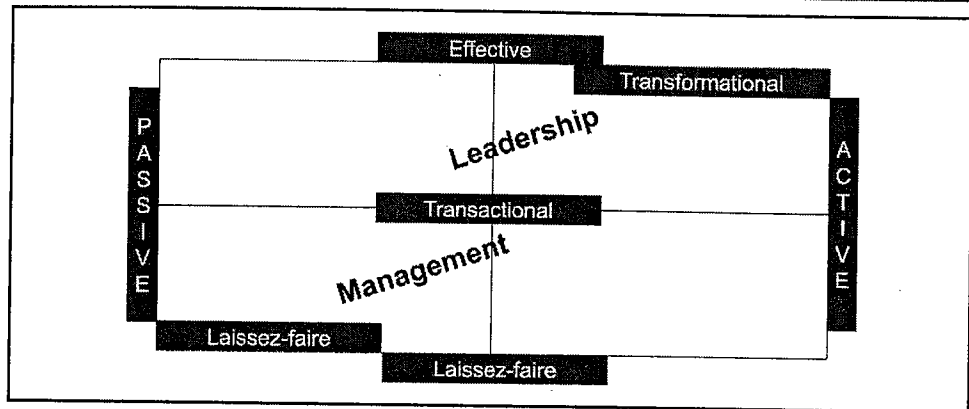
Figure 1 Full range leadership model 1
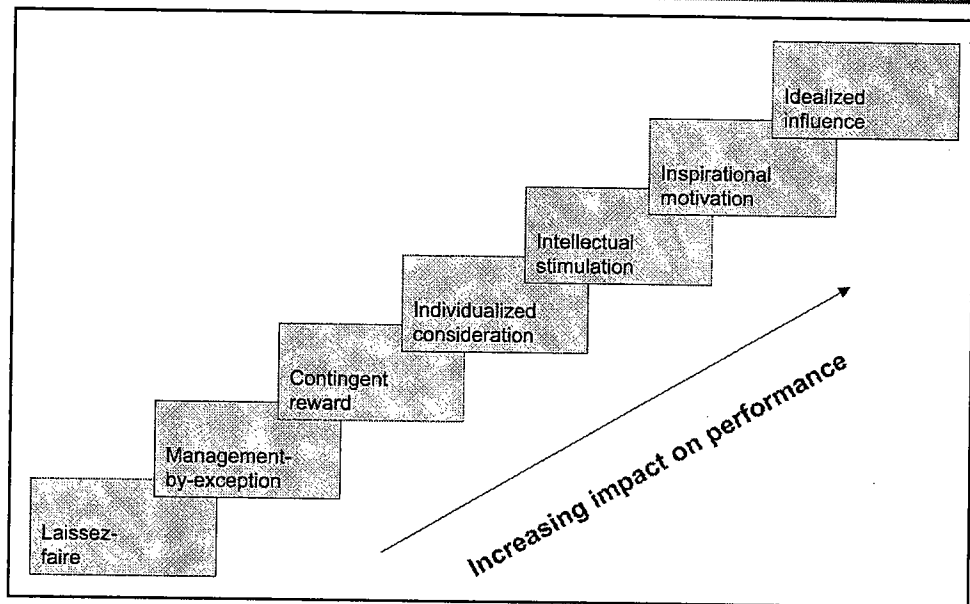

Figure 2 Full range leadership model 2

Table I Leadership styles

Non-leadership	*Laissez-faire*
Transactional leadership	Management-by-exception (passive)
	Management-by-exception (active)
	Contingent reward
Transformational leadership	Individualized consideration
	Intellectual stimulation
	Inspirational motivation
	Idealized influence

Laissez-faire

The *laissez-faire* leader is essentially a non-leader. This type of manager tends to withdraw from the leadership role and offer little in terms of either direction or support. They are often "absent" or indifferent to the needs of their followers. As a result followers are often in conflict with each other regarding roles and responsibilities, try to usurp the leaders role, or seek direction and vision from elsewhere in the organization. Key indicators of this style would be:

- avoids making decisions;
- abdicates responsibilities;
- refuses to take sides in a dispute; and
- shows lack of interest in what is going on.

Management-by-exception (passive)

Management-by-exception (MBE) refers to the process of paying attention to the exceptional rather than the normal. Thus MBE leaders tend to be relatively *laissez-faire* under normal circumstances but take action when problems occur, mistakes are made, or deviations from standard are apparent. Passive MBE leaders only intervene when the exceptional circumstances become obvious. Thus they tend to have a relatively wide performance acceptance range and poor performance monitoring systems. Key indicators of this style would be:

- takes no action unless a problem arises;
- avoids unnecessary changes;
- enforces corrective action when mistakes are made;
- places energy on maintaining status quo; and
- fixes the problem and resumes normal functioning.

Management-by-exception (active)

In contrast, the active MBE leader pays very close attention to any problems or deviations and has extensive and accurate monitoring and control systems to provide early warnings of such problems. Followers subject to this style often learn to avoid mistakes by "burying" them. MBE-A is negatively related to innovation and creativity in the organization. Even when done well this style only tends to produce performance of a moderate standard. Key indicators of this style would be:

- arranges to know if something has gone wrong;
- attends mostly to mistakes and deviations;
- remains alert for infractions of the rules; and
- teaches followers how to correct mistakes.

Contingent reward

Contingent reward (CR) is the classic transactional style. Here the leader sets very clear goals, objectives and targets and clarifies, either openly or by inference, what "rewards" can

> " **Individualized consideration (IC) is the first of the 'transformational' styles ... When managers are asked to relate the behaviors exhibited by their best leader to date the majority list some form of this style at the top of their list.** "

be expected for successful completion. By rewards we do not simply mean financial or pecuniary rewards, not least because many managers have little ability to offer monetary bonuses or to vary salary levels. Rewards in this case refer to the whole range of non-financial rewards ranging from the more tangible (extra holiday, preferred work, time off) to the less tangible (praise, visibility, recognition). The CR leader then monitors performance and provides (or exchanges) the reward and recognition if the performance targets are met or exceeded. If done successfully, this style will produce performance at the required levels. In effect followers will performance up to the objectives and targets that are specified. However, to get employees to "walk that extra mile" it is necessary to use the transformational styles. Key indicators of this style would be:

- recognizes what needs to be accomplished;
- provides support in exchange for required effort;
- gives recognition to followers when they perform and meet agreed-upon objectives;
- follows up to make sure that the agreement is satisfactorily met; and
- arranges to provide the resources needed by followers to accomplish their objectives.

Individualized consideration

Individualized consideration (IC) is the first of the "transformational" styles. The IC leader demonstrates concern for their followers, treats them as individuals, gets to know them well and listens to both their concerns and ideas. When managers are asked to relate the behaviours exhibited by their best leader to date the majority list some form of this style at the top of their list. Key indicators of this style would be:

- recognizes differences among people in their strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes;
- is an "active" listener;
- assigns projects based on individual ability and needs;
- encourages a two-way exchange of views; and
- promotes self-development.

Intellectual stimulation

Intellectual stimulation (IS) essentially involves the leader stimulating the followers to think through issues and problems for themselves and thus to develop their own abilities. It is a style that parents often use with their children but often is less frequent in organizations where many managers favour a "telling" approach to a questioning one. Key indicators of this style would be:

- re-examines assumptions;
- recognizes patterns that are difficult to imagine;
- is willing to put forth or entertain seemingly foolish ideas;
- encourages followers to revisit problems; and
- creates a "readiness" for changes in thinking.

Inspirational motivation

The inspirationally motivating (IM) leader has the ability to motivate the followers to superior performance. Such leaders tend to be able to articulate, in an exciting and compelling manner, a vision of the future that the followers are able to accept and strive towards. Such leaders can also often succeed in elevating the expectations of followers so that they

achieve more then they, or others, thought they could do. Key indicators of this style would be:

- presents an optimistic and attainable view of the future;
- moulds expectations and shapes meaning;
- reduces complex matters to key issues using simple language; and
- create a sense of priorities and purpose.

Idealized influence

The final transformational style refers to the leader who has become an idealized influence (II) or "role model" for those around them. Such leaders are regarded as a role model either because they exhibit certain personal characteristics or "charisma" or because they demonstrate certain moral behaviours. Such leaders are often seen as being high on morality, trust, integrity, honesty and purpose. Key indicators of this style would be:

- has demonstrated unusual competence;
- celebrates followers' achievements;
- addresses crises "head on"; and
- uses power for positive gain.

Bass and Avolio point out that all managers and leaders will exhibit all of these styles. There are times when all of us exhibit *laissez-faire* behaviour. Thus this approach is not simply a typology, but what counts is the frequency with which we exhibit these behaviours. Detailed research has looked at the effectiveness of each of these styles (Avolio, 1999). Many studies correlate the presence of these styles with the performance of the leader. Obviously these correlations can run from a totally negative correlation (-1.0) through the absence of correlation (0.0) to a totally positive correlation ($+1.0$). A meta-analysis by Coleman *et al.* (1995) found the following correlations from 27 studies:

- Transformational (IC, IS, IM, II): $+0.45 - 0.60$.
- Transactional (CR): $+0.44$.
- Management-by-exception (active): $+0.22$.
- Management-by-exception (passive): $+0.13$.
- *Laissez-faire*: -0.28.

Thus, ideally a leaders profile should show higher scores on the transformational styles and lower scores on the management-by-exception styles and *laissez-faire*. Or, to put it another way, good leaders engage in the transformational styles more than they do the transactional or non-transactional styles (Figure 3).

**Figure 3** Contrasting full range leadership profiles
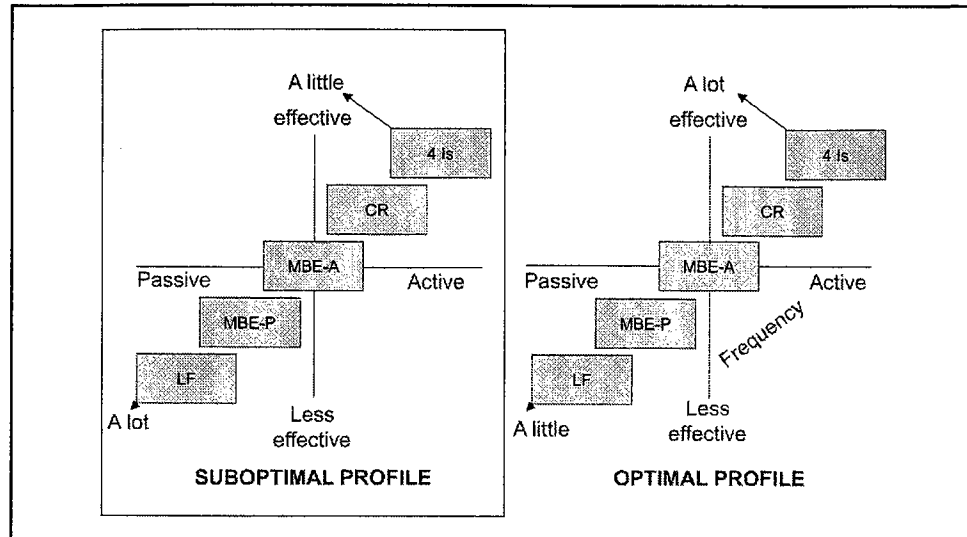
This model and the associated styles were developed from detailed research and by a process of factor analysis. The multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) was then developed and validated/tested to measure the full range leadership behaviours. Recent research has shown that leaders who are rated high on the MLQ transformational items perform better as leaders on the job. An example of such a study was recently conducted in the Israeli Army with platoon commanders. Research has also shown that managers can be trained to improve their ability to engage in the transformational leadership styles (Dvir, 1998).

Applying the model in organizations

We can now examine how we have attempted to apply the full range leadership model in organizational settings. Whilst we have worked in different ways with a number of client organizations such as Pirelli (Kirkbride, 2001), Beiersdorf and ITT, we have developed a fairly standard approach to organizational interventions (Figure 4).

Figure 4 The full range leadership path
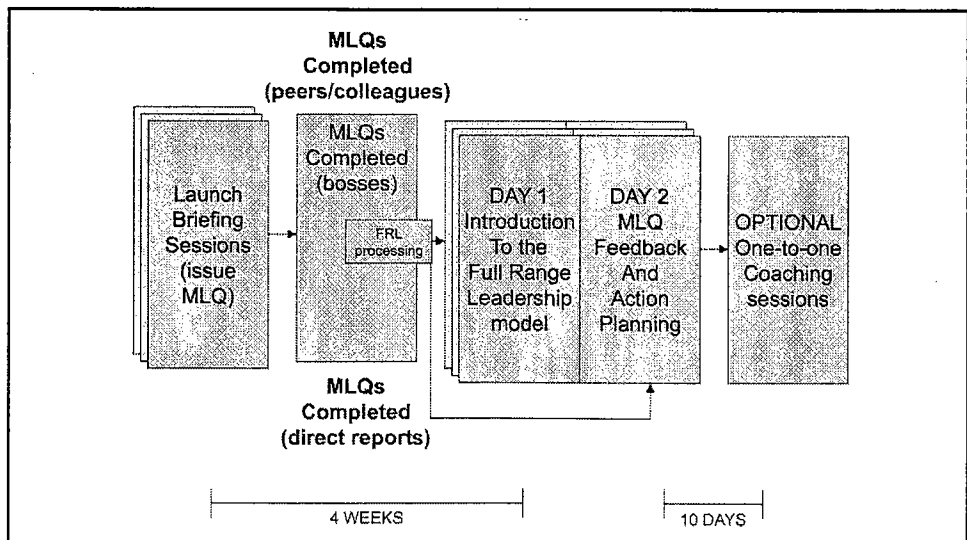
Most of our interventions begin with a series of launch briefings lasting between one and two hours each. These are usually held at the client's offices or plants. The launch briefing for the senior management team is usually facilitated by one of our consultants, while subsequent briefings are facilitated by the client's HR staff. The briefings are used to explain the structure of the leadership initiative and to issue the multifactor leadership questionnaires (MLQs) which managers were to complete themselves as well as getting their bosses, colleagues and subordinates to complete. Time is taken to assure managers about issues of anonymity and confidentiality. The contract between the client and ourselves either specifies that the MLQ forms will be faxed directly back to our offices by individual raters or we use the on-line version of the MLQ. In either way the MLQ forms will not be seen by anyone other than the rater and thus individuals can be assured that their evaluations will not been seen by the manager that they were evaluating. Also the final individual reports for managers are only to be supplied to the managers concerned. Our agreement with clients specifies that all the client will receive will be a group report that contained only anonymous aggregate data.

The initial reactions to the full range leadership interventions are often varied. Some appear to take it in their stride and appeared unfazed by the prospects. As one senior manager at an industrial company put it:

> My reaction was – "oh, here's another initiative" – and you pigeonhole it for a while until you get to hear more about it. And then as you learn more about it your interest and involvement increases and you pick it up from there.

Others are more skeptical. Clients may have experienced downsizing in recent years and some wonder whether this initiative could perhaps be connected with yet another round. Others feel they have seen a number of similar initiatives. However, often our initiative is seen to have some unusual features. As one junior manager explained:

> I was surprised that all the managers were going on it. That was something that our company hasn't done before. It was refreshing to see everybody, from the top to junior managers, going through the process. That was a surprise.

After a suitable gap to allow for processing of data and the production of individual reports a series of workshops are usual held at client locations. These workshops are two days in duration and in outline terms focused on exploring the full range leadership model on the first day and receiving 360° feedback from the MLQ on the second day.

The workshops

The workshops begin by using strategic tools to analyze the competitive environment of the client organization. This is extremely important in the overall design of the workshops. It is seen as essential to link the leadership styles to the strategic realities of the business rather than be seen as just another HR initiative. Thus the facilitator used a number of common strategic tools including PEST analysis, five forces analysis and turbulence models to involve the participants in analyses of the external environment and competitive pressures and threats. The output of these exercises is an understanding of the turbulent nature of the competitive environment facing the organization and thus the need for change focused leadership at all senior levels in the organization. Participants are then introduced to the full range leadership model and the concepts of transactional and transformational leadership styles before exploring the seven styles of the full range model in more detail by using practical examples.

The second day of each workshop starts with an introduction to the concept of 360° feedback and a familiarization with the format of the MLQ report. Participants were then issued with their own 50-page MLQ report and given time to read and digest it. They then met in pairs to "walk and talk". Each participant then reported in plenary on the following:

- one strength identified in their report;
- one weakness identified in their report; and
- one development activity they intended to pursue.

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The reactions to the MLQ report are virtually uniformly positive with comments such as:

- "certainly an eye-opener;"
- "frightening but stimulating;"
- "enlightening feedback;" and
- "very revealing, some unexpected findings."

As one of the most junior managers in one intervention put it:

> I'm not an emotional person, but I was close to tears, because out of all the managers there I was the most junior, and yet to read the positive things my peers thought about me left be dumbstruck. However, the report was not all positive and it highlighted two key areas of weakness which were very useful to me.

The reactions to the workshops are generally excellent with comments such as:

- "informative and stimulating;"
- "highly effective;"
- "very useful and thought provoking;" and
- "relevant and beneficial."

As a senior sales manager put it when he reflected on the experience:

> Well, I thought it was interesting and informative. The most useful part was probably working with colleagues. Putting us into situations where we had to work together across functional boundaries that don't come with the normal routine.

Or as a more junior administrator recalled:

> I liked the workshop because it was informal. Normally nobody has the confidence to speak up. With this workshop it was cleverly constructed so that you could discuss situations that were agitating you at work knowing that you had top managers there, but that it was a safe environment.

Personal coaching

At the end of the workshops participants are offered the opportunity of a one and a half hour coaching interview with a specialist coach to be held at their work location between one and three weeks after the initial workshop. The take up of this offer is usually very high and often over 90 per cent of the participants sign up for a coaching session and in most cases where they did not, this seems to be the result of real diary pressures.

The coaching sessions are designed to be the most important and powerful part of the whole leadership intervention and this appears to be the experience of many of the participants in our programmes, despite a lack of any clear expectations having often never experienced the process before. One senior manager's experience is perhaps common:

> I didn't really expect to get a lot from it. I just thought of it as a post-mortem discussion. However, I was pleasantly surprised. The coach managed to hone in on particular areas and was able to

draw out more about what the data means, what it could lead to and what might be done about it. As we talked things fell into place. I could see a common thread. I was very pleased.

Others are even more positive:

I found the coaching very interesting. I found it the most interesting part of the whole process, I really did. In a way it was also a little frightening. Here was a guy who I had never met and after 15 minutes he knew me. It was uncanny. The coach pointed out two or three areas to work on and also identified how I could work on them. He was excellent. I thoroughly enjoyed the one and a half hours.

A comment by the HR manager for one of our clients is perhaps apposite:

The one-to-one coaching sessions were perceived by the participants as being the most valuable part of the process. They were amazed at how well the coach really knew them from the MLQ data. This helped them focus their action plan, and it was not uncommon for individuals to ask the coach to contact them if an extra slot became available.

For many the power of the coaching was amplified by the fact that it was seen as following up on an initiative properly; something that the organization has not always done. As a junior manager commented:

I thought it was an excellent idea. I felt as if my coach was all for me, on my side. She gave me some good pointers to walk away with. I needed to know if I was doing what a leader needs to do. I'm a new manager so I'm quite fresh and can adapt. So I needed to know how I was doing. It was excellent timing for me and I found it very helpful.

Towards transformational leadership

To what extent can managers be developed on the path to transformational leadership? Can transformational leaders really be developed? This article has tried to answer these questions and has identified a number of key requisites.

Any attempt to develop transformational leadership must acknowledge the organizational realities of other styles of leadership. This is one of the key strengths of the full range leadership model. It explicitly acknowledges that managers are likely to use a whole palate of styles ranging from the non transactional, through transactional to transformational. Managers are thus encouraged to understand that they do not have to be "perfect" leaders demonstrating total transformational leadership. Instead all that is required is a subtle change of the balance of their leadership scores towards the transformational end of the scale.

We have also shown how this model can be operationalized in organizations. Key dimensions of successful use in organizations include careful positioning and pre-briefing; an embracing of the model and 360 process by all levels in the organization; and top class follow up coaching which really releases the power of the model and facilitates behaviour change.

The challenge for organizations facing turbulence in the modern world is to build transformational capability and we believe that the Full Range Leadership Model is a critical component of the solution to that challenge.

> " Intellectual stimulation (IS) essentially involves the leader stimulating the followers to think through issues and problems for themselves and thus to develop their own abilities. It is a style that parents often use with their children but often is less frequent in organizations where many managers favour a 'telling' approach."

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About the author

Professor Paul Kirkbride is President of Full Range Leadership (FRL) Limited, a UK based leadership assessment and training organization. FRL uses the full range leadership model and the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) under license from Professors Bernie Bass and Bruce Avolio and Mindgarden in the US. The model and the MLQ were developed by Professors Bass and Avolio. He can be contacted at: info@fullrangeleadership.com or: www.fullrangeleadership.co.uk