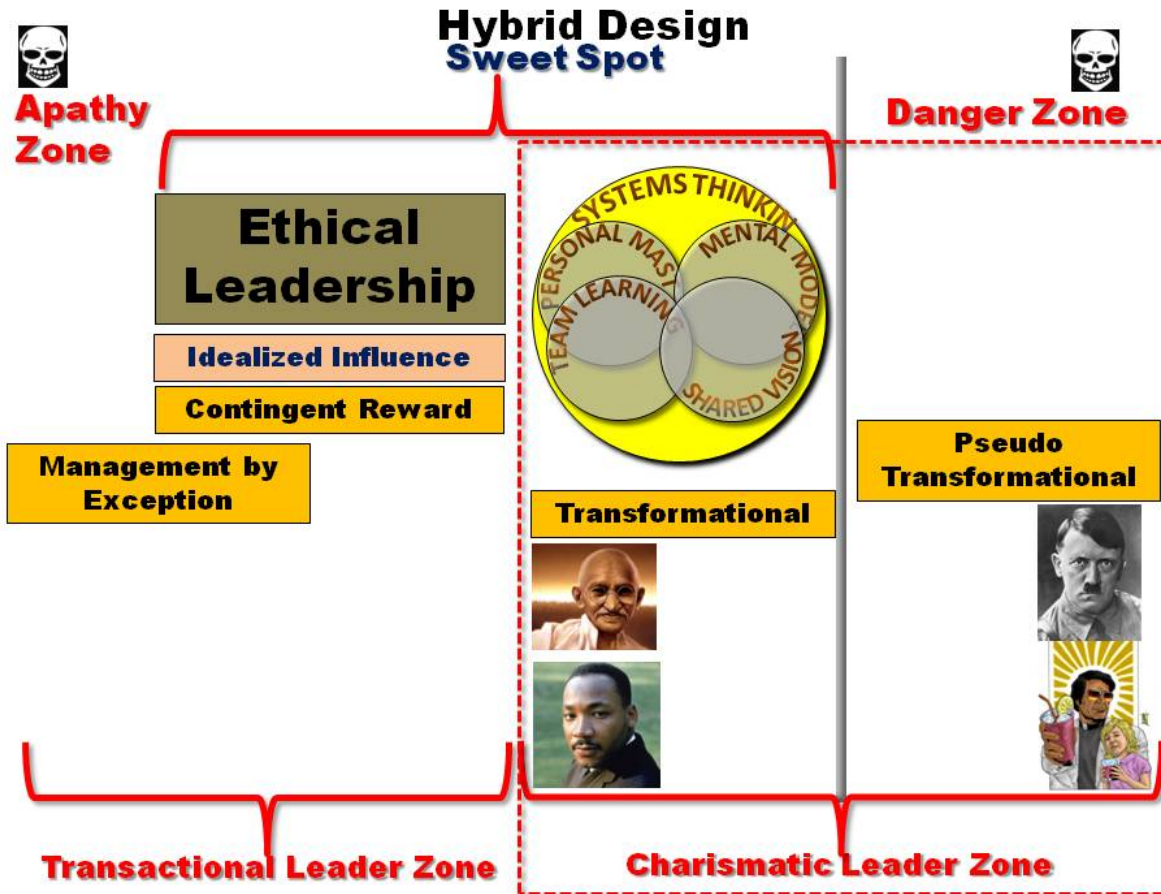


The Hybrid Design:  
Delivering an Ethical Sustainable Learning Organization



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In the case of a leader seen as inspirational, who manages a high performing organization, rouses innovation from followers, and focuses on taking the moral high ground; I will show you a concept and combination of leadership theories that were the driving cause. This essay demonstrates the links and complementary adhesion of two theories and one concept that deliver answers regarding leaders' and their organizations' ascendance to excellence. These are Bass's Transformational Leadership; Brown's and Trevino's (2006) theory of ethical leadership; and Senge's (2006) learning organization. I will apply these findings to a text book example of a leader that demonstrates "what right looks like", General James Doolittle.

### **Transformational Leadership**

As with any investigation in social science, leader or management theories that become viable within the academic and business community require advocates and a body of research to support the framer's assertions. In the case of Bernard M. Bass, his theory of transformational leadership posits that transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend personal interests in favor of broader organization goals (Selzer, J. and Bass, B. 1990). These organizations continue to achieve high results even in the leaders' absence. It is the leaders' influence and mentorship that stay with subordinates and drives them to seek excellence. A transformational leader chooses an ethical path in all ventures. Failure to maintain this ethical focus can lead to what Bass refers to as a Pseudo-Transformational Leader. Transformational leaders tend to ascend during times of great change (S. Scully, 2008). Turbulent times require leaders to reign in the chaos. These are times when transformational leaders become game changers.

C.E. Johnson (2015) notes four factors required in a transformational leader. These are:

- Idealized Influence: serve as role models for subordinates. Place follower needs above their own.
- Inspirational Motivation: Provide meaning & challenge to subordinates. Inspire team spirit and develop team vision.

- Intellectual Stimulation: Stimulate innovation and creativity. Mistakes are learning opportunities not “career enders”.
- Individualized Consideration: Coaches and Mentors to subordinates. Tailor their technique to the individual needs and desires of followers. [231]

Bass notes that transformational leaders dynamically shift from transformational to transactional leader.

The theory is not without its vulnerabilities. First, it does not account for followers and their contribution to organizational effectiveness. Leaders are the focal point of this construct and only the actions that they inspire result in followers’ actions/results. Second is the factor of inspirational motivation. Inspirational motivation is something that can neither be trained nor tamed. A transformational leader that ascends to power may find himself/herself succumbing to the dark side of charisma. In his later works, Bass added the fourth factor (to his original three), Idealized Influence. He did this primarily to offset the leadership communities concerns over the charisma factor that weighs so heavily on the successful application of transformational leadership. The line that separates transformational leader from a pseudo transformational leader is the use of charisma for the good of the organization versus self reward. Third, while it may also be considered strength, transformational leadership is based on the assumption that Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is a valid theory (Asares, 2010). People can be motivated to achieve higher order needs. At the highest point of Maslow’s pyramid was self actualization followed by transcendence. A leader that could inspire these levels of motivation could truly make an organization a high performing one.

### **Learning Organization**

A metaphor that started gaining traction within the business community (1990’s), rose from the assertion that an organization is like a brain. G. R. Jones in his book Organization Theory, Design, and Change defines the Learning Organization as “an organization that

purposefully designs and constructs its structure, culture, and strategy so as to enhance and maximize the potential for organizational learning to take place” (343).

P. Senge is credited as being a key innovator and implementer in the discipline of Learning Organizations. He bases his work concerning learning organizations on the premise that humans are by nature system thinkers. He professes that not all organizations can achieve the status of a learning organization and to achieve this status an organization must first overcome learning disabilities. Once this is achieved an organization must master five disciplines strongly associated with Learning Organizations and dedicated to the key discipline required, systems thinking. Senge (2006) defines the five disciplines as follows:

- Systems Thinking “is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that been developed over the past fifty years, to make the full patterns clearer, and to help us see how to change them effectively” (7).
- Personal Mastery “is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively” (7).
- Mental Models “are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (8).
- Building Shared Vision “involves the skills of unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future’ that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance” (9).
- Team Learning “starts with ‘dialogue,’ the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter in genuine ‘thinking together’”(10).

P. Senge’s concept is not without critics. Infed.org (2015) notes that Senge never strives to define what the ideal society that a learning organization would seek to support. The concept regarding the higher goals of society that the organization should use to guide its vision is not part of his learning organization equation. In contrast to transformational leader theory paying too much attention to the leader, Senge’s perspective focuses on the organization minus the leader. The perspective tends to wish away the need for a clearly designated leader and seems to

assume that one will emerge as the system develops or the end state society that the organization must support.

### **Ethical Leadership**

Brown and Trevino (2006) define ethical leadership as follows:

[T]he emerging research suggests that ethical leaders are characterized as honest, caring, and principled individuals who make fair and balanced decisions. Ethical leaders also frequently communicate with their followers about ethics, set clear ethical standards and use rewards and punishments to see that those standards are followed. Finally, ethical leaders do not just talk a good game— they practice what they preach and are proactive role models for ethical conduct. [597]

Attempts to offset Senge's lack of rigor toward assuming ethical standards will emerge as a result of an organization exercising the five disciplines might be better explained if it included this theory. Unfortunately, ethical leadership while somewhat accounted for in the transformational leadership theory (via idealized influence) is and always will be a perishable skill. It requires reaffirmation and recertification. Unlike "riding a bike", leaders must stay attune to changes with rules, roles, and procedures.

### **The Hybrid**

While the theories and perspective provide relevance to certain leader and organizational aspects, the three complement strengths and weaknesses inherent to their constructs. A leader's behavior can be instrumental in influencing an organization but he/she cannot do it alone. A learning organization would more than likely require a transformational leader to establish the conditions required for the five disciplines. Once leaders apply the transformational aspects of the theory, they could revert to more transactional leader behaviors until challenges emerge within the learning organization. A shift in leadership modes through inspirational motivation would be required. Ethical Leadership on the other hand is a constantly monitored discipline and part of the organization's cyclic routine.

## **General James Doolittle**

General James Doolittle's exploits in the field of aviation are legendary and his leadership success and ability to get the best performance out of the teams and organizations that he led demonstrate the leader hybrid theory as I have prescribed. Doolittle completed his career by ascending to a four star general and served a key role in the establishment of the US Air Force as a separate military branch. Unlike his peers, Doolittle's road to Generalship was by no means traditional. While serving in the grade of first lieutenant, he pursued not only intense study of aerodynamic engineering (Phd, MIT), but also the effects of flight on the human body (Bishop, 2015). Had he travelled the conventional path of other Air Corps Officers, he would more than likely been more compliant with the tactics, techniques, and procedures directed by the peacetime military and proficiency in the administrative staff skills.

Best known for the legendary Doolittle Raid of Tokyo, Japan, Doolittle proved to be a wise choice for a dangerous and very unconventional mission. He led a mission to launch sixteen B-25 Mitchell Bombers from the decks of the USS Hornet to conduct a bombing raid of mainland Japan (Bradley, J.E. and Dice, J.W., 1984). Within four months, Doolittle energized not only the aviator team that volunteered for this mission; but also the designers, scientists, and other business leaders to work out the technical kinks involved in this complex operation. Using an aircraft carrier designed for fighter aircraft and shifting the mission to reconfigured bombers required innovation (USAF, 2015). Doolittle with the charter from the President was able to assemble a team of experts with the "right creative stuff" to engineer this feat.

Doolittle's acquisition and honing of personal mastery during his developmental years was an investment that delivered when he faced wartime challenges. His effectiveness was more than likely a result of innovative thought and bold action that a traditional route and career would

have stifled. His life experiences and effectiveness against odds heavily stacked against him, demonstrate that a leader should challenge his/her mental models. He was keenly aware of the system in which he operated and how the various functions and actions within one part of the system affected the others. His initial experiences as a general required Doolittle to demonstrate transformational leadership and challenge the status quo while devising better ways to deliver more effect. Once the 8<sup>th</sup> achieved air superiority (largely due to his and his staff's innovations), Doolittle found his place within the greater system and shared in the efforts of maintaining a peak performance learning organization (Bishop, 2015).

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