

## Chapter 6

# Transformational Leadership: The Choice Between Ethical and Unethical Leadership

**Samuel Agyemang**

*Bia Lamplighter College of Education, Ghana*

### ABSTRACT

*Ethics is an essential ingredient of leadership qualifications, and for every first-time leader in an organization to be successful, ethical leadership cannot be overemphasized. An organization can be seen as two or more people coming together with a common goal to embark on a venture that will certainly yield a positive result to benefit each one of them. There is a need for such organizations to exhibit transparency and accountability by all involved in the organization so that any resources invested in do not go to waste. Since ethical leadership remains important in every organization, no matter the high standards of the moral lives of members within an organization, there are first-time leaders who, in one way or the other, exhibit misconduct, mistrust, frustration, discrimination, racism, and absenteeism, which are characteristics of unethical leadership and contrary to the nature of ethical leadership. Therefore, achieving transformational leadership becomes a challenge for a first-time leader.*

### INTRODUCTION

In every organization, leadership plays a significant role in creating motivation and thus helping leaders to provide high-quality attention to their followers. First-time leaders are not only supposed to be leading their organizations but should also be ethically conscious in handling issues. Ethical leaders do not only relent themselves towards the improvement of organizational performance, but they are to ensure that their subordinates demonstrate a high degree of ethical standards in their day-to-day activities within the organization. This makes ethical leadership to become a concern not only for first-time leaders, but those within the organization and all stakeholders. In this regard, there is a need to also ponder over how first-time leaders can possess a full understanding of the principles of ethical leadership and actually get to behave ethically within their organizations. Indeed, first-time leaders in any organization have different

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capacities in respect of their roles and responsibilities. However, they are supposed to be responsible for organizational performance, progress, and improvement. They need to exhibit transformational leadership and ethical leadership and shun unethical leadership so that they can succeed in their work. The chapter critically examines and explains in-depth for a clear understanding of transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and unethical leadership, focusing on first-time leaders who intend to be successful in leading their organizations through transformational leadership. First-time leaders, in performing their roles and responsibilities, encounter challenges both internally and externally, so the chapter further discusses barriers of ethical leadership and how to overcome them. The chapter therefore keeps and guides first-time leaders in organizations abreast of what to do to deal with turbulent situations in respect of transformational leadership by employing ethical leadership or unethical leadership towards successful quality leadership. The author's experience as a first-time leader of a higher educational institution is also shared. It is clear that unethical behavior can have consequences on the whole macro-society, organizations, leaders, and employees. Therefore, to become a transformational leader, employing ethical leadership as a first-time leader can result in positive growth.

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Though there are many approaches to leadership, some of which overlap and interchange based on the context, participant, and task (Agyemang, 2017), transformational leadership is identified as the most successful method of leading in challenging circumstances, therefore laudable for first-time leaders to employ (Eagley et al., 2003; Bass & Riggio, 2006). This is because a transformational leader has the potential to change the very culture of the organization and hence help shape and develop it as a requirement of environment change (Liebman et al., 2005). Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring others through vision and use of personal consideration, which in the organizational world can be regarded as an indispensable coping mechanism (Bottery, 2004). Transformational leaders are “special architects, who in creating a vision, develop trust of their followers, building loyalty, self-confidence and self-regard” (Bottery, 2004, p. 17). Rather than measuring performance, therefore, transformational leadership focuses inspiring and motivating followers, fostering a desire to improve and achieve and demonstrating qualities such as optimism, excitement about goals, a belief in a future vision, a commitment to develop and mentor followers, and attention to attend to the individual needs of followers, thus developing and raising the awareness of their followers about the importance of satisfying higher order growth needs (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leithwood (1994) conceptualizes transformational leadership in the organizational context along eight dimensions: building a vision for the organization, establishing organizational goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, modeling best practices and important organizational values, demonstrating high-performance expectations, creating a productive organizational culture, and developing structures to foster participation regarding decision making in an organization.

For a first-time leader in an organization, there is a need to perform roles and responsibilities so as to bring change. A first-time leader in an organization must work assiduously to make a difference to meet the goals of the organization by implementing ethical standards. The leadership type employed by a first-time leader can have negative or positive consequences for an organization. It must be noted that as a first-time leader of an organizational setting, there is a need to provide the requisite leadership type in order to achieve functional organization. In this regard, the transformational leadership type cannot

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