



## **CM Article**

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### **Can an Organization be too Transformational?**

Transformational and transactional leadership have long been viewed as opposites with transformational leadership possessing more positive features than transactional leadership.

Transformational leaders are characterized as visionary and charismatic, articulating to followers excitement and enthusiasm. Transformational leadership engages and connects with followers to raise the level of motivation and commitment in both leader and follower (Northouse, 2007). Through transformational leadership, leaders have a shared sense of mutual interests and interdependence. They will go beyond individual and self-interests or rewards for the good of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1992).

Transactional leadership has been portrayed as the “old style” of leadership marked by an exchange process. Through reward and coercive power, transactional leaders motivate. Transactional leaders are influential because it’s in the best interest of subordinates to heed the commands of their leaders. Contractual relationships spelling out conditions of employment, disciplinary codes, and benefit structures exemplify transactional leadership.

The Organizational Description Questionnaire (ODQ) developed by Bass & Avolio offers a unique perspective to the transformational/transactional leadership debate. The ODQ describes organizational leadership style as possessing different degrees of transactional and transformational tendencies. The twenty-eight item instrument measures the number of times a respondent perceives their organization to be using either a transformational or transactional leadership style. Results are quantified in two scores, a transactional and transformational score ranging from a maximum of +14 which denotes an extreme presence of either a transactional or transformational style to a -14 which denotes an extreme absence of either a transactional or transformational style. Based on the total transactional and transformational scores, the ODQ classifies organizational leadership style into one of nine specific types.

The attached figure summarizes the range of transactional and transformational scores for each of the nine organizational leadership styles defined by the ODQ. According to the figure, a predominantly 4I style is the “most transformational” form as the transformational score could range from an extreme of +14 with a transactional score going to the low end of the range at -14. A number of questions surface from a practitioner standpoint. For example, is the predominantly 4I classification the most effective leadership style? Are there downsides to the moderately 4I style?

Bass and Avolio make some interesting points about the pros and cons of the moderately 4I organizational leadership style. A positive of such a style is that the organization would be very creative, flexible, and adaptive. The ODQ score at the extreme value end for the transformational (+)

and transactional (-) dimensions would tend to lead to a very highly decentralized structure. Change would be a constant, and as a result, problems could be created through dealing with continuous change.

Within departments there would be a lack of consensus as to a common purpose or vision. Confusion would be the result as lack of transactional requirements and structure would result in poorly defined roles. Within the operation of the organization, trust would play a key role as there would be an absence of formal contractual arrangements.

Transactional leadership provides the benefit of setting the rules and structure that facilitate the completion of tasks. Perhaps what's called for is a blend of transformational and transactional characteristics needed for many organizations to achieve efficient operations. The writer is not intending to advocate a particular style of leadership but simply indicating too much transformational leadership might lead to organizational problems.

**ODQ Leadership Style TCA and TFO Values**

TCA Score	TFO Score	ODQ Leadership Style
-14 to -7	+7 to +14	Predominantly 4 I
-6 to +6	+7 to +14	Moderately 4 I
+7 to +14	+7 to +14	High Contrast
-14 to -7	-6 to +6	Loosely Guided
-6 to +6	-6 to +6	Coasting
+7 to +14	-6 to +6	Moderately Bureaucratic
-14 to -7	-14 to -7	Garbage Can
-6 to +6	-14 to -7	Pedestrian
+7 to +14	-14 to -7	Predominantly Bureaucratic

References:

Bass, B. & Avolio, B. (1992). *Organizational Description Questionnaire*. Redwood City, CA  
 Bass, B. & Riggio, R. (2006). *Transformational leadership*. New York: Routledge.  
 Northouse, P. (2007). *Leadership: Theory and practice*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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