INTRODUCING TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP AND ITS PRECURSORS

1 *From beating the odds to changing the odds: Developing a shared understanding of what is meant by transformative leadership*

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Overview

Scholarship on the styles and traits of leaders, and engagement between leaders and followers, has led to the broad distinction between transactional leadership: leadership that directs people; and transformational leadership: leadership that directs change. This chapter argues that transformative leadership might be distinguished from other thinking about leadership by its intention to attain systemic and social justice outcomes by employing ethical and people-centred processes. The focus of transformative leadership is on changing power structures and dynamics in society such that access to livelihoods, dignity, rights, and well-being are systemically ensured, rather than on institutional or organisational change (transformational leadership) or on individual engagements between leaders and followers (transactional leadership). This framework offers a helpful map to guide thinking about what might be needed to empower young graduates to become leaders across all three spheres of influence.

Introduction

> *There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river and find out why they are falling in. (Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, cited in Ledwith, 2015, p. 134)*

In business schools, firms, development agencies, and public service institutions, instruction and proficiency in leadership is eagerly sought and debated at length. While the practice of leadership has been well theorised, frequently documented, and endlessly taught, it has not been systematically analysed, nor widely considered from African perspectives, except by African scholars. As with much contemporary scholarly and nonfiction writing, discourses of leadership that enjoy mainstream purchase have largely been written, lived, and experienced in Western and Northern contexts. They cannot speak for cultural change and the complexities of historical and political experience on the African continent.

What characterises a good leader, what styles of leadership should be practised, what approaches to leadership are best, and what pitfalls of leadership are to be

avoided in the contexts of African cultural practices, values, and contexts, are critical elements to be considered. But where do these ideas come from? What values and historical contexts inform them, and how might it be better to think about the goals of leadership? Furthermore, what kinds of leadership are critical in African contexts: is it the kind of leadership that is based on human rights, cultural values, and changing individuals' lived realities while being inclusive of the voices of those who are led; or does style, process, and outcome matter most? This collected volume is an attempt to enrich the conversation around leadership, and to do so from various African contexts across a range of topics including education, gender parity, the workplace, politics, and technological change. It also invites reflections from multiple vantage points: past practices of leadership, current practices, and practices that are emerging as we build the future.

Some chapters ask what can be learned from past practices of leadership across the African continent to better inform current and future practices. This notion – looking back in order to look forward better informed – is encapsulated in a concept from the Twi language of the Akan of Ghana, *sankofa,* idiomatically described as the practice of 'obtaining the wisdom of the past [to] enable… planning for a strong future' (Slater, 2019, p. 2). In many of the chapters in this book, the authors integrate past practices, considering the cultural heritages that animate action, the political heroes (and villains), and historical thinkers who have encouraged current leadership practices and warned against others. Equally important is the current context on the African continent, where a frequent dearth of resources has led to 'make do', 'hustle', and 'get by' practices that Dayo Olopade (2014, p. 20), in her book *The Bright Continent*, describes as the spirit of *kanju*: 'the specific creativity born from African difficulty'. Here the focus is on the struggles and strengths of leaders: those who are prominent and those who are invisible, as well as those who are everyday and those who are extraordinary.

Through a series of nuanced case studies, the authors set out how contemporary leaders on the African continent navigate complexity, chaos, struggle, temptation, controversy, and roadblocks, in a context that is both emerging from colonial exploitation and domination, and suffering from a myriad of postcolonial ills and aspirations. Equally important, however, is to shine a spotlight on the many ways in which leadership challenges for the future are anticipated. These include the rapid social, technological, and cultural shifts, and struggles around gender, mobility, and commercial practices already sweeping the continent. Multiple essays offer markers for the way ahead, based primarily on the notion of ubuntu, for a new generation who must lead and find their own path to the future. This notion of ubuntu (from the Nguni languages of South Africa) has been popularised by, among others, the late Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu. Tutu (1999, pp. 127, 35) describes ubuntu as being 'interconnected in this network of interdependence and togetherness',

understanding that our 'humanity is caught up, inextricably bound up' with those with whom we share the continent and the planet, and that the only legitimate response is to embody this belonging together in sharing.

This introductory chapter sets out an argument for how transformative leadership might best be understood and distinguished from other thinking about leadership. Drawing on Paulo Freire's (1970) historical and Carolyn Shields' (2010) contemporary scholarship, it argues for transformative leadership as leadership intent on attaining systemic and social justice outcomes for societies and employing ethical and people-centred processes (participatory, empowering, and collaborative) in order to achieve these ends. Related to ideas of transformational leadership, the focus of transformative leadership is on changing power structures and dynamics in society such that people's access to livelihoods, dignity, rights, and well-being are systemically ensured, rather than on institutional or organisational change, or individual engagements between leaders and followers. Before heading into the enticing contributions of this book, this chapter uses two sources of data to situate our understanding of transformative leadership. The first is an analysis of the extensive literature review provided in Chapter 2 by De Kock and Swartz, and the second is empirical data obtained from the first year of a research study, *The Imprint of Education*, that follows 520[1] African university graduates and recipients of Mastercard Foundation scholarships over five years.

The approach taken in the discussion to follow offers a helpful map to guide thinking about what might be needed to empower young graduates to become leaders across all three spheres of influence – changing systems and structures, changing institutions and communities, and changing individuals – while ensuring that they engage deeply with transformative leadership. This understanding of transformative leadership is one with which all contributors to this volume have attempted to engage.

Distinguishing ideas about leadership

There is a wide array of literature that addresses the notion of leadership. Broadly speaking, leadership theory can be divided into two branches: transactional leadership (concerned with directing people), which is focused on the interactions and relationships between individual leaders and followers; and transforming leadership, which focuses on directing change at multiple levels: institutional, organisational, and societal (see Figure 1.1).

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[1] Of these, 403 completed an annual survey and 117 participated in an in-depth interview.

Figure 1.1 *Branches of leadership theory*
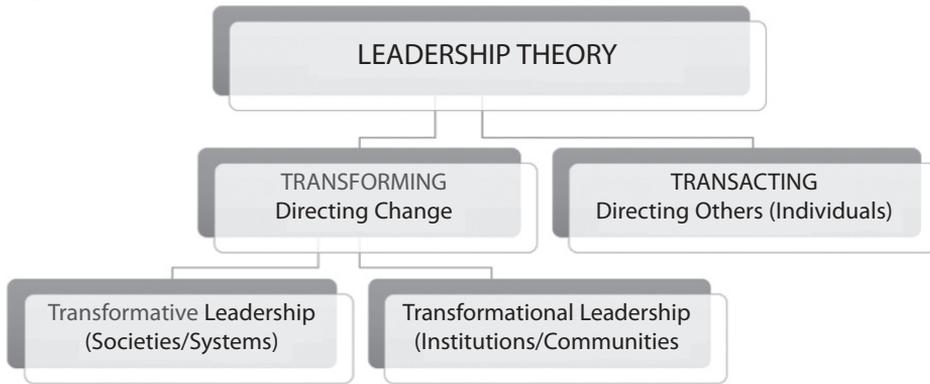
Source: Author

Transacting leadership is thus concerned with the dispositions, traits, styles, and values of leaders and with the transactional interactions between leaders and followers (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015; Hewitt, Davis, & Lashley, 2014). It can be thought of as a largely individual undertaking, with the outcome being the achievement of a designated end through influencing individuals (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). These transactions of influence – directing others, charting a course, identifying a vision, and motivating people towards a shared goal – can be for benevolent or for selfish ends.

Transforming leadership, on the other hand, is focused on directing change among groups of people, communities, institutions, and organisations, and also on directing the kind of leadership processes and outcomes necessary to bring about such change. Leadership has increasingly come to be seen as a mechanism for long-term change within organisations, resulting in transformational theories of leadership that highlight the processes by which this change is enacted.

Not surprisingly, while the concept of 'transformative leadership' has circulated within leadership discourses for several decades, it is frequently conflated and used interchangeably with 'transformational leadership'. While the literature does not make clear or hard distinctions between directing change at varying levels, the work of Carolyn Shields and others (Hewitt et al., 2014; Shields, 2010; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Sun & Leithwood, 2012) have argued that the category 'transformative leadership', while a form of transforming leadership, can be distinguished from it, since transformative leadership transcends the immediate concerns of a single organisation or institution and takes as its unit of influence wider social, political, and material issues. Shields (2010) further argues that transformative leadership should be seen as a standalone theory of leadership because its aim is one of justice and fundamental societal change, rather than

being concerned with improving efficiencies and ways of operating, as has occurred in managerial contexts in business and the public sector (Caldwell et al., 2012; Currie & Lockett, 2007).

According to Shields (2010), while making a valuable intervention in the field of leadership theory and practice, transformational leadership theories do not primarily address the social, economic, ethical, and material dynamics that shape people's lives individually, as well as in organisations and institutions. Moreover, transformational leadership theory is not guided by a moral or social justice imperative, but rather by institutional and organisational effectiveness, efficiencies, and productivity. Transformative leadership responds to this gap. Shields (2010, p. 562) further develops the notion of transformative leadership by providing the following key attributes:

> attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes; deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity; acknowledgment of power and privilege; emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good; a focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice; and finally, evidence of moral courage and activism.

Table 1.1 offers a summary of the ways in which transacting, transforming, and transformative leadership differ.

Table 1.1 *Contrasting understandings of transacting, transforming, and transformative leadership*

	Transacting Leadership	**Transforming Leadership**	**Transformative Leadership**
Directing	Others	Change	Equitable Change
Concerned with	dispositions traits styles values	effectiveness productivity	justice public good knowledge frameworks power and privilege ethics and moral courage
Processes	vision influence goals	vision influence goals efficiencies	vision influence goals equality people-centred collaborative
Interactions between	leaders and individuals	leaders and groups	leaders and systems
Outcomes	localised and individual	organisational and institutional change	systemic change

Source: Author

Transformative leadership in the African context

The main proponents of transformative leadership come from Brazil and the United States of America. Literature on transformative leadership in Africa is less ubiquitous, indicating that the theory has not taken root in scholarly work on leadership on the continent. However, continental literature has important contributions to make. Frequently, the features of transformative leadership are used but not named. Amanchukwu et al. (2015) describe their understanding of leadership as 'transformational', but include the value of a social consciousness to inform its practice. Bell (2001) shows how organisational and institutional leadership does not always result in just outcomes in his study of vice chancellors at historically Black universities in South Africa. Magoqwana (2019) advocates for the incorporation of African philosophies and idioms to inform leadership in higher education, such as *inimba* (birthing pains) to invoke the importance of giving, sustaining, and enabling in leadership processes; while Brown, Ekoue, and Goodban (2019) discuss the implementation of Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights (TLWR) to address historic imbalances in the role of local women in development programmes, especially considering the implications of women's daily work and responsibilities.

Rylander (2010) shows how transformative political leadership can arrest potential crises and redirect actors towards peace and lasting social cohesion. This view is echoed by Olonisakin (2017), who argues that a focus on leadership as a process provides an opportunity to think about how leadership works, what it is for, and who leaders are intended to serve, synthesising top-down and bottom-up leadership strategies. Finally, Odora Hoppers (2014, p. 32) speaks to the importance of 'interrupting cycles of humiliation' by recognising the roles we play in facilitating domination or displacing blame. The metaphor of the 'wounded healer' is core to Odora Hoppers' discussion of leadership: the notion that the transformative leader works from a position of intimate knowledge of their own experiences of suffering, loss, or deprivation, and commits to a project of converting suffering into praxis.

Developing a common understanding of transformative leadership

In summary then, both transformative and transformational leadership are concerned with change rather than only with transactional exchanges between leaders and followers. Both emphasise the value of collaborative, dialogic, and democratic decision-making, and deliberative processes, but transformational leadership is primarily concerned with transforming and renewing institutions

and organisations in order to enhance efficiency, productivity, and, ultimately, the scope and quality of outputs.[2]

Transformative leadership, on the other hand, focuses on transforming societies (albeit through institutions, organisations, and individuals) in order to ensure structural change in society that benefits all. It is not content to change the lives of individuals without also unearthing, problematising, and dismantling those structures of power and privilege that act against equity and freedom (Odora Hoppers, 2014; Shields, 2010; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Weiner, 2003) and that necessitate the need for change or help in the first place. In words attributed to the late Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, as cited in the epigraph to this chapter, 'there comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river and find out why they are falling in' (cited in Ledwith, 2015, p. 134). It is time to enact transformative leadership on the continent – leadership concerned with systemic rather than local or individual change, leadership directed at just rather than self-serving outcomes, and leadership that intentionally seeks to address institutional and systemic challenges.

Insights from African graduates on transformative leadership

As compelling as some of the differences between types of leadership are, empirical work provides further evidence to support these distinctions and to arrive at a common understanding of transformative leadership. In this regard, this section offers insights from 520 young African university graduates enrolled in a longitudinal study that is concerned with the impact of university education on first-generation graduates: on their career trajectories; their contributions to family, community, and society; as well as their understanding and growth in leadership. *The Imprint of Education* study was commissioned by the Mastercard Foundation and conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council. It comprises a quantitative longitudinal tracer study of 403 graduates plus annual in-depth interviews with a further 117. The graduates surveyed or interviewed were recipients of Mastercard Foundation scholarships from various African countries between 2014 and 2020.

The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program has spent nearly a billion US dollars on ensuring that academically talented but socioeconomically disadvantaged young people on the African continent access high-quality education and are prepared to take their place as 'next-generation leaders

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[2] This is perhaps not surprising since leadership is most frequently taught as part of business school courses, rather than in the critical social sciences and humanities. Of the 30 top-ranked universities on the African continent, only half offered any courses on leadership at all at the time of our review (2020–2021). Those that did offered them through their business schools.

supporting social transformation and economic growth…in Africa' (Mastercard Foundation, 2014, p. 3). Towards this goal, the Foundation offers scholarship recipients support 'designed to foster *transformative leadership* by equipping Scholars with knowledge, tools, capacity and motivation to make a difference in their countries and regions of origin in the future' (Mastercard Foundation, 2014, p. 3, emphasis added).

The Foundation understands 'transformative leadership' as an identity, an ethical practice, and as a contribution to society in the following terms:

> The act of engaging others, in an ethical manner, to generate positive and lasting change. Transformative leadership relies on teamwork, relationships, networks and peer support. Transformative leaders are creative visionaries who exhibit courage, empathy, resilience and a desire to give back. (Mastercard Foundation, 2016, p. 26)

The Foundation is not alone in its quest to transform the continent through enabling young people to access education, nor is it alone in attempting to develop young leaders. What *The Imprint of Education* study offers is the opportunity to test understandings, practices, and distinctions between and of various definitions of leadership.

After the first year of data collection (Mahali, Swartz, Juan, & *The Imprint of Education* Research Team, 2021), 80 per cent of graduates surveyed had heard of the Mastercard Foundation definition of transformative leadership – 'engaging others in an ethical manner to generate positive and lasting change' – and 90 per cent said it mostly or completely represented their understanding of transformative leadership. In qualitative interviews, however, only around one quarter of those interviewed spoke specifically of their understanding of *transformative* leadership, with most speaking about leadership in more general terms, and with almost no reference to leadership that aims to bring about socially just change. Young people's understandings focused on the outcomes of leadership (bringing solutions, giving back, bringing about change in people's lives) and processes of leadership (ethical, empowering, consulting, collaborating, putting yourself in the shoes of others).

The outcomes of transformative leadership

According to participants, transformative leadership has concrete outcomes, and these can be summarised as: understanding your community, 'giving back to society' by helping others, 'bringing solutions', and 'saving people's lives' (Kenya, male, age 30).[3] While understanding people's contexts and needs was a starting point, most participants stated that they believed it should never stop there.

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[3] The source for all participant quotations is Mahali et al., 2021.

Transformative leaders, they said, solve problems and 'leave things better than [they] found them' (Botswana, female, age 27). The refrain of transformative leadership being an approach that changes individuals' lives was common.

A graduate from the South African cohort eloquently summed up the multiple facets of transformative leadership (in their understanding) by focusing on leadership that is solution-based, takes the needs of people whom one is attempting to serve into account, does so in a way that is not egocentric, and is ethical:

> Looking [at things] from that person's point of view, that's the best trait that you can have in a leader…somebody might actually be having this charismatic persona and maybe even qualified in terms of pragmatic thinking, and having constructive ideas…but if you lack that insight, then your leadership is not really transformative…The other thing that I look at when I look at leadership is not being greedy. (South Africa, female, age 29)

Processes and styles of transformative leadership

Graduates spoke of the processes and styles of transformative leadership, which included 'investing in the personal development of people and improving people's lives apart from just controlling them' (Kenya, female, age 26) and someone who could 'first change himself [sic] and then change others' (Ethiopia, female, age 26). Several participants echoed the idea that transformative leadership empowers others, and that this empowerment persists even when the leader is no longer around. They further elaborated that it needs to be based on shared vision and shared values, and is not authoritarian. A few contrasted empowering leadership with 'dictatorial' leadership, in which 'people have no voice, you've completely silenced people' (Kenya, female, age 28).

The importance of ethics for transformative leaders was also prominent, exemplified by those who lead by example, collaborate, consult, place people at the centre of their endeavours, serve others, and display character traits such as compassion, courage, empathy, integrity, and consistency. One graduate from Kenya summed up this ethical approach as follows:

> A good leader is a person who will walk in front of you…they do things and then tell you, 'do the same'…[Leaders] should be accountable, they should lead by example, they should have the heart of people in their minds…they should defend…the people they are leading…A good leader, they involve people in decision-making… They accept opinions of people…[their own opinions are] not written on stones. (Kenya, male, age 33)

Most graduates consider themselves leaders; leadership is largely transformational at community level

The most common answer to the question about the meaning of transformative leadership was for graduates 'to make a difference' in their sphere of influence. Almost all (97 per cent) of those who completed the survey considered themselves to be leaders; when asked why they called themselves leaders, most centred on the leadership roles they played among friends and family and within their community. Most saw their leadership actions as being those of a role model, a resource provider, or an educator: 'providing care and advice to my siblings' (Ethiopia, female, age 26) and 'tutoring and teaching in schools' (South Africa, male, age 28).

This is not surprising given the nature of programming around leadership and social responsibility. Most graduates spoke at length of the many 'give back' projects they had been challenged to embark upon during their university studies (by the Foundation and its staff). While many of these projects were laudable, most were limited to local community development challenges, working with or starting local NGOs or entrepreneurial ventures to address problems of employment in their hometowns or villages.

> Leadership should be transformative you know…it should [bring about] some change eventually in the community…[The Mastercard Foundation] explicitly told us, you know, 'We need you to go back to Africa. You need to go back to your community and make a difference. Use the skills that you now have, the new skills that you have. Go back to your community and do something and make transformative change.' (Kenya, male, age 31)

Graduates were almost completely silent about efforts to bring about systemic change. A young woman from Kenya was one of the few exceptions. She spoke about 'participating in some advocacies…especially on girl and human rights…not being silent about things that happen in the society' (Kenya, female, age 25). Some, however, spoke of systemic change as a future aspiration. This is understandable given that the median age of those in the study was only 27 years old.

Leadership and systemic change

While few spoke about transformative leaders as those who were engaged in addressing systemic and structural problems, several noted that many leaders were themselves involved in entrenching societal problems through 'corruption' (nepotism, self-enrichment, or embezzlement):

> [People] get themselves elected to positions of leadership with the mind-set of 'it's just me and my family', they just get to these positions,

and they just acquire wealth for themselves…they'll just be looking at what they can gain for themselves and let's say their immediate families and friends. (Kenya, male, age 32)

A leader is…the head of either a community, a country, [or] an institution. The head will lead you to the right place or the wrong place. So if you have a bad head, you know, then everything will be bad like…when a fish starts to rot, it starts from the head…to the tail. Good leadership will foster development and progress. But bad leadership will destroy you. (South Africa, male, age 34)

Skills needed to become transformative leaders

While these questions of transformative leadership will be explored in greater depth with the graduates in this study, we also included seven questions in the first year of the survey to ascertain which leadership skills these graduates had, which ones they wanted to develop, and which ones they didn't think they needed. Table 1.2 tabulates their responses.

Table 1.2 *Graduate evaluation of leadership skills (n = 403)*

Question	Options	Response
The skill to motivate people to work towards a common goal [Q120]	I have that skill	69.0%
	I want to develop that skill	30.8%
	I don't need that skill	0.2%
The skill to transform good ideas into action [Q121]	I have that skill	62.5%
	I want to develop that skill	37.3%
	I don't need that skill	0.2%
The skill to describe the small steps needed to solve big problems [Q122]	I have that skill	62.5%
	I want to develop that skill	37.5%
	I don't need that skill	0.0%
The skill to recognise people's strengths and put them into an effective team to solve problems [Q123]	I have that skill	49.9%
	I want to develop that skill	48.2%
	I don't need that skill	1.9%
The skill to use disagreements/conflict in a group to find new ways of solving problems [Q124]	I have that skill	43.1%
	I want to develop that skill	54.0%
	I don't need that skill	2.9%
The skill to use government policies to solve problems in my community [Q125]	I have that skill	21.5%
	I want to develop that skill	71.2%
	I don't need that skill	7.3%
The skill to show people how all forms of injustice are related, e.g. racism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia [Q126]	I have that skill	36.3%
	I want to develop that skill	58.1%
	I don't need that skill	5.6%

Source: Mahali, Swartz, Juan, & The Imprint of Education *Research Team, 2021*

While a majority was able to motivate people (69 per cent), could transform good ideas into action (63 per cent), and was able to 'describe the small steps needed to solve big problems' (63 per cent), fewer had 'the skill to recognise people's strengths and put them into an effective team to solve problems' (50 per cent), and only 43 per cent were able to say they had the 'the skill to use disagreements/ conflict in a group to find new ways of solving problems'.

Skills that were in short supply among graduates included 'the skill to use government policies to solve problems in my community' (only 22 per cent said they had this skill) and 'the skill to show people how all forms of injustice are related, e.g. racism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia' (36 per cent said they had this skill). Key here was the indication by respondents that these policy change and intersectional social justice skills are skills they would like to develop.

These questions were designed with the understanding that transformative leadership requires these latter two skills especially – that of bringing about systemic and structural change, and doing it via just inclusion of all groups and through policy change. (Other ways of bringing about change is the topic of the final chapter of this book.) The answers to these questions supported our conclusion that these young graduates thought of leadership as transformational and transacting rather than transformative.

The structure of the book

The book is divided into eight parts. The first part deals with developing a common understanding of transformative leadership (this chapter) and how it is viewed in Africa both currently (Chapter 2 De Kock & Swartz) and in precolonial contexts (Chapter 3 Makgamatha). The second part looks at transformative leadership in a variety of contexts from a filmmaking activity undertaken by research participants (Chapter 4 Mahali & Paramoer), to how blockchain can be used in service of transformative leadership (Chapter 5 Chetty), a cross-border initiative in Burundi (Chapter 6 Birantamije), and examples of cultural contributions to leadership from southern Africa (Chapter 7 Mnqwazi; Chapter 8 Chivasa).

Part Three focuses on women and transformative leadership, offering a broad overview (Chapter 9 Moletsane), as well as a more-focused contribution centring the lived experience of a young woman in an institution of higher education (Chapter 10 Mwale). Part Four applies the notion of transformative leadership to educational contexts at multiple levels: in higher education (Chapter 11 Oanda), in resource-constrained schools (Chapter 12 Juan & Hannan), from the perspective of student leaders engaged in bringing about change (Chapter 13 Oyori Ogechi), and in the relationships between students and faculty (Chapter 14 Pusumane & Auerbach Jahajeeah). Still focusing on education, Part Five

evaluates a range of scholarship (Chapter 15 Klugman; Chapter 16 Mwamelo) and leadership programmes (Chapter 17 Adigun; Chapter 18 Chikane & Atouguia) operating on the African continent.

Part Six considers political leadership. It explores how it has evolved on the African continent (Chapter 19 De Kock & Nyamnjoh) and offers examples and critiques of the leadership of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Chapter 20 Badaru & Adu) and that of Jerry John Rawlings (Chapter 21 Ampomah). Part Seven applies the African concept of ubuntu to three novel contexts: transformative leadership in dealing with disability (Chapter 22 Muzite), the role of ubuntu in dealing with technological innovations (Chapter 23 Mokoena), and ubuntu as an approach to innovation for public sector leaders (Chapter 24 Biljohn). The final part, Part Eight, offers a forward-looking ethics of leadership to rebuild societies (Chapter 25 Odora Hoppers & Soudien) and concludes with an application of Eric Olin Wright's typologies of how change happens as strategies to guide action (Chapter 26 Swartz).

Conclusion

Both the literature and the empirical evidence drawn from the case study *The Imprint of Education* show that there is still much work to be done when it comes to understanding and defining transformative leadership. As a more robust framework emerges (see Figure 1.2), it will be important for curricula to be developed that employ the definitions and elements that this essay has recommended.

Figure 1.2 *The four components of transformative leadership*

Just and ethical motivation

People-centred process

Ensuring institutional and organisational change

Aimed at systemic outcomes

Source: Author

Transformative leaders are leaders motivated by an ethical purpose and driven by moral courage to bring about equitable social change. The style of leadership practised is people-centred (collaborative, consultative, empowering, agential) and aims for inclusivity in decision-making as well as the implementation of shared goals. These leaders aim to bring about just solutions at a systemic level (economic, governance, educational) to ensure the well-being and inclusion in society of those for and with whom they work. They engage in analysis and action to dismantle knowledge frameworks and systems of power and privilege that keep inequality and precarity in place. Transformative leadership relies on leaders who will be, and who will enable, agents of change who can pursue a vision of a more just and democratic society.

The African continent is awash with transacting leaders – celebrity, charismatic, authoritarian leaders, leading their followers towards good and evil ends. There are also numerous examples of institutional and organisational change through leadership on the continent, including the ways in which countries have expanded gender equality through equal representation of women in parliaments, having women presidents, and ensuring girl children are not prevented from attending school. It is also a continent on which multiple NGOs, aid organisations, and government agencies from outside the continent make heroic efforts to address hunger, gender-based violence, and child marriage, and to end wars and exploitation. The young graduates display much of this understanding of leadership – that it is concerned with bringing about change at individual, local, and community levels. It is important to support their efforts to drive social change by drawing out the impact that this work can have if tied to a systemic understanding of what strong leadership can achieve.

It is time to enact transformative leadership on the continent and, in so doing, find out why people are 'falling in the river', in order to change the systems that allow them to continue doing so. Put more colloquially, it is time to change the odds that allow some to succeed and cause others to fail, rather than merely ensuring that a few lucky ones beat the odds that would have prevented them from thriving. This book, in multiple ways and spheres, offers insights and perspectives into how this might best be done.

#TransformativeLeadershipEqualsSystemicChange
Transformative leadership is a huge ask and is political in nature. It requires courage to take on entrenched injustices, vision to know what can be done, and expertise to bring about change at the systemic level, rather than only individual or community levels.

Questions for discussion

1. What does it mean when we say transformative leadership should aim at changing the odds rather than allowing only a few to beat the odds?

2. What concrete examples can you offer of 'going upstream' to see why people are 'falling in the river' (to quote Desmond Tutu), in your area of leadership?

3. How can actions that aim to help individuals and communities be converted (over time) into actions of transformative leadership – actions that attempt to change the system that results in the hardships with which individuals and communities struggle?

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