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# **Toward a Transformational-Transcendental Leadership Model of Intercultural Communication**

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## **Abstract**

A communication model from the unique perspective of transformational-transcendental leadership in a cross-cultural context is proposed. A brief discussion of the elements of both transformational and transcendental leadership is conducted, with emphasis placed on the role of relationship building in both. This is followed by the identification of trust, credibility, relational empathy, and time as critical components of the communication process. Culture-specific variables regarding attitude, skills, and knowledge are then introduced as part of the model. A short case study of how the model applies to the Japanese and American cultural context is then presented. Finally, suggestions for further research are offered which would contribute to the validity of the model proposed.

## **Toward a Transformational-Transcendental Leadership Model of Intercultural Communication**

Though much has been written concerning transformational leadership in the past two decades, a review of the literature reveals that research remains to be done on the practical application of the concept cross-culturally, particularly in the area of communication. What follows is an attempt to provide a preliminary intercultural communication model of a particularized type of leadership, herein termed “transformational-transcendental leadership.” Spitzberg (1989) expressed the need for a culture invariant model of communication processes that accounts for cultural

variances, and in an era of rapid globalization, the presentation of such a model in the transformational leadership context may work towards filling the void in this area.

After briefly summarizing the concept of transformational-transcendental leadership, the current study will deal with its applicability to a cross-cultural environment. Focus will then be placed upon the four elements deemed essential to success in any communicative setting, with special attention devoted to intercultural communication. This will be followed by the presentation and explanation of the model itself, with a brief description of how it may be applied in the particular instance of Japanese and American encounters. Finally, a discussion of the limitations of the model and suggestions for further research will ensue.

## **Transformational-Transcendental Leadership**

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Burns (1978) first wrote of the transforming political leader as one “who looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower” (p. 4), interacting with followers in such a way that both the leader and the led raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality (p. 20). Bass (1985) applied the concept to the business world and characterized the components of transformational leadership in terms of what has become the “Four I’s,” (Avolio et al., 1991, p. 9), as follows:

1. Individualized consideration
2. Intellectual stimulation
3. Inspirational motivation
4. Idealized influence (originally “charismatic leadership;” Bass, 1985; Bass et al., 1987; Bass, 1990)

In short, transformational leaders stimulate colleagues and followers to view their work from new perspectives, create awareness of the mission of the organization, assist them in developing higher levels of both ability and

potential, and motivate them to subjugate their self interests to the interests of the group (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Such leaders develop their followers, raise their need levels and subsequently energize them, and promote significant changes in individuals, groups, and potentially entire organizations (Avolio et al., 1991; Den Hartog et al., 1997; Banerji & Krishnan, 2000; Krishnan, 2001).

Bass and other theorists were careful to distinguish transformational from transactional leadership, the latter being characterized by contingent reward (reward for performance), active management by exception (enforcing rules to avoid mistakes), and passive management by exception (intervening only when problems become serious) (Bass, 1997). However, it must be noted that transformational does not supplant contingent leadership but is, rather, an expansion of it (Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leadership has been determined to be more effective than transactional leadership alone (Bass, 1990; Bass, 1997), but in fact superior leaders display both types (Avolio et al., 1999), there being a strong correlation between contingent reward and components of transformational leadership (Bycio et al., 1995; Brown & Dodd, 1999; Banerji & Krishnan, 2000). Transformational leadership simply goes beyond transactional in that it is proactive, forming new expectations in individuals and groups and setting empowerment processes in motion (Popper & Zakkai, 1994) by raising consciousness levels through articulation and role modeling (Bass, 1990).

Research has shown that transformational leadership leads to higher levels of organizational performance (Brown & Dodd, 1999); enhances subordinates' satisfaction levels, trust in leadership, and affective commitment (Barling et al., 2000); and increases effort and job performance (Podsakoff et al., 1996; Den Hartog et al., 1997).

Qualifiers to this are that situational variables have been found to influence the effects of leaders' behavior (Podsakoff et al., 1996). Transformational leadership has been determined to be more effective in close versus distant situations (Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999), and transformation can be downward as well as upward (Ford, 1991). Nevertheless, the consensus of the literature reviewed is that transformational leadership is of a higher order than transactional leadership.

Concerning the actual leader, there has been a strong correlation made between personal values and the ability to be transformational (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Russell, 2001). Values associated with transformational leadership have been identified as integrity, honor, and justice, these end values being adopted by followers (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). In addition, having a high purpose in life, personal efficacy, social self-confidence, and interpersonal control distinguish the transformational leader (Krishnan, 2001). In fact, Banerji and Krishnan (2000) have shown there to be a link between ethical behavior, inspirational leadership, and intellectual stimulation.

The moral aspect of transformational leadership is deemed to be critical in that there is seen to be a core element of servant leadership involved, “the primary functional elements of servant leadership [growing] out of proper leadership values” such as humility and respect for others (Russell, 2001). These are key components of what this writer theorizes to be the highest form of leadership, discussed in the following.

### ***Transcendental Leadership***

Burns (1978) distinguished transactional leadership from that which “motivates followers to work for transcendental goals” (cited in Bass, 1985, p. 11). Though commenting on transformational leadership, Burns’ emphasis on the inspirational aspect is significant.

Nicholls (1994) asserted that there are three types of leadership, as follows:

1. Strategic leadership (“head”) — concerned with path-finding and culture-building to create effective organizations;
2. Supervisory leadership (“hands”) — concerned with adapting to the situation to achieve efficient operations; and
3. Inspiring leadership (“heart”) — concerned with people, giving them an energizing vision, focusing on beliefs, and enabling.

The latter, considered to be the superior form, is defined as “that activity which stimulates purposeful activity in others by changing the way they look at the world around them and relate to one another” (Nicholls,

1994, paragraph 13). A similarity is apparent between “inspiring leadership” and Kouzes and Posner’s (1995) five fundamentals of exemplary leadership: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modelling the way, and encouraging the heart (pp. 9, 18).

Though these may be included under the rubric of transformational leadership, the emphasis on the relational aspect has led Cardona (2000) to categorize this form of leadership as transcendental. Transcendental leaders are concerned primarily with the people themselves and their personal development. Cardona (2000, paragraph 26), after referring to Greenleaf’s (1970) original concept of servant-leadership, comments that a transcendental leader is “a transactional leader, who is also charismatic [transformational], and a server,” one who best leads by example.

Thus, transcendental leaders emphasize personal relationships and service to others. Though these are implicit in transformational leadership, transcendental leadership, differing in degree rather than kind from transformational, is explicit about their centrality to effective leadership. Therefore, from this point onward transcendental leadership will be conjoined with transformational into what this writer holds to be the highest form of leader behavior: transformational-transcendental leadership.

### **Cross-cultural Applicability of the Transformational-Transcendental Leadership Paradigm**

Though no work has been done in this area in relation to transcendental leadership alone, recent research has indicated that the transformational leadership model has applications in an intercultural environment. Concerning leadership as a whole, Gibson and Marcoulides (1995, paragraph 11) cite a study of leadership in fourteen countries which concluded that there is a generalizability of leadership factors. Bond and Smith (1996) concur, as do Salk and Brannen (2000, paragraph 1), who write, “National culture . . . [is] far less direct and deterministic than suggested by prior research.”

Referring specifically to transformational leadership, Bass (1996) finds “at least some degree of universality” (p. 732). Bass (1997) further

concluded from supportive evidence accumulated from all but one continent that “there is universality in the transactional-transformational leadership paradigm” (p. 130), and that “in whatever the country, when people think about leadership, their prototypes and ideals are transformational” (p. 135). Pillai, Scandura and Williams (1999) provide supportive evidence for this conclusion, with Den Hartog, House, Hanges, et al. (1999) producing a study determining that aspects of charismatic/transformational leadership are universally endorsed across cultures.

The transformational leadership component of inspiration in particular appears to be “as universal as the concept of leadership itself” (Bass, 1997, p. 132), although it must be added that contextual influences (e.g., organizational orientation, task system, structure, and mode of governance) within organizations do affect the receptivity of transformational leadership (Pawar & Eastman, 1997). The levels of perceived leadership have also been discovered to be culturally variant (Bass, 1997), with collectivist cultures being more favorably disposed towards transformational leadership in some cases (Jung & Avolio, 1999).

This notwithstanding, the concepts of transformational leadership in general appear to have a cross-cultural appeal. Documentation further reveals that its outcomes in the areas of subordinate effectiveness, effort, and satisfaction make transformational leadership the most efficacious style of leadership in the international environment (Bass, 1997; cf. Pillai et al., 1999).

Having now defined transformational-transcendental leadership and established that the transformational leadership paradigm in a holistic sense is apropos to a cross-cultural setting, attention will now be focused upon the role of communication in the paradigm and the essential components of an intercultural communicative model.

## **Transformational-Transcendental Leadership and Intercultural Communication**

In order to provide individualized consideration, stimulate intellectually, motivate through inspiration and influence ideally, transformational leaders

must necessarily raise consciousness levels through articulation (Bass, 1990). Cardona (2000) posits that the three transcendental leadership competencies are integrity, negotiation, and communication. Inspiring others in particular is heavily dependent upon effective communication. As Kouzes and Posner (1995) note, “by using powerful language, positive communication style, and non-verbal expressiveness, leaders breathe life (which is the literal definition of the word inspire) into a vision” (pp. 133-134).

Naturally, there are a number of factors involved in effective communication, both within one’s own culture and interculturally. Furthermore, it should be noted that “the fundamental nature of the communicative process does not change given different cultural contexts; only the contextual parameters change” (Spitzberg, 1989, p. 261). With this in mind, the writer is of the conviction that four factors in particular are fundamental to the process. These are identified as trust, credibility, relational empathy, and time.

### ***Trust***

Fairholm and Fairholm (2000, paragraph 11) state, “The level of trust in a relationship determines the quality and fidelity of the communication in that relationship.” Mayers (1974) also acknowledges that “the trust bond is the foundation for effective relationships” (p. 4). Indeed, trust is seen as a basic ingredient in servant leadership and in other leadership styles, as well (cf. Greenleaf, 1977; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Covey, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) define trust as follows:

the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (paragraph 10)

They note that leaders desiring to be trusted need 1) ability, 2) benevolence, and 3) integrity (paragraph 43; cf. Chan, 1997). This is particularly true of transformational-transcendental leaders, whose character and moral

values are fundamental to their effectiveness. In fact, Pillai, Schriesheim, and Williams (1999) show convincingly that there is a key relationship between transformational leadership and trust, their research on fairness and trust concluding as follows:

We feel that the transformational leader plays an important role in actively building trust through his or her specific behaviors and that trust is not simply a contextual variable that facilitates the transformational process. Thus, our model posits a direct relationship between transformational leadership and trust. (paragraph 15)

The conclusion reached is that trust is one of the building blocks for effective transformational-transcendental leadership, as it is essential to relationships, being closely correlated with the level of communication achieved.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility is associated with both effective communication and trust (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; O'Keefe, 1990). Kouzes and Posner (1993) postulate that honesty, competence, and inspiration are crucial to source credibility, whereas Munter (1993) distinguishes five factors that contribute to being perceived as a credible leader: 1) rank; 2) goodwill; 3) expertise; 4) image; and 5) values and standards shared with the audience (paragraph 19).

In intercultural relationships, Dodd (1998) asserts that "intercultural information is influenced by the perceived credibility of another person" (p. 215). She posits that aspects of intercultural credibility are 1) competence (knowledge, credentials, information, etc.); 2) trust; 3) similarity (perceptions of oneness or commonality); 4) charisma; and 5) dynamism (pp. 215-222).

Specifically regarding communication, Redding (cited in Goldhaber, 1993, p. 66) asserts that trust, confidence, and credibility, "the extent to which message sources and/or communication events are judged believable," are key factors in communicating with effect. As such, establishing both trust and credibility are seen to be essential components of

effective communication as a leader, both in same culture and intercultural environments, as is the third ingredient, relational empathy.

### ***Relational Empathy***

Empathy is defined by Fracaro (2001, paragraph 4) as “the ability to view things from another’s perspective and to share in their thoughts and feelings about attitudes, beliefs, hopes, and fears” and has been identified by Goleman (1995) as “the fundamental ‘people skill’ ” (p. 119) and “the most powerful form of nondefensive listening” (p. 166).

The connection made between empathy and listening is especially important in the context of communication. Spears (1995) has identified ten characteristics of the servant-leader, the first two being listening and empathy. In fact, “empathetic listening” is considered to be the highest form of listening by Covey (1989; cf. Cashman and Burzynski, 2000). It is notable that in an intercultural context, Dodd (1998) asserts that both active listening and perceiving are but extensions of empathy.

Aaker and Williams (1998) point out the importance of empathy in intercultural communication in particular. Broome (1991) acknowledges the same, stating that “the process of empathizing may be more essential in intercultural communication than it is in interaction with similar others” (p. 236). He emphasizes the necessity of engaging in “relational empathy,” a view which goes beyond the individual to the creation of *shared meaning* [emphasis in original] during interpersonal encounters. This is to be viewed as an on-going, dynamic process which moves toward degrees of understanding as participants recognize their interdependence. In order for relational empathy to be developed, similarity is nonessential. Instead, the following denotes what is recognized to be required in an intercultural encounter.

1. Desire to put forth the necessary effort
2. Demonstration of commitment to the encounter
3. Willingness to explore alternative meanings
4. Willingness to participate in mutually creative exploration that results in the development of a “third culture” (Broome, 1991, p. 247; cf. Dodd, 1998, p. 193)

Broome's emphasis on the relational aspect of empathy is significant in that transformational-transcendental leaders stress the development of human relationships, as alluded to above. Thus, relational empathy is to be regarded as an essential component of the paradigm, as is the ingredient of time.

### ***Time***

Fairholm and Fairholm (2000) comment that "leadership is a process of instilling and encouraging trust" (paragraph 3) and that "trust develops over a long time" (paragraph 20). In the context of servant-leadership, McGee-Cooper and Trammell (1995) stress the importance of this issue, remarking that "the ethical is not always the most time-efficient" (p. 117). They conclude, "A servant-leader takes the time to offer sensitive and supportive coaching in a way that preserves the message but eliminates distancing mannerisms . . . In essence, a servant leader makes time for people" (p. 120). Therefore, time is to be considered elemental to the transformational-transcendental leader, who realizes that time cannot be circumvented in the development of personal relationships.

The four factors of trust, credibility, empathy, and time are deemed to be supracultural in that they form the basis for effective communication in any environment. They are especially critical in intercultural communication, to which Broome's (1991) concept of relational empathy may be considered a refinement. These, then, form the mediating variables in the model proposed below (Figure 1).

### **Explanation of the Communication Model**

The Transformational-Transcendental Leadership Intercultural Communication Model emphasizes the development of a personal relationship between the leader and the led, with the positive transformation of the latter being the goal. As stated above, trust, credibility, relational empathy, and time are critical mediating variables in the communicative process and will determine in large measure whether the leader is met with

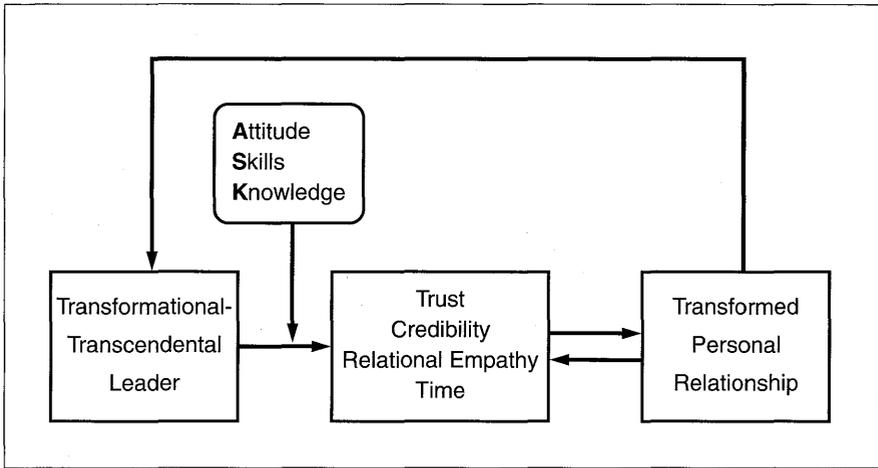


Figure 1. Transformational-Transcendental Leadership Intercultural Communication Model

success or failure.

Furthermore, important moderating variables specific to intercultural communication have been identified by Iwahori and Lanigan (1989) and grouped into the three broad categories of attitude (motivational emphasis), skills (behavioral emphasis), and knowledge (cognitive emphasis). Factors in the category of attitude are ethnocentrism (Wiseman et al., 1989), positive regard for the other, open-mindedness, attentiveness (Iwahori & Lanigan, 1989, p. 278), and adaptability (Kim, 1991, p. 271). Skills include tolerance for ambiguity, language ability, display of respect (Iwahori & Lanigan, 1989, p. 278), non-verbal communication skills (Samovar et al., 1981), and active listening (Dodd, 1998). Knowledge of the host culture (Wiseman et al., 1989) and its interaction rules (Iwahori & Lanigan, 1989, p. 278) completes the triad of moderating variables in the model. The acronym for the categories of attitude, skills, and knowledge, ASK, is intended as a reminder of the eminent role of humble inquiry on the part of the transformational-transcendental leader in an intercultural situation.

The model further reveals that the relationship between the leader and the led is dynamic and reciprocal, with a successfully transformed personal

relationship resulting in the transformation of the leader as well.

Dodd defines intercultural communication as “the influence of cultural variability and diversity on interpersonally oriented communication outcomes” (p. 4). Meeting the inherent challenges requires intercultural communication competence, which is “achieving the appropriate level of motivation, knowledge, and skills of both the sojourner and the host-national in regards to their relationship, leading to an effective relational outcome” (Iwahori & Lanigan, 1989, pp. 276-277). It is felt that mastery of each of the moderating variables in the proposed model, if centered upon the foundation of trust, credibility, relational empathy, and time, will enable the transformational-transcendental leader to acquire intercultural communication competence.

## **Application of the Communication Model**

As a minister and educator in Japan, the writer has become acutely aware over the years of the formidable cultural barriers between Japanese and Americans. In a number of instances, the two cultures are near opposites. For example, in all four of Hofstede’s (1984) cultural values polarities of power distance (PDI), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), individualism/collectivism (IDV), and masculinity/femininity (MAS), Japan and the United States find themselves on opposite ends of the scale (pp. 159, 214).

Concerning organizational issues such as decision-making and conflict resolution, the two countries are again observed to be quite different. Regarding the former, Kume (1985) notes that the Japanese are group-oriented, emphasizing harmony and time-consuming consensus building, whereas Americans are individualistic, self-reliant, and proceed with a sense of urgency (cf. Stewart, 1985; Hunt & Targett, 1995; Taplin, 1995).

During conflict resolution, the Japanese are concerned with saving face, and therefore utilize passive, accommodating strategies, while Americans value the competitive norm and make use of active, confrontational tactics (Ting-Toomey, 1988; cf. Whitehill, 1991).

In short, in many ways the Japanese and American cultures are quite

unlike each other. Yet, experience has led to the conclusion that transformational-transcendental leadership is possible in this intercultural context. Building high levels of trust, credibility, and relational empathy is difficult and requires considerable time (read “years”). Yet once this is achieved, with a proper attitude and sincere effort being made in the areas of skill-building and knowledge, tangible results can be realized. Japanese do respond to the “Four I’s,” but only after the proper personal relationships have been forged. Therefore, at least in this particular case, the model of intercultural communication proposed does appear to be valid.

### **Limitations of the Communication Model**

The tentative nature of this proposal is suggested in the title, the author realizing that this model is preliminary in nature and may require future revision. This is may be partially due to the nature of the subject, no transformational-transcendental leadership model of intercultural communication having been previously proposed to the knowledge of the author. What is perhaps most acutely necessary from this point is field research, preferably of a quantitative nature, which would either substantiate or belie the variables selected. Though such a study would be difficult to conduct and would require substantial time and effort, it may result in a revised model that would be beneficial to transformational-transcendental leaders who find themselves working in an intercultural context.

Communication is seen to be vital to the leadership enterprise. This is nowhere more evident than in the case of transformational-transcendental leadership, with its emphasis on the development of personal relationships. Given the globalization that is currently under way, perhaps the time is right for scholars to give serious consideration to development of a scientifically validated transformational-transcendental leadership model of intercultural communication.

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