

MBA

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**Full Leadership Development:
Building the Vital Forces in Organizations**
Notes Critiques
Gestion de Ressources Humaines



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I. Introduction

This book focuses on the leadership concept and framework that Bruno Avolio presents and supports with theories, different experiences that he had the opportunity to deal with and real life examples that he develops and analyzes during the book. B. Avolio is considered as an international expert in the area of assessing and developing transformational leadership, both at an individual, team and strategic level. He is also one of the authors of two leadership measures: the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and the Team Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, being a professor and the director of the Center of Leadership Studies at Binghamton University.

In this book, B. Avolio presents what he defines as the full range of leadership. It is interesting as in his book he gives a global approach and explanation about the leadership concept, in terms of the key variables that could intervene within different models/types of leadership/leaders.

Avolio considers leadership as a system, not only as a process or person, with particular emphasis on the context which leader and follower interact and are embedded over time. His framework is based on people, timing, resources, the context of interaction, and the expected results in performance and motivation. In my opinion, this framework is an excellent basis of reflection and analysis of personal and professional situations, of people we consider(ed) to be the “leaders” and of personal characteristics that people could enhance to improve its leadership skills.

Avolio also relates the leadership system and its impact in an organization. He defends that when a leadership system is optimized, it in turn optimizes the vital force of each individual, thereby enhancing the collective force of the entire organization. The quality of the relationships among the leaders, their peers, and followers is a source of enrichment for all involved.

The author stresses that to lead means to step backwards before moving forward. He also thinks that leaders are surrounded by mirrors: what they do and say is reflected back to them in the behaviour of their followers. As an example, the author suggests that from meeting an organization’s second-in-command he learns about the boss. In fact, the importance and the influence of a leader is extremely important and relevant within the development of a team and therefore within an organization. From my experience and regarding the different peoples to whom I worked it is incredible the

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influence a leader could have in terms of each one working style, communication type, etc. Normally we refer to the followers as the “little XPTO leader”.

With this book the author aims to develop each one’s leadership potential by referring to the key variables, principles that leadership is based and by sharing some examples when leadership was enhanced. The author also stresses the leadership development at different hierarchic levels, each one with the same leadership potential. He supports his opinion by giving diverse examples from top management of multinational organizations to staff/common people with no relevant visibility.

This report will firstly explain the concept and ideas of the author about the leadership process. Secondly it presents my opinion about his ideas, where I’ll give some examples of my experience, my different reflections obtained during the reading period, also related with Human Resources and Change Management subjects. Thirdly the report will focus on the main lessons I learned from the book itself.

II. Avolio's Leadership Process

1. Develop and Construct Leadership Processes

The author focuses on leadership as a combination of different processes that will lead to the launch of what he calls as the full system.

One of the main processes referred by the author is the importance of establishing a clear relationship between the follower and the leader to create a sense of identification, to build trust and commitment. This set of transactions established between the leader and the followers is considered as the **Transactional Leadership** process, which constitutes an input to the transformational leadership.

The transactional form represents one type of leadership system, the articulation of standards, expectations, goals, rules and in many cases the rewards an individual receives for achieving goals.

The author distinguishes different forms of transactional leadership: *contingent reward*; *management by exception* (either active – leader actively monitors deviations - or passive – leader waits for deviations to take corrective measures); and *laissez faire*, where nothing is transacted between the leader and the follower and which is considered to be the most ineffective one, in terms of the performance and motivation levels that could be enhanced.

The best transactions referred are those which are *constructive* – what you should do, what you should be encouraged to explore. In the *corrective exchange* standards are set "of what not to do" – leaders just pay attention to the mistakes - and the contingent consequences when errors are made. This type of transaction does not enable to understand how to best develop leadership potential. This is normally common in risk-averse environments, typically quite low in innovation which threatens their survival.

Transformational leadership could be considered as a significant expansion of transactional leadership – one step ahead. The former would consider the outputs obtained from the transactional leadership - one's beliefs and values, trust constructed, behaviours – and would determine a course for change in the future, articulating it as a vision. Because visions cannot always be achieved in one's lifetime, leaders should try for the domino effect: develop leaders who, in turn, develop leaders. Therefore transformational leadership is far more effective than transactional in generating the higher levels of extra effort, commitment, performance and satisfaction of those who

led. Transformational leaders stimulate coworkers and oneself to challenge traditional ways of thinking; develop oneself and others to the highest levels of potential; raise the level of identification, moral maturity and perspective of those who lead and overtime develop their followers into leaders. Transformational leadership involves motivating others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible.

As with the transactional leadership the author identifies four components – the four I's – of transformational leadership: a) *Idealized Influence* (Leaders are admired, respected, trusted); b) *Inspirational motivation* (leaders display enthusiasm and optimism; followers are involved in thinking about various attractive future states and different possible scenarios); c) *Intellectual Stimulation* (leaders incentive followers to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems); *Indivualized consideration* (Leaders act as a coach, a mentor, teacher, facilitator, counselor, confidant of the members he led).

2. Are Leaders Born or Made?

The author defends that although leadership is to some extent pre determined by the nature of one's personality, intelligence and emotional makeup, there is a tremendous range in which it is possible to work to develop leadership potential to the highest points along the full range of leadership.

To support this idea the author states once more that is not only the person that influences leadership potential but also the situation. Therefore both person and situation must be analyzed together.

In terms of opportunities of development the first idea the author mentions is the fact that the leader must develop an effort to understand as much as he can about each member's developmental readiness. The developmental readiness of people relates to the perspectives they have built about how to best influence others. This aspect – capacity to influence and the person being influenced, the other person in the leadership process - will help to achieve full leadership potential.

Another idea the author presents is that each form of influence is related to the experiences people have accumulated on their lives biographies. The life experiences that people accumulate both strategically and beyond his control shape his perspective on how to influence others. For example, individuals who have been extremely challenged, but received support in their failures and constructive advice were often

the ones who grew up to be the best developers of people. They learned early what could be derived from failures and successes. They sought mentors who would make them dig deeply, and they reflected when their efforts resulted in failure.

Another aspect is that people who exhibit a broader range of learning interests, encourages followers to show innovative thinking at work, stimulates a willingness in others to come to these leaders with ideas that were on the boundaries of acceptability and sometimes even beyond those boundaries. The passion for learning new and different things is a common characteristic of transformational leaders.

3. Leadership at all Levels, within different cultures

After studying the leadership within an individual, the author then analyzed the concept within teams or teams system, as leadership in many organizations is often not just vested in a single individual, but in a larger collective. This aspect leads to create and develop “shared leadership” practices in teams or even a leadership system in an organization.

At an individual level, the one who lead will create a set of relationships and interactions with the followers that it will promote a set of expectations that everyone will know about and that will guide the interactions of members in that organization, whether they will be with the leader or with the other members. Therefore what started between a leader and his followers grew into a leadership system and culture.

Considering what is mentioned above, to build a leadership system it is essential to understand two basic points: 1. Determine what the system will be by stating up front the ideals, perspectives and then by behaving in a way that is absolutely congruent with those ideals; 2. People come in organizations with preconceived notions or models in their heads. Consistency is crucial to overcome the habits imported from past experiences with other groups and organizations and is proportionately more crucial to the extent that the beliefs one is trying to change are heavily ingrained in the way people already think.

Therefore consistency and continuous reinforcement are necessary for it to evolve to a systemic cultural level.

3.1. Team Leadership System

In a team leadership system, a shared mental model is needed for guiding team development and performance. Any system out of alignment, human or otherwise, is not able to optimize its performance. The goal is to integrate diversity of the group

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around a common purpose (e.g. the principles for how members treat each other in the group). The shared in highly effective teams represents a collective understanding of how members want to relate to each other and the purpose of their relationships. Those teams appear to display the type of shared leadership that was described above as transformational. Specifically, high performing teams work collectively towards developing each other's potential, in designing and implementing a shared vision, in stimulating each other to explore new avenues of thinking and in setting high standards and principles of conduct for all members to achieve.

3.2. Teams in Organizational Cultures

In terms of cultural aspects, the leadership culture that has become rooted in the organization can be a tremendous impediment to introduce new leadership methods and models. One of the key successes for organizations is to be highly adaptive and get rid or abandon something that doesn't serve the needs of the business in order to move onto something that is more effective: step out of the current context in which organization is embedded and examine what the next potential context will look like: "What systems must we retire or transform? How will this affect the people we select and develop?" This tension and pressure to change should be translated into positive energy to create the desired future scenario.

Another important aspect referred is that leadership is migrating to the lowest levels and more and more people have influence in shaping the organization destiny. With these changes comes a need to reengineer relationships in the organization to take into consideration that, increasingly, the formal structures are blurred and the informal structures have more influence on bottom-line performance. Once again consistency and integration of different ideas become keys to develop a leadership system in an organization.

4. Shared leadership in teams

The integration mentioned above creates the vital force in highly developed teams and in larger organizational systems; some calls it the shared mental model. Following this idea, the author refers that although the levels of trust and identification are not easy to build, once built they can have dramatic, positive effects on a team's effort, performance and perhaps most important, sustainability. Teams operate at the highest levels on the basis of trust, integrity and identification.

To achieve those highest levels, there are different stages of building a team and the basis to build a highly developed team leadership system. Avolio refers that teams must go through adaptive conflict and tension to develop themselves fully. Tasks conflict which focuses on the content in a group's work and goals, was being identified as situational in its impact and showed positive effects under certain conditions.

5. Building Context to embed a transformational leadership

Avolio also presents in his book an approach to transform and change a leadership system in an organization. He first states that the context is so crucial to the transformation process that it must be changed first or challenged if any real change is to take place. The reasoning behind is that as context includes the people; thus context must be changed if a full and successful transformation is expected. Taking the context as given is to limit the ability to transform organization. So, first change the context, create positive tension and then worry about getting more specific with altering and adapting styles and behaviors to the new context. To drive these ideas, and as already mentioned before, one of the greatest challenges that leaders have is attacking the habits of the past to replace them with the assumptions on which the future needs to be based.

One of the consequences of context and people changes is that leadership development is time-based and does not happen overnight. Avolio refers that boosters are needed to reinforce (revisit) learning and change evolution. Also, if leaders move from being decision-makers to organisational design consultants, they are doing something right.

In this sense, Avolio analyses how typical transformational leaders behave, as they tend to be more successful in leading change. The main difference is that these leaders don't accept the context as given. They see opportunities in the context that others see as overwhelming obstacles that cannot be overcome, which led to open channels for input, as opposed to close sources of information. They express their desire to hear more arguments before coming to a conclusion. This transformational vision to know the part, toward which the leader is directing the transformation of the people and context, is essential to bring successful and full transformations. Transformational leaders typically see the elements of the future in the current context and move to capitalize on what they see, before others do, which put them ahead of competition.

6. Leadership does not affect Performance Directly

Another important idea that the author believes, is that if leaders directly affect performances they are probably not leading well or transformationally, as they are too close to followers' work. The leader's challenge is to transform the *processes* that affect performance.

Often a leaders' influence is indirect through the follower, through the context or through some interaction between both overtime. The most important aspect of a leader's influence is the impact she or he has overtime and indirectly on performance. This forces to think about leadership as a process and not only as a person's behaviour, style and/or outcomes. This process starts with leader's internal perspective – his vision, core values, and understanding - and which overtime is reflected in the organizational system and culture. The leader develops himself and, in turn, develops others to exceed current development and performance capacities. The transformation a leader could drive is the transformation in the perspective of a follower from “he tells me I can do it”, to “I know I can do this” and then to “I know I can help others do this”. The follower takes actions and decision that stretch him and around him; the follower challenges his own thinking and others; and begins to expand his boundaries of vulnerability and moves to positions of increasing challenges and opportunities.

III. Main Findings

1. Bruce J. Avolio models his theory for leadership through his writing style. The author pulls together his experiences and perspectives from all aspects of his life, providing a rich foundation for his theories. He uses personal examples, anecdotes, and cases to communicate his range of experience as a consultant, trainer, and researcher, as well as a parent. The result is a conversational and accessible book that engages the reader with its interactive style. The author frequently finishes his ideas with open questions that obliges the reader to reflect about situations already lived or that pushes the reader to develop an introspection about his personality, attitudes, values and perspective. Perhaps a general critic refers to the “culture” of the book: too American in terms of the ideas developed and how some ideas were implemented.
2. An important aspect to comment is the approach of this book. Avolio focuses on presenting his principles and theory, then on demonstrating them with illustrations of real life examples and highlights of empirical study developed by Avolio and other experts in the area. I consider this approach an excellent parallel between reality and theory, due to the examples he gave (e.g. well known companies and personalities, coaching experiences he had in different countries and companies) which is then well supported by different empirical studies. This approach forces the reader to broaden his perspective about leadership, not only as a skill but also as a process, and therefore to help him to develop owns leadership potential.
3. The idea I found particularly interesting, is the structure of leadership types: transactional versus transformational. When he presents these models he clearly defines the frontier/difference between them, by presenting the main characteristics and the main components (e.g. the four “I’s”). Although conceptually it makes sense to make such clear differentiation, in reality and according to my experience, leadership types are difficult to be “pure” transactional and/or transformational. The same people could have a different behavior/transaction/transformation impact facing the same situation, just because the interaction is developed with different people/teams. Or otherwise, by interacting with the same people in different situations the leadership style could be quite different. In fact, people usually see inconsistencies in their leaders. That’s why the author also stresses that behaviour and the system have to match, which I consider quite impossible to achieve integrally. Many times,

leaders adapt to the different environments accordingly and sometimes consistency in their behaviour is not the main issue. Good leaders have core values that followers can relate to; their passion comes from identifying it with their leader.

4. Another interesting aspect to analyze in this book is the potential of each one's to develop its leadership potential. It was interesting to analyze deeply my potential and the different types of leaders I had the opportunity to work for, according to the factors the author mentions. I totally agree that the accumulated experiences, the diversity of interests, the education in which a person is embedded are factors that influence the development of leaders. If we observe two distinct persons, the one's that has more experience in different domains, has more interests and a passion for learning new things become almost the "natural leader" and a person of having a higher level of influence/dominance and credibility.

5. When the author analyses the leadership at an organization level he mentions about the importance of stating up front the ideals, perspectives and then by behaving in a way that is absolutely congruent with those ideals. When reading this I just thought about the importance that all the companies currently gave to the corporate culture and corporate leadership principles and the alignment of the resources to these ideals. Although not very objectively, resources are becoming evaluated and rewarded not just in terms of their competences to develop their job but also in terms of how they contribute to the development and implementation of the company's values and corporate principles. This is also linked with his second idea that leadership is migrating to the lowest levels of an organization and more and more people have influence in shaping the organization destiny. Another example that came up to my mind, and that reinforces the previous one, is that companies currently give much more emphasis, when selecting and recruiting new resources, to their personality and values regarding the corporate principles of the organization. In my opinion, this trend reflects the companies' effort of developing a process that will be naturally self-sustainable and self-controlled in terms of the principles the company wants to have.

Following the evaluation system mentioned above, in this book Avolio also refers to the need to adapt the evaluation and reward system once the philosophy has changed (e.g. evaluation of a team member versus the evaluation of the whole team, evaluation of the commitment to corporate principles). Although it is not yet very common to observe shared evaluation systems, the fact people are already evaluated in terms of their contribution to the company's values is already an adaptation to a new

philosophy. In my opinion although evaluation systems progressed a lot in the past years there are still many opportunities of improvement.

6. When the author develops the concept of shared leadership he mentions about the importance of building levels of trust and identification within team members, something that is difficult to create but that could have dramatic, positive effects on a team's effort, performance and perhaps most importantly, sustainability. In my opinion, the idea of building trust and identification in teams are developed at different stages of team development, which I think is strongly associated with the number of times and frequency people interact together. The more people are able to know and understand about other's personality and way of thinking the easier these people can develop a relationship of trust and identification. When teams achieve this level, they have a strong feeling of belonging to a team, with a common purpose, and not just to a group. If this is true, one question that came up to my mind, is that if these relationships are so difficult to create but when created they could achieve high levels of team's performance, why do some companies bet on rotating employees and constantly changing them to new teams? Are these companies getting the most out of the potential of team development and performance? In certain sense, it seems that when the team is finally achieving high levels of development and performance, the company tends to change it. In another sense I can also interpret this policy as the company's effort to create the highest number of relationships and transactions between different persons in the company, something that will serve as an input to continue to develop the integration of diversity between team members. To conclude it seems that there is a trade-off in developing a shared leadership system – bringing upfront and share the ideals – and to achieve the highest stage of team development – building identification and trust.

7. Another important aspect referred and I found extremely interesting is the need of changing a leadership system and the main steps involved in changing it – context first and then people - and how different leadership styles could better deal with or identify this change needs. Once more, change management appears to be a reality and the person's attitude and personality to face and deal with these changes crucial. The will one's have to drive change, the will one's have to transform change not in an obstacle but in an opportunity, the will one's has to listen to others inputs, are characteristics that increase vision and alignment of perspective between leaders and followers, team's commitment and identification with the leaders. From my

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experience leaders that spend much time in pushing followers up front, in letting themselves to be challenged, in giving followers support, are leaders that could improve team motivation and energy, as well as, global commitment to results. The positive effects are incredible when compared to those leaders that aimed to block transparency and want to control all the activities within a team.

8. The fact that Avolio stresses that leadership should not affect performance directly, is a consequence of developing a leader, not only as the more experienced and competent person, but as the coach that: a) aims to support different development stages of a follower; b) spends time in transform the followers capability to deal with challenging issues and c) changes followers self-confidence and increases the scope of its comfort zone, through a communication content and style.

It is this relation that the leader is able to construct and to develop with the follower that can increase bottom unit performance.

According to this analysis and according to my experience I think that there are many leaders did not understand their role as a coach. Many persist to avoid communication, to create environments of stress and uncomfort as they consider there are key inputs to contribute to the people development.

9. As a final positive critic, I considered this book an excellent tool and a good contact to understand “What leadership is about?”, as everybody mention and uses this word no matter what is the context; and “Who are in fact the good leaders?”... I recommend its reading to those who want to develop their leadership potential and to understand the type of manager they have in terms of leading (could be a good tool to manage him).

IV. Conclusion

The book's final thoughts and main lessons learned I consider more relevant for my development is associated with the idea of "Step back then forward": to develop our leadership potential we must go inside ourselves and reflect; we must develop a solid understanding of our own vulnerabilities, build trust and be willing, at times, to get out of the way and let those that should lead, lead. The most exemplary leaders, teams and organizations are balanced in how they manage their vulnerabilities. Vulnerabilities are embraced, understood, dealt with and certainly not avoided.

Moreover through identification, the greatest force for control is created between leaders and followers, a force that is called commitment. This enable to create a system that forces amazing things to happen and develop innovation: Predictable things happen when people are controlled; amazing things happen when they are committed.

Decisiveness seemed to be important too: "If you know where you want to go, you'll get there". Leaders should drive the direction to guide followers to achieve results.

*The difference is knowing what you want and knowing what the end is supposed to look like.
If a coach does not know what the end is supposed to look like, he won't know it when he sees it – Coach Vince Lombardi*