

Transformative Leadership: Key to Success in Education

Liderazgo Transformacional: Clave del Éxito en Educación



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Summary

Transformational leadership has become a fundamental concept in the educational field, making a difference in how educational institutions are managed and how educators influence student development. This leadership approach focuses on inspiring and motivating others to achieve common goals and objectives, fostering a positive and stimulating learning environment. In the context of education, transformational leadership has been revealed as an essential driving force behind educational success. We leave it up to the reader to consider the present article.

Keywords: transformational leadership, educational, educational institutions, student development, common goals and objectives.

Resumen

El liderazgo transformacional se ha convertido en un concepto fundamental en el ámbito educativo, marcando la diferencia en la forma en que las instituciones educativas son gestionadas y cómo los educadores influyen en el desarrollo de los estudiantes. Este enfoque de liderazgo se centra en inspirar y motivar a los demás para alcanzar metas y objetivos comunes, fomentando un ambiente de aprendizaje positivo y estimulante. En el contexto de la educación, el liderazgo transformacional se ha revelado como una fuerza impulsora esencial detrás del éxito educativo. Dejamos a consideración del lector el presente artículo.

Palabras clave: liderazgo transformacional, educativo, instituciones educativas, desarrollo de los estudiantes, metas y objetivos comunes.

Introduction

The following article focuses on transformational leadership in education and how a clear vision and strategic direction can be the key to success in the educational field. Firstly, the importance of considering the significance of teamwork is highlighted in order to establish collaborative learning environments and share knowledge among teachers. Additionally, the importance of sharing a clear and motivating vision for the future of the educational institution is mentioned, inspiring others and emphasizing positive values and celebrating achievements.

Secondly, the topic of empowerment and professional development is addressed, where the importance of facilitating opportunities for professional development and personal growth of team members is highlighted. Specific strategies such as training, workshops, and mentoring programs are mentioned to facilitate professional development.

Lastly, the need for an academic revolution is discussed, where learning intertwines with the ability to create, innovate, and lead change. Strategies to achieve transformational leadership in education are mentioned, such as creating a positive environment by promoting a culture of respect, inclusion, and collaboration, and establishing clear and specific goals for students and



the educational community as a whole.

Vision and Strategic Direction in Education

Vision and strategic direction play a crucial role in transformative leadership within the educational field. A clear vision not only provides a defined direction for the educational institution, establishing long-term goals that guide daily actions, but it also influences everyday decision-making. Transformative educational leaders must not only possess a strong vision but also effectively communicate it to all stakeholders, including educators, students, parents, and the wider community.

From this perspective, transformative leadership entails the presence of a charismatic leader with the ability to exert positive influence. Studies conducted by [García et al. \(2015\)](#) have confirmed the relationship between authentic leadership, group cohesion, identification, and the potential mediating effect of organizational justice. However, the crucial aspect is not limited to this alone. If we approach this issue from the teacher's perspective in the university setting, according to [Robbins \(2014, p. 347\)](#), this professional is expected to be a leader with the "*capacidad de influir en un grupo para que logren metas*". This approach underscores the crucial importance of the teacher in the educational field, becoming a determining factor that motivates students to learn and think in a problem-solving oriented manner in their everyday lives.

In this sense, the responsibility and significant impact that educators have in the holistic development of students are highlighted, guiding them towards the development of practical skills and the application of knowledge in real-life situations. Thus, the university professor emerges as a key agent in shaping an effective and goal-oriented educational process, where their influential leadership contributes to the achievement of academic and personal objectives.

In addition to clear vision, strategic leadership involves the implementation of plans and strategies that help achieve established objectives. Transformational leaders in education are proactive and creative in addressing challenges, identifying opportunities, and making informed decisions to improve educational quality. These leaders are not afraid to innovate and adopt new and effective pedagogical approaches that respond to the changing needs of students and society.

Several authors have explored this theme, offering approaches and theoretical frameworks that can guide educational leaders. [Fullan \(2001\)](#) emphasizes the importance of a shared vision and strong strategic direction in transforming schools, emphasizing that effective school leadership involves creating and communicating an appealing vision that motivates all key stakeholders to work together towards common goals.

¹ Our translation: ability to influence a group to achieve goals.



Senge (1990), on the other hand, argues that a shared vision is achieved through a continuous process of organizational learning, where all stakeholders actively participate in creating and developing the vision. This approach is based on the idea that vision and strategic direction in education should be collaboratively built, taking into account the perspectives and contributions of all members of the educational community.

Gimeno (2008) highlights the importance of a strategic vision in education that responds to current social, cultural, and technological challenges and changes. He emphasizes the need for educational leaders to generate a vision that aligns with new demands and contexts, promoting a strategic direction that fosters continuous improvement of educational processes. This, as stated by Rojas *et al.* (2020, p. 243), requires "challenging followers to think and rethink how activities are carried out, fostering motivation, reinforcement, and the behavior of those involved."

Inspiration and Motivation of Educational Staff

Educational transformational leadership plays a crucial role in inspiring and motivating teachers, as it focuses on stimulating change, promoting development, and creating an environment that fosters both personal and professional growth for educators. The foundations of transformational leadership were first established by James MacGregor Burns. In his seminal work Burns (1978), he laid the groundwork for transformational leadership. He argued that this style of leadership is based on motivation and inspiration, going beyond mere transactional exchanges to focus on raising the aspirations and morale of followers. In an educational context, this approach involves cultivating a passion for teaching, fostering innovation, and promoting a deeper commitment to the educational mission.

Later, Bass (1985) expanded and refined Burns' ideas. In his work, he highlighted the importance of transformational leaders in inspiring their followers to transcend their personal interests in favor of higher goals. In the educational realm, this approach urges leaders to cultivate a shared sense of purpose, focusing on educational goals that go beyond academic outcomes and address the holistic development of students.

However, achieving this challenge is not easy in today's times, as new challenges constantly arise that demand different professional attitudes. That is why it is necessary to reflect and address problems in order to transform knowledge and solve issues. Therefore, today's leader must have a different profile than decades before, as they are expected to stay updated in knowledge, have strategic skills to manage groups, be able to communicate effectively, and make decisions. These aspects are considered essential to be successful and competitive leaders in today's world.

Dylan & Hargreaves (2016) emphasize the importance of creating a school culture where all teachers continuously develop themselves in order to achieve the success of all students. Transformational leadership emerges as key to inspiring and promoting change in teaching, fostering an environment where learning and constant improvement are fundamental values.



In this sense, the need for educational leaders who guide and motivate teachers, promoting an environment conducive to educational excellence, stands out. In this conception, transformational leadership can be a catalyst for teachers' continuous learning. Therefore, it is important to have leadership that fosters a culture of constant improvement, where educators feel supported and motivated to enhance their teaching practices.

An important aspect of transformational leadership is the way habits can influence our personal and professional lives. If we analyze the power of habits following [Duhigg's perspective \(2012\)](#), habits can influence the motivation and performance of educational staff, but strategies are required to change negative habits and promote positive ones.

In the dynamic academic and student environment, the transformational leader emerges as the architect of an educational revolution that transcends conventional classrooms. To illustrate this concept, let's imagine a scenario where universities are not only centers of knowledge but also authentic drivers of innovation. We are referring to a place where educational processes are constantly reinvented, allowing the flourishing of cutting-edge technologies and transforming the academic and community environment into a crucible overflowing with opportunities.

In this exciting journey, the transformational leader emerges as the catalyst that triggers significant changes. The pursuit of excellence goes beyond being a motto; it becomes a philosophy that drives the professional development of young people. We are referring to an education that goes beyond the classrooms, preparing students to be proactive agents and creators of innovative solutions.

In this context, universities not only play an educational role but also empower individuals. They become sources of inspiration for a generation that not only seeks to acquire knowledge but also yearns to transform its environment and confront the challenges of tomorrow. Thus, the need for an academic revolution arises, where learning intertwines with the ability to create, innovate, and lead change. The crucial thing is to prepare to be part of a community that not only dreams of the future but actively contributes to building it.

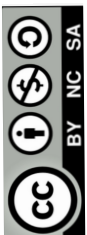
One way to achieve transformational leadership in education, based on our own teaching experience, is to:

- **Create a positive environment:** Promote a culture of respect, inclusion, and collaboration throughout the educational environment. This can be achieved through implementing anti-bullying programs, integration activities, and promoting open communication and respect among students, teachers, and administrative staff.
- **Set clear goals:** Define clear and specific goals for students and the educational community as a whole. These goals can be related to academic performance, behavior, participation in extracurricular activities, among others. By setting goals and monitoring their progress, students are motivated to adopt positive habits to achieve the established objectives.



- **Implement recognition and rewards programs:** Create recognition and rewards systems for students who demonstrate positive habits. This can include prizes, certificates, public recognition, or special privileges. These programs help motivate students and reinforce the positive habits that are desired to be fostered.
- **Promote personal responsibility:** Teach students about the importance of personal responsibility and making appropriate decisions. Foster self-discipline and self-evaluation so that students take responsibility for their own actions and learn to make positive choices.
- **Offer training and development programs:** Provide training and development programs for students, teachers, and educational staff that promote social, emotional, and intellectual skills. These programs can include conflict resolution workshops, communication skills, emotional intelligence, among others.
- **Encourage parental involvement:** Involve parents in the educational process and promote open and ongoing communication between the educational institution and families. Organize events and meetings to discuss relevant topics and provide support to parents in the education and upbringing of their children.
- **Model positive behaviors:** Leaders and educational staff should model positive behaviors and be role models for students. This includes consistency between what is said and done, as well as promoting positive values such as honesty, respect, and empathy.
- **Promoting autonomy:** Giving teachers the freedom to make decisions and control their own work, fostering a sense of responsibility and empowerment. This can contribute to an environment where transformational leadership can thrive, as individuals feel more connected to their work and have more space to express their creativity.
- **Mastery:** Intrinsic motivation is related to the desire to improve and grow. When leaders promote mastery, they allow team members to develop and perfect their skills. This approach can align with transformational leadership, as leaders are interested in the personal and professional development of their followers.
- **Purpose:** When people feel that their work has a purpose beyond simply earning a salary, they are more engaged. Transformational leadership often relies on a shared vision and a sense of collective purpose, so the intrinsic motivation that comes from having a purpose can fuel this type of leadership.

In the context outlined, [Pink \(2010\)](#) argues that intrinsic motivation, which is based on internal desire to perform an activity, is more effective than extrinsic motivation, such as that derived from rewards or punishments. Accordingly, the author suggests various tools and strategies aimed at fostering intrinsic motivation, which can be applied both in the general organizational context and specifically in the educational field. These strategies seek to promote autonomy,



skill development, and the definition of a clear purpose.

However, the most important aspect in any organization or team is understanding and communicating the "why" behind actions and goals. Leaders who are able to inspire their personnel through a meaningful purpose generate higher commitment and motivation. In this regard, [Sinek \(2009, p. 41\)](#) argue that: "*Todos los grandes líderes y organizaciones, independientemente de su tamaño o industria, actúan y se comunican desde adentro hacia afuera*"².

Promoting a Positive Learning Environment

Generating positivity in educational transformative leadership is crucial to inspire others, foster a positive learning environment, and achieve meaningful changes within the educational community. Here are some strategies that can help cultivate positive transformative leadership in the educational field:

- **Promotion of open and transparent communication:** In an educational institution, we promote open and transparent communication by providing space to listen to concerns and suggestions from team members and the educational community. In this context, we highlight the relevance of considering the perspectives of [Hargreaves & O'Connor \(2018\)](#), who emphasize the importance of working as a team to establish collaborative learning environments. Additionally, it is important to share knowledge among teachers and to learn from one another. Applying the principles of collaboration, trust, and communication contributes to building a culture of learning within the classroom. It is also vital to share information transparently so that everyone is informed about the objectives, challenges, and achievements of the transformation process.
- **Inspiration and shared vision:** From our experience, we firmly believe that in an educational institution, it is crucial to share a clear and motivating vision for the future. This practice helps all stakeholders understand the purpose and goals behind the proposed changes. Additionally, we consider it essential to inspire others by highlighting positive values and celebrating achievements, even small ones, throughout the transformation process.

In our opinion, the key lies in fostering a mindset of lifelong learning among teachers, encouraging them to work as a team to share knowledge and pedagogical strategies. Creating a learning environment where teachers can interact, learn, and share ideas is fundamental. As suggested by [Fullan \(2001\)](#), having a clear and motivating vision is essential to guide change processes in educational institutions. Following [Senge's](#) pers-

² Our translation: All great leaders and organizations, regardless of their size or industry, act and communicate from the inside out.



pective (1990), shared vision stands out as one of the key components for creating learning organizations, as it can unite people towards common goals.

In this regard, we support the idea expressed by Kotter (1996) about the need to establish a clear and compelling vision as the first crucial step in any change process. Furthermore, we believe that a clear vision can guide assessment and improve learning. We also agree with Barber's argument (2013) that a compelling vision is essential to mobilize people towards specific educational goals.

- **Empowerment and professional development:** In an educational institution, opportunities for professional development and personal growth should be facilitated for team members. This can include training, workshops, and mentoring programs.

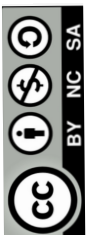
Regarding this, Covey (2004) emphasizes the importance of empowering individuals to take responsibility for their own professional and personal development. In this context, opportunities for professional development are fundamental, and authors such as Senge (1990) advocate for the creation of organizational environments that foster continuous learning and personal growth.

The trainings, workshops, and mentoring programs mentioned in the text are specific strategies to facilitate professional development. According to Tannenbaum & Yukl (1992), training and development are key elements in empowering employees, as they provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to assume greater responsibilities. Additionally, mentoring, according to Kram (1985), contributes to the development of interpersonal skills and personal growth by providing guidance and support. They encourage active participation of educators in decision-making and implementation of changes, allowing them to feel integral part of the process.

- **Culture of collaboration and mutual support:** A culture where collaboration is valued and teamwork is fostered must be promoted. This may include creating spaces to share ideas and resources, providing emotional and professional support to team members, and recognizing and celebrating individual and collective efforts. In this sense, various authors support the importance of cultivating an environment that values and promotes collaboration.

According to Robbins & Judge (2019), effective collaboration is a key component for improving team performance and achieving organizational objectives. These authors argue that a culture of collaboration not only involves working together on specific projects, but also continuously sharing ideas and resources.

Likewise, Katzenbach & Smith (1993) highlight that teamwork is not only about the task itself, but also about the mutual support among team members. Positive interdependence among team members is also important, contributing to an environment where each individual feels supported.



Creating spaces to share ideas and resources aligns with [Senge's \(1990\)](#) perspective, who advocates for the importance of "shared mind." This concept involves building a collective vision and the ability of team members to share their knowledge and learn from each other.

Regarding emotional and professional support, authors like [Maslach & Leiter \(2016\)](#) point out that a work environment that provides emotional support reduces burnout and improves the psychological well-being of employees. The inclusion of this type of support helps strengthen the bonds among team members, generating a sense of belonging.

The recognition and celebration of individual and collective efforts, as mentioned by [Pink \(2010\)](#), are fundamental elements to motivate employees. Recognition is not only about tangible rewards, but also about acknowledging the effort and contribution to the achievement of common goals.

- **Recognition and celebration:** According to [Byrd et al. \(2017\)](#), in the educational context, public recognition of the achievements and contributions of educators, students, and other staff members is essential to strengthen cohesion and community spirit. Organizing events or ceremonies specifically designed to celebrate important milestones not only fosters a sense of accomplishment, but also demonstrates appreciation for the hard work performed by the educational community.
- **Flexibility and adaptability:** According to [Zarkadakis \(2021\)](#), flexibility and adaptability are essential leadership attributes in the current ever-changing world. A leader who shows flexibility in the face of challenges and changes is more capable of positively influencing their team and organization. This encourages innovation and continuous learning.
- **Taking care of well-being:** Literature indicates that an empathetic and well-being-conscious leader should prioritize the emotional and physical well-being of team members ([Crawford, 2019](#)). This is achieved through the implementation of policies and practices that support a healthy and balanced environment. Contributions from [Marzano et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Marzano & Heflebower \(2011\)](#) indicate that resilience can be fostered by providing resources and tools to help educators manage stress and job demands.

Development of Communication Skills and Active Listening

An aspect that is essential in educational transformational leadership is the transformational learning of communication and listening skills. These skills allow for the establishment and maintenance of effective communication with all members of the educational community.

[Robbins & Judge \(2017\)](#) state that effective communication is essential for leaders to convey their vision and goals, as well as to obtain feedback and understanding from others. Through clear and coherent communication, educational leaders can inspire their team and motivate



them to achieve common goals.

On the other hand, Covey (2004) points out the importance of active listening as an essential skill in leadership. Active listening involves understanding not only the words spoken by others, but also the underlying emotions and needs. As an educational transformational leader, it is important to listen attentively to teachers, students, parents, and other community members in order to understand their concerns and needs, and to make decisions and take actions accordingly.

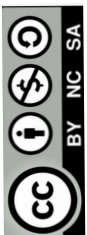
The lack of communication skills and active listening can hinder transformational leadership in education for several reasons, such as:

- **It limits the ability to convey a clear vision:** Transformational leadership involves the ability to effectively communicate an inspiring vision that motivates others to work towards a common goal. If a leader lacks communication skills, they are likely to be unable to transmit their vision in a clear and persuasive manner.
- **It hinders the creation of trust relationships:** To lead in a transformational manner, it is crucial to establish trust relationships with team members. Lack of communication skills can hinder the building of trust, as others may perceive the leader as unresponsive or uninterested in their concerns and opinions.
- **It limits the exchange of ideas and feedback:** Active listening is a fundamental skill for a transformational leader. By actively listening to others, leaders can gather valuable information, generate new ideas, and make informed decisions. Lack of active listening skills can result in a one-way communication environment, where ideas and feedback are ignored or dismissed.
- **It hinders change management:** Transformational leadership involves managing and promoting change in the educational organization. To achieve this, it is important to be able to clearly communicate the benefits of the change, involve team members in the process, and effectively handle resistance to change. Lack of communication skills can hinder all stages of the change process.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement in the Educational Context

Marzano (2005) emphasizes the importance of implementing an evaluative approach in education, in which school leaders actively engage in the evaluation and improvement process of their institution. This involves setting clear goals, collecting relevant data, and using it effectively to make informed decisions.

It is equally essential to use various tools and processes, such as classroom observation, standardized tests, and formative assessments, to measure student progress and evaluate the quality of teaching. School leaders must be able to analyze the results of these evaluations and



use them to identify areas for improvement and develop effective strategies to address them.

However, great importance should also be given to feedback and the continuous professional development of teachers. Therefore, school leaders should provide constructive feedback and offer growth opportunities to teachers so they can improve their teaching practice. This involves providing the support, training, and resources necessary to ensure quality learning for all students.

As for continuous improvement, [Fullan \(2001\)](#) points out that it is not limited solely to students' academic performance, but involves the participation of the entire educational community. In transformational leadership, it is essential to foster continuous improvement, not just by managing daily tasks, but by motivating, inspiring, and empowering others to achieve common goals.

[Robinson et al. \(2016\)](#), on their part, emphasize the relationship between transformational leadership and students' performance. This type of leadership creates a positive and supportive environment, enabling teachers to feel empowered and motivated to improve their teaching practice. Transformational leaders focus on setting clear goals, communicating expectations, fostering collaboration, and providing professional development opportunities. Numerous studies support the relationship between transformational leadership and improved educational outcomes, as these leaders have a learner-centered approach, establish high expectations, and provide the appropriate resources and support for teachers to enhance their practice.

Glickman (1987) cited by [Glickman \(2002\)](#) asserts that leaders live up to the expectations they have for others, being open and willing to be scrutinized on how they carry out their own professional work. Educators who cannot publicly practice continuous improvement over time must either leave voluntarily, relocate to a different environment, or be dismissed. Clearly, this is not an easy job!

Teachers who are deemed competent after the first cycle are asked to establish their own classroom teaching goals and professional growth plans. Subsequent observation cycles and conferences are no longer tied to evaluation but rather provide feedback on their growth plans.

Errors to Avoid in Transformational Leadership

As [Villalba \(2014\)](#) points out, there are several mistakes that are detrimental to establishing true transformational leadership in education. Firstly, some executives fail to recognize the importance of communication as an inherent responsibility of their position. Additionally, they do not consider the impact that their communicative actions can have on the organization.

Another common error is the lack of a unified discourse from the executives, resulting in obvious contradictions. This lack of coherence in the conveyed message creates conflicts that ultimately affect lower-level employees. Furthermore, some executives do not share the same vision as the organization, resulting in discrepancies and tensions in the work environment.



Similarly, it is concerning the lack of awareness of the effects of their actions on personnel. Many executives do not consider the repercussions of their behavior on the teaching staff, which can lead to demotivation and lack of commitment. Lastly, some executives solely focus on operational aspects when transmitting information, disregarding other relevant aspects for the educational institution.)

Conclusions

After addressing the topic, we conclude that transformational leadership goes beyond being a source of motivational inspiration, through the establishment of a charismatic role model and the articulation of a shared vision for the future. Additionally, we recognize and consider the individual differences among followers. Transformational leadership facilitates intellectual stimulation by questioning old assumptions and the status quo to foster creative thinking.

We also believe that the various mentioned authors provide approaches and concepts that allow us to understand the importance of a vision and strategic direction in education. These works can be used as theoretical references by educational leaders to guide our work and promote effective management of educational institutions.

We also believe that educational transformational leadership, according to the perspective of various authors over the years, presents itself as a solid framework to inspire and motivate educational staff. We, as leaders, not only focus on academic goals, but also aim for the holistic development of educators, creating an environment conducive to continuous learning and innovation in education.

Transformational leadership, backed by a clear vision and effective strategic direction, is essential for our success in the educational field. We, as transformational leaders, inspire, motivate, and empower educators and students, creating an environment conducive to learning and personal growth. By adopting a transformational approach, our educational institutions can achieve higher levels of academic excellence and prepare students for a promising future in an ever-changing world.

We also conclude that communication and active listening skills are essential in educational transformational leadership, as they allow us to establish effective communication, convey the vision and goals, motivate and inspire others, as well as understand the needs and concerns of the educational community. These skills are fundamental to generate an atmosphere of trust and cooperation and achieve the necessary transformation in the educational field.

Finally, we believe that creating a culture of collaboration and mutual support in our work environment, which includes facilitating spaces to share ideas, emotional and professional support, as well as recognizing individual and collective efforts, is supported by various authors who emphasize the importance of these elements for our organizational success and the well-being of team members.



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