

Leadership and educational games

Source: Vleader project (edited by University of Padova)

1. Proposed definition(s): (including the author(s)/source(s), what exact term they use to refer to the competence in question)

There is a large debate among transactional vs. transformational leadership, after James McGregor Burns published his leadership book that first introduced those concepts.

Transactional leadership is defined as the influence of a leader toward his subordinates using reward and punishment as a form of motivational medium. The style is based on the concept that a leader has to give something to his followers in exchange for performing certain tasks. Leadership depends on the leader's power to reinforce subordinates for their successful completion of the bargain.

Transformational leadership is a model in which the leader works as a model and a motivator, encouraging the followers to work not because of an exchange of value but for the love of their work. According to Burns, transformational leadership is a process in which "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation". Leaders create learning opportunities for their followers, motivate and stimulate followers to solve problems; they possess good visioning, rhetorical and management skills, to develop strong emotional bonds with followers.

2. Elements of the competence: (what elements constitute the competence, according to the author(s))

Unlike in the transactional approach, the transformational one is not based on a "give and take" relationship, but on the leader's personality, traits and ability to make a change through example, articulation of an energizing vision and challenging goals.

The focus of the educational simulator Vleader is in particular on organizational leadership:

- a) identify, analyze, and solve problems;
- b) make informed decisions;
- c) plan and manage time; motivate people; focus people on common goals; prevent and resolve conflicts.

3. Developmental levels and indicators/descriptors for each developmental level: (How can 3 levels (or a different number) of the competence development be distinguished? What does the person need to be capable of to be considered to have developed the competence up to each of these levels?)

Understanding the principles of power, tension, ideas (the social system), and business results is critical to recognizing and influencing what is happening in a leadership situation. By using three very different styles of leadership, students experience a wide spectrum of causes and effects on the principles.

Directing Leadership Style: The directing leadership style is leader-centered; students playing the game have formal authority; they have all or most of the ideas; they do not solicit ideas from subordinates; they want productive tension and quick results; they dominate the conversation, giving detailed instructions on how, when, and where they want a task performed.

Participating Leadership Style: The participating leadership style centers on the leader and team. When teams receive assignments, the leaders encourage colleagues to participate by asking for ideas, such as input, information, and recommendations. Leaders might push tension to an extreme (relaxed, tense) to generate new ideas.

Delegating Leadership Style: In the delegating leadership style, leaders encourage colleagues to solve problems and make decisions without clearing it through them. Leaders should only make a few decisive comments to keep the team from straying too far.

4. Instruments: Instruments available to measure this concept/assessment techniques that can be used to check if students have reached a certain level of the competence in question/find out what level of competence in question a learner has reached (please mention where these are available and/or attach them in a scanned version)

VLeader, an educational simulator that provides a lifelike work experience. Students take on the role of a leader and interact with artificially intelligent avatars in a simulated organizational context. The simulation is an attempt to get out of the academy and to promote learning of leadership skills in a virtual environment that simulates real-world social interactions

5. Relevance: Why do you propose this definition/s?

This proposal of working definition comes from an empirical experience using the educational simulator Vleader and might be adapted to different contexts (educational and organizational ones) according to the needs of the context.

6. Critique: Arguments against the adoption of this model/each of these models for the needs of DARE+ project

The use of educational games can be less flexible than other tools, since it requires to accept dimensions and indicators already established in the software framework.

However, in the application of Vleader for students at the University of Padova it has been combined with an online learning log, enhancing reflection on actions, on crucial learning events and on learning outcomes achieved through behaviors activated.

7. References:

Burns (1978), Leadership, New York: Harper & Row.

Vleader Student workbook, Simulearn.