Leadership Style in the Deaf Community: An Exploratory Case Study of a University President

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LEADERSHIP STYLE IN THE DEAF COMMUNITY:
AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF A
UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT

A QUALITATIVE MINI-CASE STUDY of I. King Jordan and his leadership style explores the influence of a transformational leader on Gallaudet University and the Deaf community. The study features a template-style semistructured interview with Jordan regarding his perceptions of leadership and his personal insights. The study highlights the attributes of transformational leadership and encourages further research into leadership as a tool for change in the Deaf community and the disability rights movement. This exploration of the leadership style of Gallaudet’s first Deaf president is especially timely; the study was conducted between Jordan’s retirement announcement and the Gallaudet Board of Trustees’ decision to rescind an offer to his announced successor to become the university’s next president. That tumultuous transition accentuated the disconnect between Jordan’s transformational, charismatic leadership style, which affected generations of the Deaf community, and his followers’ dissatisfaction with his management and successor planning.

The impact of one leader’s influence may cause waves of change over decades and through many generations within a community; that impact may have positive and negative consequences. Leadership in the Deaf community is no exception. Northouse (2004, p. 3) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”

There is a history of strong leadership in the Deaf community. For many years and throughout many subcultures within the Deaf community, leadership initiatives have been organized that play an important part in improving the lives of deaf people. The World Congress of the Deaf represents deaf individuals all over the globe through innovative collaboration and rights advocacy (National Association of the Deaf, 2007). In 2005 the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) celebrated its 125th anniversary (NAD, 2006). The unique professional blend of the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association, which includes both hearing and deaf people, advocates for the education, mental health, and vocational opportunities of deaf individuals. Deaf Women United, established in 1985,
asserts that Deaf women are “key” in leading social change. (Deaf Women United, 2008, para. 5). National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) recently celebrated its 25th anniversary while hosting the Collegiate Black Deaf Leadership Institute, an event characteristic of NBDA’s tradition of advocating leadership training for youth (Gallaudet University, 2007a). As an institution of higher education, Gallaudet University strives to empower Deaf leaders through the Gallaudet Leadership Institute. The university also recently established the I. King Jordan Chair for Leadership to commemorate the legacy of the school’s first Deaf president (Gallaudet University, 2007b).

Though President Jordan was once tremendously popular, his role within the university came under question as he left office and the university fell under sanctions from its regional accrediting body. Following the appointment of Jordan’s successor, students and faculty alike expressed a reversal in their support of Jordan’s leadership and management of the university. However as recent as 2005, regarding Jordan’s pending retirement, Nancy Bloch, executive director of NAD, praised Jordan for his leadership skills; “Dr. I. King Jordan, through his leadership, has established the benchmark for the next president of Gallaudet University” (NAD, 2005a, p. 1). Likewise, in an open letter to the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees, the NAD Board of Directors said that “Dr. Jordan’s leadership has opened countless doors for deaf and hard of hearing Americans. His work has had a lasting impact, resulting in unprecedented opportunities across the country, and even worldwide” (NAD, 2005b, p. 1). This assessment contrasts starkly with the boos and insults from students that followed Jordan’s expression of support for his named successor, Jane Fernandes, and accusations from within the Gallaudet community that Fernandes, the university provost, had engaged in autocratic management practices.

The research for the present study focused on I. King Jordan’s reflections as they intersected with a template interview regarding transformational leadership characteristics. We did not investigate the disparity between management style and quality of leadership in Jordan’s administration that became apparent during the data analysis. Leadership and management are often referred to interchangeably; however, Bolman and Deal (1997) make the clarifying observation that leadership and management are distinct skills, and that one may be a strong leader without being a good manager, or vice versa. Further, they say, it is possible to be a strong leader though not skilled in organizational management, though the results can be mixed: “Poorly managed organizations with strong charismatic leaders may soar briefly only to crash shortly thereafter” (p. xxii). The research for the present study concerned the leadership style of I. King Jordan, the first Deaf president of Gallaudet, and the transformational effect of his tenure on the Deaf community. His management style as university president and his succession planning are not the focus of the article.

Limited Research on Leadership in the Deaf Community

Even with the tremendous surge in leadership programs and mentoring opportunities, the need still exists for research regarding leadership within the Deaf community, from a cultural perspective rather than from the deficit viewpoint (Hughes, McKie, Hopkins, & Watson, 2005; Luckner & Stewart, 2003; Mangrubang, 1993; Pollard, 1992). Luckner and Stewart examined the perceptions of deaf adults regarding their success, seeking and reporting their advice and wisdom. Bat-Chava (2000) examined deaf adults regarding their group affiliation and identification with the Deaf or hearing community through social identity theory, clearly valuing a cultural rather than a deficit perspective. Pollard asserted that researchers must differentiate between Deaf participants (associated with the Deaf community) and deaf participants (associated more with the hearing community and the medical aspects of hearing loss.) It was in that spirit that we interviewed I. King Jordan (Kamm, Heacox, Greene, & Stanford, 2007), examining the perception of leadership through the eyes and words of Gallaudet’s first Deaf president, an activist on behalf of the rights of people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Jordan emerged as a transformational leader in the Deaf community during the Deaf President Now (DPN) protest of the late 1980s, which led to his appointment as the first Deaf president of Gallaudet University. The combination of a sincere leader with the momentum generated by students and student leaders erupted into a transformational partnership that influenced and empowered the entire community of Deaf people across the United States and worldwide. In the present study, we aimed to identify a parallel between Jordan’s self-reported perception of leadership and research-based leadership theories. We predicted that the self-reported leadership style that emerged would parallel the characteristics associated with a transformational leader.

In the present article, we review the leadership styles and characteristics that emerged from the intersection of a leadership literature review and Jordan’s reflections in a template-
based, semistructured interview built on leadership characteristics of transformational and path-goal leadership styles. In addition, the data collected from the interview were examined within the context of the historical events of the Gallaudet student protests of 1988, DPN, Jordan’s recollections, and his role as the first Deaf president of Gallaudet University. John and Moser (2001, p. 116) emphasize that “leadership is a dynamic process, varying from situation to situation with changes in the leader, followers, and the situations.” The present article serves as an attempt to understand the leadership style of King Jordan and his impact on the Deaf community, with the hope of generating further discussion and research concerning leadership within the Deaf community.

**An Overview of Leadership Theory**

**Transformational Leadership**

The concept of transformational leadership, proposed by Burns (1978) and popularized through the 1970s and 1980s, was the outgrowth of trends in human relations in society at that time. Leaders of corporations and educational institutions were beginning to understand that the organization was not isolated from the needs of followers and of society in general. The institution was affected by outside contingencies and was thus compelled to consider the dynamic state of society and even to develop a sense of responsibility for improving society. From this state of change, transformational leadership arose (Johns & Moser, 2001).

A transformational leader is a courageous change agent who is skilled in managing situations of uncertainty (Johns & Moser, 2001). Burns (1978) first identified the leadership style of the great change agents, who seek higher purposes for institutions’ goals. The transformational leader touches followers’ unrealized needs and acts decisively and autonomously to mobilize followers toward a moral and enduring exchange. This can only be accomplished by the creation of a shared vision, effective communication of that vision, and the presence of a community of followers who “expect to make a difference, to create reform, to innovate” (Pielstick, 1998, p. 197).

The transformational leader elevates the shared goals of the group and inspires confidence and excellence in followers by touching their innermost needs for self-actualization and autonomy (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). Thus, the organization’s goals become closely tied to the intrinsic sense of self, which create an adherence to the shared vision (Burns, 1978; Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003; Dvir et al., 2002). The transformational leader is an icon, a moral example. Such leaders have undergone a process of self-discovery and the achievement of authenticity so that the values they espouse are truly motivational (Avolio, 2005).

Whether the leader is charismatic or inspirational, it is imperative that he or she communicate the shared vision in such a way as to mobilize followers. “By articulating a vision or a mission, the transformational leader increases the intrinsic value of goal accomplishment” (Bass, 1998, p. 23). The effective transformational leader uses language to create within the individual follower a sense of competency and a sense of self. When the leader sets forth high expectations, followers are convinced that they are capable of accomplishing goals of moral and enduring purpose (Bass, 1998; Pielstick, 1998).

Transformational leaders’ language and actions reflect this purpose. They model the commitment to the purpose and challenge followers to emulate their behavior (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992). Slogans and mottoes create a climate of success and change (Kirby et al., 1992; Pielstick, 1998). They contain emotional appeal and communicate a cultural sense of cohesiveness that in turns builds trust in the unified purpose. “Emotional appeals and a sense of drama may be added to help provoke, influence, and persuade others” (Pielstick, 1998, p. 198). It is therefore through effective communication that the followers are persuaded to make a difference, to make an enduring change.

The leader is crucial to this transformation, but the essence of transformational leadership is that the followers do not become dependent on the leader; they instead become leaders. Thus, an enduring change in the organization or in society will outlast the individual leader (Johns & Moser, 2001). A more hierarchical, authoritative leadership style is not a trusted agent adequate for change. A group of followers disenchanted with an unfair system of leadership is ripe for the emergence of a transformational leader who will organize and empower them to move toward the necessary adaptation to autonomy. The result should be a natural system that adapts, and is able to survive, even when the transformational head is no longer there (Avolio, 2005).

Table 1 outlines the thinking of some of the first authors to write on transformational theory.

**Path-Goal Leadership**

The Path-Goal Theory of Leadership deals with the interaction between supervisors and their subordinates. According to House (1971), the path-goal leader motivates subordinates by clearing the way for their success. The leader motivates subordinates by showing them that by achieving their goals, they will also benefit in some
manner. The leader is there to support the subordinates, giving them the necessary resources and providing them with opportunities for success (House & Mitchell, 1974).

The Path-Goal Theory of Leadership is based on several implied assumptions. The first is that a person’s effort level on a task is directly related to the reward he or she anticipates for his or her effort. The second assumption is based on the Valence Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964). This theory holds that people will cognitively work at the level that will have the greatest benefit to them. The third assumption is that role ambiguity is stressful to individuals and should be avoided. It is the leader’s job to clarify what is expected from subordinates; knowing what is expected of them, subordinates thus can work more easily knowing how they will be evaluated.

Path-goal leadership consists of different components that include leader behavior, subordinate characteristics, task characteristics, and motivation. The leader behavior component is further subdivided into four different leadership styles: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement oriented (House & Mitchell, 1974). The directive leadership style describes a leader who gives followers instructions about their task, including expectations, how it should be done, and a completion time line. The supportive leadership style involves being friendly and approachable as a leader and guiding from a humanistic perspective. The achievement-oriented leadership style describes a leader who challenges followers to perform at the highest level possible, setting the expectation of no less than excellence. House and Mitchell (1974) suggest that leaders may demonstrate some or all leadership characteristics, depending on the situation.

Subordinate characteristics help to predict the manner in which followers will interpret the leader’s behaviors. Key characteristics include affiliation, preferences for structure, desire for control, and self-perceived level of task ability (House & Mitchell, 1974). These characteristics, in combination with others, can forecast the degree to which subordinates will find the leader’s behavior to be a source of immediate or future satisfaction. Task characteristics affect the leader’s influence, as it may also determine the motivation level of followers and involve task design, the formal authority system of the organization, and the primary work group of followers (House & Mitchell, 1974).

The Path-Goal Theory of Leadership is meant to improve subordinates’ performance and satisfaction. The leader assumes a supportive role and lets the subordinates know what is expected of them and how they would benefit over the long term. A special focus of path-goal theory is on helping followers overcome obstacles. Path-goal theory suggests that leaders help followers by removing obstacles or helping them around the obstacles as a means of increasing overall satisfaction.

House (1996) expanded on the previously published path-goal theory by adding four additional leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Major Transformational Leadership Theories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Definition of transformational leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns (1978)</td>
<td>Engage with others and create a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House (1971)</td>
<td>Capable of having a profound and extraordinary effect on followers; able to accomplish outstanding feats through their influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass (1985)</td>
<td>Motivate followers to do more than the expected by raising their level of conscience and getting them to transcend their self-interest in the name of the group; move followers to address higher-level needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass &amp; Avolio (1994)</td>
<td>[Extension of past work] Motivate followers to rise above the status quo by raising followers’ level of conscience and getting them to transcend their self-interest in the name of the group; move followers to address higher-level needs</td>
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</table>
behaviors: work facilitation, a group-oriented decision process, work-group representation and networking, and value-based leader behavior. Although new components were later added to the theory, the original spirit remained the same: To be effective, leaders must give followers the missing elements of their environments that are critical to their success. Table 2 lists the major authors writing on the Path-Goal Theory of Leadership and briefly outlines their thinking.

Conceptual Framework

In developing the case study on I. King Jordan, we selected the framework of transformational leadership to investigate his leadership style. There are four key components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). After we interviewed Jordan, it was evident that there were actually two leadership roles that emerged: transformational and path-goal. Jordan was hired by Gallaudet University to be the formal leader, the one responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of the institution. After all that has been written and discussed about Jordan’s contribution to the Deaf community and the disability community as spokesperson and advocate, it is often overlooked that he was a formal leader first and foremost. But from the interview process, we learned that Jordan’s informal role of advocate and spokesperson for the Deaf and for the disabilities rights movement, rather than his formal management of the university, exhibited strong transformational leadership characteristics, while his formal leadership role of university president encompassed some of the characteristics of path-goal leadership: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented (House & Mitchell, 1974).

Most people know Jordan primarily as a leader of the Deaf community; it is from this frame that Jordan’s role as a transformational leader emerges. By becoming president of Gallaudet University, he unknowingly became not only the leader and spokesperson for the Deaf community, but for all people with disabilities. It was his charismatic leadership style that shaped his image and enabled him to lead through the transformational framework.

In this study of Jordan, we discuss his formal leadership style of path-goal leadership as a secondary leadership style, with the primary leadership style being that of transformational leadership encompassing the ideas of emotional intelligence, conceptualized as an empathetic connection to followers; a mood or attitude, which includes interpersonal skills, internal motivation, and self-awareness (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006).

Study Limitations

Research limitations existed within the present study, with the most significant being the exclusion of documents and research on the student protests that followed the naming of Jordan’s successor. This information was excluded because it had not yet appeared in the research literature in a primary source. The eruption of protests and the faculty’s no-confidence vote for Jordan’s successor occurred during the production of this research and thus is not part of the overall literature review. So while the protests are not part of this research project, this initial review of Jordan’s leadership style may open doors to future analysis of management style and his tenure’s influence on the Deaf community.

The present study also did not include a 360-degree assessment that would have provided impressions from Jordan’s peers, coworkers, and followers both on and off the Gallaudet University campus. The study relied solely on the self-reported perceptions of leadership provided during the interview with Jordan in conjunction with characteristics identified in the literature; it was an exploratory study. To build a holistic understanding of leadership within the Deaf community, further research must include not only Jordan’s perspective but that of his peers and subordinates, as well as the leadership perspectives of others, to illuminate

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Leader characteristics</th>
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<td>Evans (1970), House (1971), House &amp; Dessler (1974), House &amp; Mitchell (1974)</td>
<td>Emphasizes the relationship between the leader’s style, the characteristics of the follower, and the setting. The underlying assumption suggests that followers will be motivated if they think they are capable of performing the work, if they believe their efforts will result in a desired outcome, and if they believe the payoff is worthwhile.</td>
<td>Directive, supportive, participative, achievement oriented</td>
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the totality of Jordan’s impact on the Deaf community.

**Study Design and Methodology**

**Instrument Design**

In a qualitative case study, we examined the leadership style of I. King Jordan against the template of transformational leadership. The interview tool was a 14-item semi-structured questionnaire based on common qualities and characteristics found in the literature which included empathy, interdependence, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, strong relationships, creating meaning, shared vision, shared decision making, empowerment, use of language, and dedication to followers. The interview lasted about 39 minutes and was audiotaped and videotaped to facilitate transcription. Jordan reviewed the transcripts for accuracy prior to the analysis. The final stage of data collection consisted of developing a leadership characteristics matrix from the literature review and prominent keywords in the transcript. This process serves as a filter to help us interpret the data in a template-style structure using identified emerging characteristics and themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

**Validity**

Validity was established by means of triangulation of data taken from a research literature review of leadership characteristics, historical documents, and personal communication via the template-style interview with Jordan (Creswell, 2003). Further validity was sought by an external auditor (Creswell, 2003). The investigation was conducted by five researchers, one of whom is familiar with Jordan’s work and is active within the Deaf community. Such understanding and knowledge of the Deaf community are crucial to cross-cultural understanding (Pollard, 1992). The other four researchers are experts within the field of educational leadership yet lack the same familiarity with Jordan and the Deaf community. This mix of expertise—one researcher familiar with the Deaf community and four researchers considered external to the Deaf community—contributes to the validity of the findings by creating a balance and, presumably, an unbiased view. The external auditor had no agenda outside that of identifying the trends and strong research criteria. This external perspective monitored and tempered any hidden agenda or bias of the research (Creswell, 2003). Thus, while the interview instrument needs to undergo further study to determine reliability, validity was established through careful application of triangulation, the presence of an external auditor, and cross-cultural considerations.

**Data Analysis**

**Transformational Leadership**

While clearly there are gray lines between leadership styles, and one will not operate strictly within the model of any leadership style, common themes in transformational leadership strongly outweighed other styles evident in Jordan’s interview and in his life. Barbuto and Burbach (2006, p. 51) have identified common traits of the transformational leader: commitment to “intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence.” Northouse (2004, p. 172) has characterized the transformational leader as one who is “dominant” and “competent,” “sets strong role models,” “desires to influence,” has “strong values,” “expresses confidence,” and “communicates high expectations.”

**The Right Place at the Right Time**

While the charismatic, transformational leader may be marginally successful in the relatively homeostatic college environment, such leadership...
is truly transformational when the followers are in a pivotal dynamic state of change at the time when a leader emerges who is able to mobilize the followers toward a shared and enduring goal (Friedman, 2004). Gallaudet University, 1988, was such a place and time when I. King Jordan became its first Deaf president. He described Gallaudet at the time as a community that had for too long believed the deficit view forced on it by the majority hearing culture. He described a time and place that was ripe for a charismatic, inspirational leader:

Unfortunately, before Deaf President Now [DPN], I think too many of us, Deaf people, accepted that second-class citizenship. We allowed people to put limitations on what we can do. We allowed people to put limitations on our expectations, our goals. (interview transcription, p. 5, para. 10)

He explained that the support was there; the people were ready for empowerment. Jordan stepped into the role as the groundswell of the Deaf community was emerging into a self-determined population.

It matters little whether the movement or vision originated with the leader or with the community of followers. In fact, it is often that growing and innovative movement that originated within the followers that is taken up and molded by the emerging transformational leader; this often results in enduring change that transcends even the original group vision (Pielstick, 1998). The vision is not about the leader’s power in the situation; it is about the power of the group acting in accord and interdependence (Friedman, 2004).

Jordan emerged as a truly transformational leader who acted as a change agent and mobilized and inspired the Deaf community. NAD executive director Gary Olsen asserted, “We need a president in this time and age who is sensitive [to], understands, exemplifies, and advocates for the Deaf, not just by rhetoric but by being a living example” (Gannon, 1989, p. 61). Jordan fondly related how his former dean, Tom Mayes, used the analogy of Gallaudet’s culture after the DPN protests as being like the set of a Hollywood movie, with Jordan perfectly typecast to be its leader. Jordan concluded, “Somebody was in front of that movement; that somebody was me” (interview transcription, p. 7, para. 12).

Commitment to Intellectual Stimulation

Jordan indicated his strong commitment to intellectual stimulation by saying passionately and often that Gallaudet’s future lay in increasing academic rigor. He spoke of Gallaudet’s future in light of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA):

It is a two-edged sword for Gallaudet because with ADA and other laws and regulations, Deaf people can go anywhere to college and university now. They'll get support services wherever they want to go, and there are a lot of choices. The best and brightest Deaf people think about where to go to college. In 1960, 1970, even 1980, the bright young Deaf people almost automatically went to Gallaudet. Now, it’s not automatic anymore. Gallaudet has to compete with other colleges and universities. And their competition has to be academic excellence. It has to be. (interview transcription, p. 6, para. 11)

Jordan’s commitment to academic rigor traces back to 1988, when he applied to become president of Gallaudet University. He conveyed that this was an important part of his application for the position. He also related that academic excellence was his top priority when taking the reigns at Gallaudet, saying that his first goal was to “elevate the academic reputation of deaf people” (interview transcription, p. 3, line 68). Of course, in the post-secondary environment, one would expect little else.

Communicates High Expectations

When the leader sets high expectations, followers are convinced that they are capable of accomplishing goals of moral and enduring purpose (Bass, 1998; Pielstick, 1998). The transformational leader elevates the shared goals of the group and inspires confidence and excellence in followers by touching their innermost needs for self-actualization and autonomy (Dvir et al., 2002). They model their commitment to the purpose and challenge followers to emulate their behavior (Kirby et al., 1992). Slogans and mottos create a climate of success and change (Kirby et al., 1992; Pielstick, 1998). They contain emotional appeal and communicate a cultural sense of cohesiveness that in turn builds trust in the unified purpose. “Emotional appeals and a sense of drama may be added to help provoke, influence, and persuade others” (Pielstick, 1998, p. 23). It is therefore through effective communication that the followers are “persuaded” to make a difference, to make an enduring change.

Jordan spoke passionately about his belief in the Deaf community’s capacity to make that change. “Deaf people can do anything but hear!” he said (I. K. Jordan, personal communication, 2007). This trademark phrase has resonated since he first took office at Gallaudet, in 1988. He related the story of how this impassioned declaration was first coined:
LEADERSHIP STYLE IN THE DEAF COMMUNITY

March 13th, Sunday, the board named me president and I spoke at an impromptu press conference, outside the hotel with microphones all around; when that was over, the press asked for a formal press conference. So we scheduled one for Monday morning, in Ely Auditorium at Gallaudet. So I stood behind a podium on the stage and gee, there must have been 20 microphones around the podium and there were TV cameras and flashbulbs. The place was standing room only, and you may remember that the press was very friendly and supportive of the revolution. So they were very friendly to me and I thought, "Hey, if this is a press conference, I'm going to like this!" It was easy because they kept tossing me easy questions. I would answer back and forth, back and forth. Back and forth . . . easy!

Then, when it was almost over, somebody and I wish I knew who, but somebody stood up and said, "Well Mr. President"—now I'm making up the words but this was the concept—"Well, Mr. President, this is all well and good and congratulations but I mean REALY, EVEN with an education, what kinds of things can Deaf people do?" [Here, Jordan gave a small smile and hesitated.] I stood there, and it was almost like he punched me in the stomach. I thought, "All week, we've been talking about the abilities and potential of Deaf people, and here I am a Deaf man and I've become a president of a university and this guy is asking me what can Deaf people do?" All that went through my head in about [he snaps his fingers] 5 seconds. Without even thinking, I said, "Deaf people can do anything except hear!" It became like a tagline of my presidency, and I really strongly believed that. So that became my second vision, my second goal, to prove that deaf people can do anything except hear. (interview transcription, p. 3, para. 7)

The passionate conviction and belief in the abilities and potential of deaf individuals is evidence of the transformational style of leadership that desires to propel the community to higher and loftier goals.

If Jordan did not display the characteristics of the transformational leader, he might have taken office, written a strategic plan, raised money for the endowment, and focused on internal goals. However, he had an informal role to fulfill, that of spokesperson and model. He spoke with great pride in the accomplishments of deaf people today. He named "famous" and "successful deaf people" in every field of vocation. He spoke of his influence on the younger generation:

And more importantly, it's very common for young Deaf children to have high expectations. And young Deaf children, really, they don't think about what they can't do. Young Deaf children used to focus, almost perseverate, on what they couldn't do. Now we think about what we can do. And that's a huge change! And I'm very happy—very proud to have played a significant role in helping that happen. (interview transcription, p. 5, para. 10)

The leader is crucial to cultural transformation, but the essence of transformational leadership is that the followers do not become dependent on the leader; they will instead become the leaders. Thus, an enduring change in the organization or in society will outlast the individual leader (Johns & Moser, 2001). There is little doubt that change came to the Deaf community during Jordan's tenure, though no causal link was identified.

**Emotional Intelligence**

The transformational leader is an icon, a moral example. He or she has undergone a process of self-discovery and authenticity such that the values he or she espouses are truly motivational (Avolio, 2005). Through his own journey Jordan related his experience of self-discovery, self-concept, and identity that he began when he first became a student at Gallaudet. When relating the etiology of his hearing loss, he explained that an accident made him lose his hearing, but he did not find his identity as a Deaf person until he became a student at Gallaudet:

At first I was a hearing person who couldn't hear. I just lost my hearing. So, I felt like I was defective; I lost something. I felt like something was wrong with me; I couldn't hear. I couldn't this, couldn't that. I didn't really understand that Gallaudet would give me an identity. (interview transcription, p. 1, paras. 2–3)

Jordan related that Gallaudet was not only crucial in providing him an education, but that it was the place where deaf students undergo the process of self-discovery and become whole persons with a strong identity and self-concept. "I've always known how important Gallaudet is for helping Deaf people establish themselves, not just for Deaf education but for developing identity, for becoming a whole person" (interview transcript, p. 1, para. 2). The transformational leader is one who has undergone a process of self-discovery and the pursuit of authenticity; this is the leader who is truly inspirational (Avolio, 2005).
**Competent, Expresses Confidence**

When Jordan was asked how he communicated strong values and high expectations, he responded, “Oh, I don’t know that I deliberately communicate that” (interview transcription, p. 4, para. 9). He then launched into personal stories of his own adventures, which seemed to represent the demands he had placed on himself:

I’m a skilled scuba diver. I can stay down for a while. That’s a skill, not using up air fast, and you know that’s a skill for divers. So we went to Bonaire [an island in the Netherlands Antilles] one time; we went out on a boat with about 15 people. It was a shallow dive so we dove to about 30 or 40 feet. And then we came up to this really nice reef that was at about 15 to 20 feet, so I just stayed on that reef. I was down for an hour and a half! I didn’t realize it but . . . 14 of the people were up on the boat waiting. Finally, someone came down and told me come on up; it’s time to go. So anyway, they know me as a scuba diver. (interview transcription, p. 5, para. 9)

Jordan also related stories of his running. Laughing at his difficulties with vestibular balance, he related his own story of a “guy in short pants” who went trail running. The other runners might stumble over the roots and rocks, but they regained their balance; Jordan, on the other hand, stumbled and fell, with the result being bloody knees and elbows. But he continued to run and did not let the balance problems become an excuse to stop.

At the end of the stories of his athletic accomplishments and after laughing at his own struggles to stay off the ground, he reflected on the question that had been posed to him: How had he communicated his expectations and values? “Well, modeling behavior and modeling leadership and modeling appropriate decision making and appropriate behavior in a leadership position—that’s really leadership, in my opinion.” (interview transcription, p. 5, para. 9)

**Path-Goal Leadership**

Path-goal leadership emerged as the secondary self-reported leadership style during the keyword analysis. The path-goal leader is friendly and approachable and articulates clear expectations. Jordan made reference to this when relating his own experience as a student at Gallaudet:

I wasn’t really a whole person when I started at Gallaudet. I was anxious to get an education; I knew that I needed an education, and I knew that Gallaudet would give that to me. I didn’t really understand that Gallaudet would also give me an identity. So the concept is the added self-esteem. I know firsthand how important Gallaudet is to a deaf person. So later, when I became the leader of Gallaudet, I could see in the students the need for the same thing. The experience of living at Gallaudet, learning at Gallaudet, helped me lead Gallaudet, no question about it. (interview transcription, p.1, para. 3)

Jordan’s affiliation with the university and its students contributed to his unique tie to the community and thus to his followers.

**Achievement-Oriented Leadership**

Achievement-oriented leadership is most often characterized by a leader who challenges followers to consistently perform at the highest level possible, often setting the bar of excellence at an extremely high level. After taking office Jordan often talked about his leadership style, focusing on achievement, when addressing his vision for Gallaudet:

To elevate the academic reputation of Gallaudet, elevate the academic reputation of Deaf people, help educate the country and the world to the potential of deaf people, the abilities of deaf people. [The goal was] to make Gallaudet more than a high-level Deaf school, make it a prestigious university. (transcription, p. 3, para. 6)

**Participative Leadership**

Participative leaders offer their followers an opportunity to share in decision making in order to create a stronger sense of pride in themselves and in their purpose. Jordan characterized himself as a participative leader in describing how he talked with others before making decisions:

I’m [a] very participatory leader. I don’t know if that is the right word, but I involve people in the decision making. I listen to people, and I use their thoughts. I listen to people, and then I think about all the information I’ve got, and then I make my decision. (interview transcription, p. 2, para. 4)

Jordan admitted that he did not always make the correct decision, but he felt that he was mature enough to admit when he made a mistake and take steps to rectify the problem:

I believe one of my strengths—some people might disagree—but one strength I have is that I recognize that decisions are sometimes flawed. Sometimes you make wrong decisions, sometimes even with the best intent. Even with as much information as you can gather, you make the wrong decision. I’m not afraid to
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change the decision if I make a decision and learn that it is not a good decision. I’m not afraid to back up and change, and, more importantly, I’m not afraid to admit that it was a wrong decision, that I made a mistake. (interview transcription, p. 2, para. 4)

Two distinct styles emerged from the data analysis. The first was that of a more formal, administrative manager, appointed by the Board of Trustees and responsible for the daily management of the university. The other leadership style was more informal, with the leader wearing the hat of spokesperson and inspirational role model of the disability rights movement and of the Deaf community.

Discussion

In 1988, I. King Jordan was appointed the first Deaf president of Gallaudet University since its founding in 1864. His appointment came in part as a result of protests that occurred after two deaf candidates were passed over for a candidate who could hear (Shapiro, 1994). Assuming leadership at Gallaudet University at such a time, when discrimination and oppression were prevalent in society, was a daunting task. However, Jordan proved to be the “right person in the right place at the right time” (interview transcription, p. 8, para. 13). Likewise, the students, faculty, and staff at Gallaudet were ready to emerge from the oppression of a hearing-hegemonic society.

According to Bass (1985), there are four components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Based on the data from the present study, all of these attributes were exemplified by Jordan during his presidency at Gallaudet. By setting high goals of academic excellence, he called for intellectual stimulation and emancipatory ideals; whether those goals were attained remains unknown. By showing that “Deaf people can do anything but hear” (interview transcription, p. 3, para. 7), he became an inspiration and served to motivate the previously marginalized community of Deaf people. Jordan reported that he was a participatory leader, listening to his constituency; this self-perception emphasized the importance of individualized consideration. By his own admission, he made mistakes in the role of formal leader, CEO of the world’s only liberal arts college for the Deaf. But in his informal roles of advocate, role model, and inspirational leader, he demonstrated strong transformational traits.

Future research should continue to focus on the impact of transformational leadership in the Deaf community and in other communities of people with disabilities. Additional research should examine the effect of transformational leadership on followers and the communities they lead. Such research should also focus on the characteristics and leadership style of additional Deaf leaders and should encompass other people’s perceptions of the leaders and their styles of leadership. In addition, the roots of the recent student protests may shed light on management issues within this transformational leadership. We hope that this addition to an already strong body of literature on leadership styles within the Deaf community will contribute to the growing field of leadership within the Deaf community.

References


