

What is transformation?

by
Sebastian Salicru
Business Psychologist
ss@pts.net.au
www.pts.net.au

Introduction

In this paper, I define transformation within a context of personal transformation and its implications for leadership development, cultural organisational change, collaboration and high performance. In doing so, I draw, predominantly, on my own personal transformation journey and professional experience working as a corporate/business psychologist during the last eighteen years working in both private and public sector organisations. Some of the concepts I present have been inspired by, are aligned with and endorse the ideas of other authors, whose work is listed in the recommended reading section at the end of the paper.

What is transformation?

Transformation is the result of the experiential learning resulting from committing to a journey of self-discovery. Transformation occurs when our sense of identity (the self) is re-defined and altered. A first step in the transformation journey is understanding and embracing the distinction between our 'false self' and 'true self'. Our 'false self' is our conditioned or illusory self-image - in other words, the self that others have imposed on us and that we have settled for. Contrastingly, our 'true self' is our authentic, healthily integrated self. In some traditions, the 'true self' is referred to as our 'essence'. Transformation, then, is the developmental process of reclaiming our personal integrity by staying in touch with our inner self and authority, which frees us from others standards and expectations. When personal transformation occurs, the world, people and circumstances around us are also transformed and we engage in a new way of being.

This new state of being can be easily recognised by various experiences and behavioural traits, such as being alert, awake, aware, focused, clear, centered, calm, serene and peaceful most of the time. During transformation, there is a tendency to being appreciative and grateful, which in turn impacts on our capacity to retain a positive attitude - to always see the glass as half-full - and this resulting in new opportunities. In our relationships with others, we are

empathic, sensitive, genuinely respectful, compassionate and forgiving. As a result, others experience us as genuine, honest, open and direct.

In the work context, when operating from a true self state of being, we are patient, persistent and committed. In a team context, collaboration with others becomes a spontaneous way of working, rather than an accession to a request or imposed external force from others. We have shifted from the 'I' and 'me' to the 'we' and 'us' mindset and behavioural set.

Within a leadership role, we feel grounded, strong, motivated, visionary and purposeful. We command the respect, strength of character and authority that inspires others to act in the same way. During the transformation journey we are spiritually open, aware, receptive, continually growing and connected to others and life.

Transformation usually arises out of a major crisis and/or a strong sense of dissatisfaction, doubt, and the desire to attain a new state of being. It could be seen as turning a challenge, peril or loss into a great, enduring learning opportunity. It can also occur as a result of realizing that if better is possible, then good is not enough. An enduring feeling of depression can sometimes be a sign that the time for self-transformation has arrived.

The transformation journey begins with self-understanding. This entails uncovering our blind spots, and identifying and dealing with the barriers that preclude every human being from being their 'essence' or 'true self'. (This, by the way, is at the heart of leadership development.) Seeking and realizing our true self takes courage and commitment. While anyone can contribute to their own transformation, effective guidance and support is required from someone who has already embarked on the transformation journey. . This guidance may take the form of engaging in some form of therapy and/or spiritual mentoring. In the work context, it may take the form of a specific kind of coaching (not just performance coaching).

Transformation, then, can be described as the learning process by which we grow and develop awareness, and acquire new consciousness and presence. Awareness allows us to perceive and name a new world of possibilities, which was previously unseen or unnoticed – that is, we are able to see with 'new eyes'. This awareness in combination with appropriate and effective guidance (eg: coaching) provides us with the opportunity to balance our perceptions and achieve emotional maturity by integrating our thinking, emotions and actions.

Presence allows us to be 'there' - fully present - in time and place. Presence is the opposite of being absent-minded or unavailable to our own consciousness and others' presence – and their words, feelings and concerns. Presence, then, is the expression of trust in the self and allows us to act purposefully at each moment.

As a result of being aware and present, we become empowered and develop a new way of relating to ourselves and others. We start telling a different story (our vision). We develop a plan (our mission). We create new possibilities (design the future) and embark on purposeful action in service of that future. This is when the impossible becomes possible. From this place, commitment to action arises.

Awareness and commitment allows us to shift from ‘my story’ (I) to ‘our story’ (we), thereby gaining a sense of collective identity and the desire to achieve higher goals and make a real and positive difference in the external world. Awareness, desire and commitment combined provide us with a clear sense of identity, purpose and direction. At this stage, we start to take on real, personal responsibility and provide leadership. We are present and confident – we trust ourselves. This comes from our being authentic and acting with integrity and humility, which enables us to touch, influence, inspire and enlist others, as our story resonates with them – thus, we provide true transformational leadership. Inevitably, we impact on those around us and achieve outcomes that previously might have seemed impossible. Average teams turn into high performance teams. We exceed expectations and make breakthroughs happen.

In summary, transformation does not happen by chance. It requires self-understanding, courage, commitment, dedication, perseverance, guidance and support. This combination provides the passion and responsibility that results in breakthroughs, and inspires and contributes to the transformation of others, which is the essence of leadership.

Recommended reading

- Binney, GT. & Williams, C. (1997) *Leaning into the Future: Changing the Way People Change Organizations*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London.
- Cameron, K. & Lavine, M. (2006) *Making the Impossible Possible: Leading Extraordinary Performance: The Rocky Flats Story*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.
- Moore, R. (2001) *The Archetype of Initiation: Sacred Space, Ritual Process, and Personal Transformation*. Xlibris Corporation. Bloomington.
- Moore, R. & Gillette, D. (1990) *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*. HaperCollins, San Francisco.
- Moore, T. (1992) *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*. Piatkus, London.
- Nahser, FB. (1997) *Learning to Read the Signs: Reclaiming Pragmatism in Business*. Butterworth-Heinemann, Boston.
- Ouspensky, P.D. (1974) *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*. Vintage, New York.
- Ouspensky, P.D. (1931) *A New Model of the Universe*. Knopf, New York.
- Owen, H. (1999) *The Spirit of Leadership: Liberating the Leader in Each of Us*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.
- Rohr, R. & Martos, J. (1996) *The Wild Man's Journey: Reflections on Male Spirituality*. St. Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati.
- Scott Peck, M. (1987) *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*. Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Senge, P.; Scharmer, C.O; Jaworski, J.; & Flowers, B.S. (2004) *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London.
- Tolle, E. (2005) *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. Penguin Books, New York.
- Wagner, J.P. (1996) *The Enneagram Spectrum of Personality Styles: An Introductory Guide*. Metamorphous Press, Portland.