

## ***Transformational Leadership as a Pedagogical Approach in Design Education***

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### **Abstract**

Education leading to wisdom has been acknowledged as a key transformational experience since time immemorial, and the process is organic. Ideal interaction between the teacher and the learner has always been that of a mutual experience which impacts and elevates both the stakeholders involved. When it comes to design education, educators across the globe constantly experiment with various pedagogical methods, to improve the learning experience of their learners. Educators hold not only the ability to ensure that their industry domain continues to get equipped with a better talent pool, but also contribute to the upholding of social values. This is where the concept of transformational leadership emerges. It enables an approach that causes an internal change in individuals as well as social systems. This research examines if the method of transformational leadership can practically be used as a pedagogical tool in design education while meeting the formal objectives of higher education in India. The methodology for this study is built around an interactive discussion with all stakeholders and to examine the possibilities. It begins with an objective to understand the concept of transformational leadership and its possible role in education. It then observes the current system of education (based on discussions with tutors) to find out how they actually practice (if at all) using any such ways. The study finally aims to review the advantages and challenges of this method, culminating in proposing a model, which can create the possibility to implement this concept at a larger perspective.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Design Education, Transformational Leadership

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## **Introduction**

Many design educators view teaching as an act of learning and transformation for students and themselves as well. They continually seek the most effective means to enhance the student learning experience, improve their outcomes and to make the students ready for the future. There are many models of learning which instructors incorporate in their teaching to get better results.

Leadership is a powerful tool to transform an organisation particularly in higher education to help broaden the vision, reach new horizons, and open the door of awareness (Beytekin, O.F., 2014) Tom Gallagher (2002), argued that leadership education "is not a singular focus," but instead "sits at the nexus of two disciplines, the art and science of leadership and the art and science of education". Thus these two disciplines can be merged in a symbiotic relationship to impact students at a deeper level.

It's difficult for students to understand leadership theories until they are in the field. Williams and Rosser (2008) argued that when students develop connections between the content and practical experiences in their lives, they can integrate the knowledge better. One way, therefore, to implement the theories about leadership is to model them in the classroom.

One approach to involve students in the classroom is to examine transformational leadership as a pedagogical model which will not only help the students to execute the theory, but also leads to a deeper understanding. As Robert E. Quinn said, "transformational teachers are those who turn ordinary students into extraordinary students" (Anding, 2005, p. 488).

Transformational leadership fosters a collaborative approach to problem-solving. Such leaders connect with the needs and motives of their followers and raise both the follower and leader to a higher level of motivation and morality (Bass, 1990).

## **Literature Review**

### **Importance of Student-Teacher Relationship**

Student-teacher relationships are critically important for influencing students' academic, social and emotional development. Students who perceive their teacher's support have better achievement outcomes (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011; Skinner & Green, 2008). The nature of the learning environment plays an important role in developing a student's interest and engagement. When there is a sense of control and security in the studios, students get more engaged and approach learning with enthusiasm. Students become active participants in their own education (Skinner & Green, 2008; Maulana, Opdenakker, Stroet, & Bosker, 2013). Maintaining a positive student-teacher relationship will help students in achieving success in their final outcome. If the foundation for a good relationship is lacking, it can negatively impact student behaviour. They may resist rules and procedures, and may neither trust teachers nor listen to what they have to say if they sense that the teachers do not value or respect them (Boynton & Boynton, 2005).

Teachers hold an enormous amount of influence on students and can significantly impact the learning environment of students, which will affect their learning. The most powerful weapon teachers have when trying to foster a favourable learning climate, is a positive relationship with their students (Boynton & Boynton, 2005).

When teachers and students become more familiar with each other, it creates a sense of community (Brown, 2010). But it is also important to establish boundaries. Body language, voice inflection, and facial expressions are all key aspects of communication (Brown, 2010). Teachers should carefully consider their own behaviour from the perspective of students in order to ensure their words and action always form part of positive communication.

With a better understanding of the need for good student-teacher relationships in education, let us further review the available literature on transformational leadership.

### Understanding Transformational Leadership

The term leadership has been studied extensively over the course of history. Transformational leadership is specifically defined as a leadership approach that causes a change in individuals and social systems. Bass (1990) describes four factors that make up transformational leadership (Image1):

- (a) Idealized influence
- (b) Inspirational motivation
- (c) Intellectual stimulation
- (d) Individual consideration

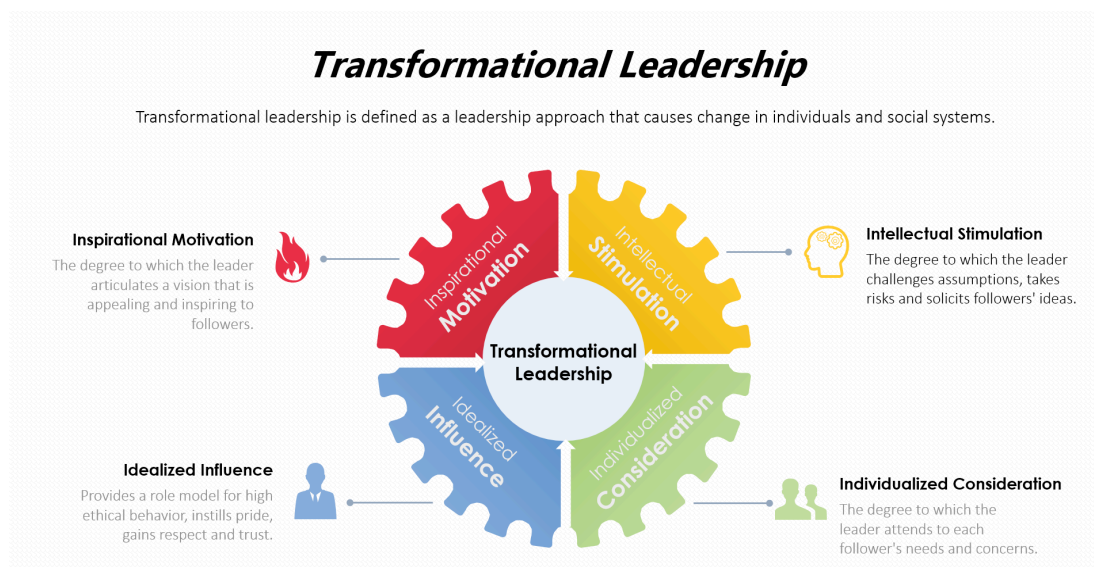


Image 1: Four factors that make up transformational leadership (Bass, 1990 (image sourced from online Transformational Leadership Workshop, 2020))

The leader who uses **idealised influence** provides their followers with a compelling vision. They are strong role models who can be trusted to do the right things. The leaders who use **inspirational motivation** have high expectations and build commitments to achieve the organisational vision which is appealing and inspiring to the followers. They motivate followers to go beyond their self-interest for achieving organisational goals. Leaders using **intellectual stimulation**, inspire followers to

challenge their own assumptions as well as that of the leaders. They take risks and encourage followers to find innovative ways to solve their problems. The leader who uses the fourth factor, **individual consideration**, creates a supportive climate by listening to individual needs and concerns of their followers and helping them to become completely realised.

### **Understanding of Transformational Teaching**

Over the past few years, approaches to teaching in the classroom have changed considerably. The emergence of many learning concepts and teaching approaches, including active learning, student-centred learning, collaborative learning, experiential learning, and problem-based learning, has driven this progress. The term transformational leadership is, however, rarely used in higher education pedagogical discussions. This includes building dynamic relationships among teachers, students and a shared body of knowledge to encourage students in their learning and personal development. As per Tennant (2002), transformative education is "promoting awareness and fundamental change at the personal, relational, institutional, and global levels". Meziro & Associates (2000) define transformative learning as "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action". As per Meziro, transformative learning occurs in one of four following ways: by elaborating on existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind.

When transformational learning occurs, a student's prior belief, values and assumptions get significantly changed into world reality. As per Cranton (2006), the learning depends upon the establishment of a trustworthy and meaningful relationship between the instructor and the students. They both get to know each other from the inside out. According to Cranton and Carusetta (2004), authentic teachers have high self-awareness, develop deep relationships with learners, and engage in critical reflection of educational practice as well as critical self-reflection.

However, before we investigate the potential of transformational leadership as a valid pedagogy in design education in India, it is important to understand the need for transformational leadership in higher education through relevant literature review.

### **The need for Transformational Leadership in Higher Education**

As per the current perspective within this communication era, higher education needs transformational leadership to replace hierarchical, bureaucratic management (Beytekin, O.F., 2014). Transformational leaders shift the motives, values and goals of the learners in various ways, which will lead to an improvement in their competencies and help them achieve better results. According to Rouche, Baker and Rose (1989), this is the most effective leadership style and is the principal contributor to the realisation of outcomes in colleges and universities. It has been proven that positive leadership (which is a part of transformational leadership) has the potential to greatly improve the teaching and learning environment in higher education (Benito, et al., 2019). The study confirms that positive leadership creates an active and enhanced environment in the classroom. It not only impacts the student positively (which is

seen in their behaviour and final outcomes of assignment) but also energises the teachers, who are empowered by the success of a positive climate in the class.

## **Objectives**

The study will review the followings things:

1. To evaluate the advantages and challenges of transformational leadership faced by design educators (from a broader perspective) while implementing it.
2. To understand the responses of students on the implementation of transformational leadership as a teaching model.
3. To propose a framework of incorporating transformational leadership theory as a pedagogical tool in design education for the benefit of both students and teachers.

## **Research Methodology**

To achieve the first objective, interviews of design educators were conducted. Twenty design educators (19 from India and 1 from the United Kingdom) with a range of five to thirty-three years of professional experience were interviewed for this study. They have taught in different disciplines of design at undergraduate and postgraduate level in more than 25 design colleges in India and five design colleges outside India.

To achieve the second objective, an online survey was conducted with design students of various disciplines. Total of 100 students participated in the survey from 7 different design institutes in India. The students are either presently enrolled or have studied design at an undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The third objective is intended to be achieved through cumulative analysis of the previous two objectives. This will lead to the development of transformational leadership model as an outcome of the research.

## **The perspective of Design Educators on Transformational Leadership**

As a part of primary research, interviews were conducted to understand if design educators are consciously or unconsciously using the tenets of transformational leadership theory in their teaching methods, in face to face as well as online teaching sessions. In case they were aware of the method, they were asked to share their experiences and describe the advantages and limitations of the system. Where they had not tried or were only partially aware of the inclusion of this method (within their teaching), their views were collected based on the reservation and willingness to try this method in future. The outcome was quite interesting. Out of 20 participants, 45% had unconsciously tried using all the four factors of transformational leadership in their teaching. 40% had only partly applied the factors and had not given much importance to *Idealised influence* and *Individualised consideration*. The balance 15% participants were not willing to apply *idealised influence* and *individualised consideration* in their teaching methods (refer fig 1)

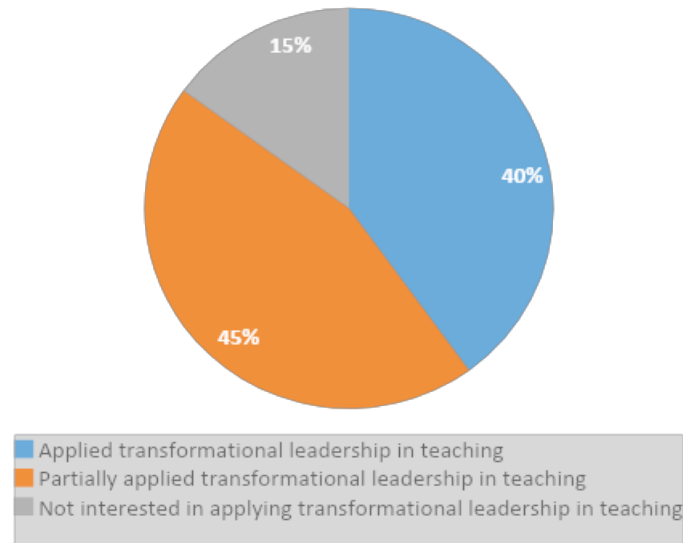


Figure 1: Pie chart represents the application of transformational leadership by design educators in their teaching

According to the interviewed design educators, who had consciously or unconsciously applied all four methods in their teaching, 100% had applied *inspirational motivation*, 82% *intellectual stimulation*, 45% *idealised influence* and 58% had applied *individual consideration* (refer fig 2). The graph below represents the proportional application of four elements of transformational leadership in their teaching.

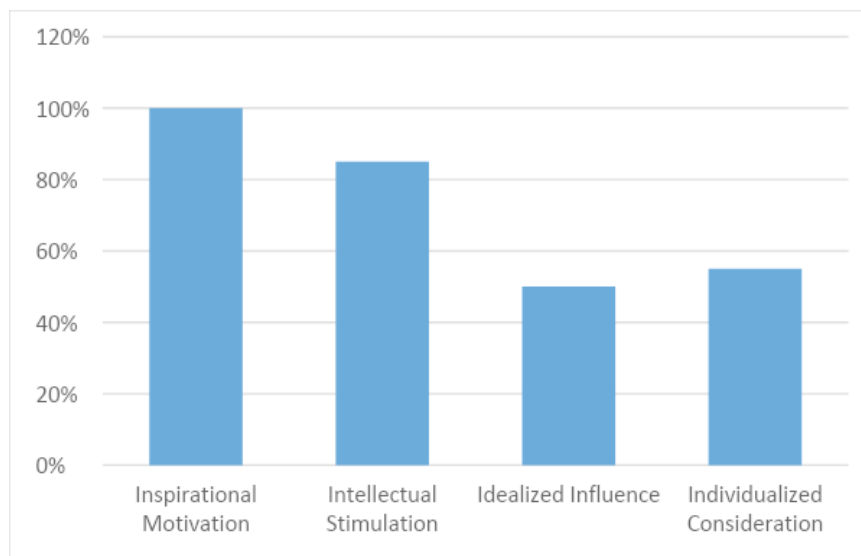


Figure 2: The graph represent the percentage of all the four factors of Transformational leadership applied by the participant educator in their classroom

Though they all agreed on potential advantages of using this method informally, they also had concerns for the more formal implementation of this method in the studio.

## Advantages for Students

Followings are the advantages of transformational leadership for students identified by the interviewed design educators:

- **Autonomy-** 65% of educators indicated that students had started taking ownership of their work. Even in the juries, they accepted critical feedback and explained their work with more confidence, pride and dignity and this was well appreciated by the industry.
- **Respect for each other-** 75% educators responded that through constructive peer to peer feedback, juries and collaborative work, the students gained respect for each other.
- **Confidence-** 85% of educators agreed that by implementing all the four factors of the method in the classroom, students gained confidence in themselves as well as an improved sense of trust in their teachers.
- **Engagement and motivation-** 90% of educators said that once the students started getting more involved in their classroom activities, and once they gained more trust in their teachers, their engagement also increased proportionately. Their learning experience got enhanced, and they started to generate their own excitement and confidence to present their work to the industry.
- **Good listener-** 60% educators indicated that after practising *individualised consideration* with students, the latter demonstrated improved listening skills. They first listened and then responded, which clearly reflects the development of certain mature qualities like patience, keenness to understand the other side, to analyse someone else's viewpoint critically and to absorb and then respond.
- **Professional Approach-** With time, the students developed more maturity in their design thinking. 60% of educators said that the students start looking at their own work from the industry's perspective and therefore try to reach a final outcome based on the needs which the industry might expect from them.
- **Communication skill-** 55% of educators indicated that with their newfound confidence, the students communicated more vocally about their design and with more conviction. The educator encourages students to form their own viewpoints and create their own opportunities to express them. These methods thereby inculcated qualities like empathy and an ability to seek out possibilities within students.
- **Less student drop out-** 70% educators said that transformational teaching creates better learning experience in class, and the outcome has been a lesser number of dropouts.

The graph presented below shows the feedback given by the participant educators, discussing the advantages of transformational leadership in the class (refer fig 3)

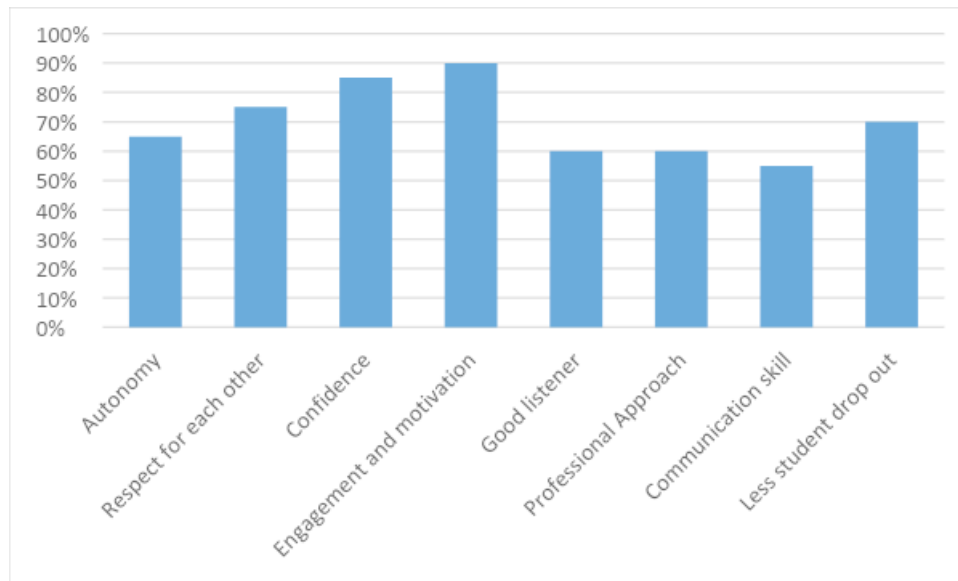


Figure 3: Feedback given by the participant educators, discussing the advantages of transformational leadership in the class

### Advantages for Design Educators

- **Improved personal bond with students-** 90% design educators indicated that they had developed a better personal bond with students through the implementation of the method. This boosted their own confidence in both academic and personal spheres.
- **Developed capacity to take more risks-** With more student excitement and better engagement, 65% educators got further motivated to challenge the students towards producing better results.
- **Satisfaction-** 85% of design educators felt a sense of satisfaction when the students started delivering better work. A feeling of assurance of the semester ending with better, more improved outcomes is definitely more satisfying for any teacher.
- **Better student-teacher relationship-** For a teacher, the possibility of creating a calm, comfortable and predictable environment in the classroom is more likely through the practice of all four factors of transformational leadership. 80% of design educators indicated that they had developed a far better student-teacher relationship resulting in the creation of a positive environment in the classroom.
- **Developed empathy-** 60% of educators agreed that continued interactions with students and listening to their concerns develops empathy amongst the teachers.

The graph presented below shows the advantages of transformational leadership for design educators (fig 4) -



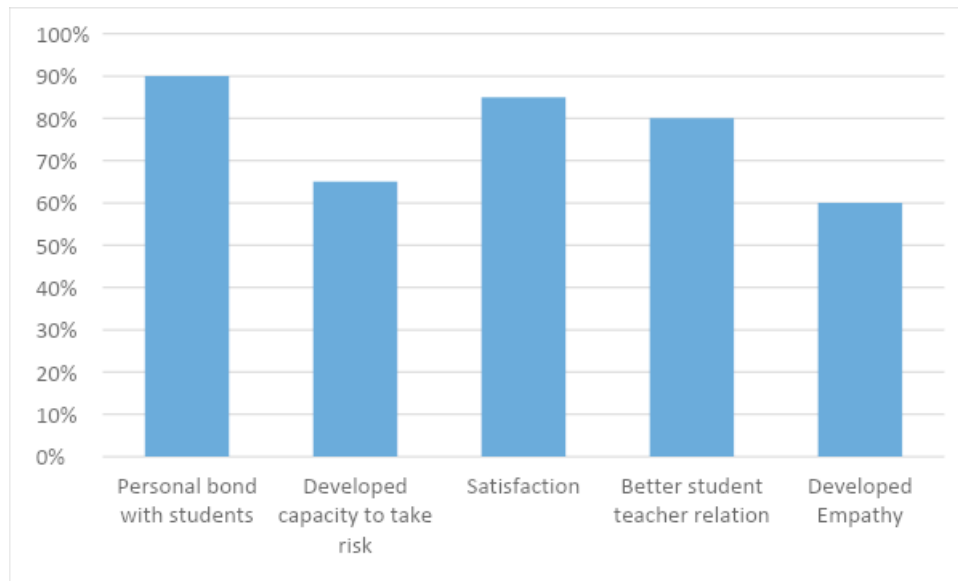


Figure 4: The graph showing the advantages of transformational leadership for the interviewed design educators

### Challenges faced by Design Educators

Following are the challenges identified by the interviewed design educators:

- **Challenges can turn the student off** – 40% educators indicated that providing too many or too large a challenge to the student can make them disoriented. This could result in them losing interest towards accepting challenges, and in some cases, they could even become willing to perform to their basic abilities.
- **Teachers as role models**- 75% design educators consciously chose not to become a role model for their students. Their concern stems from the fact that there is a likelihood of the students getting restricted in their vision, to achieve only as much as set out by their' role models' and to then refuse to evolve beyond. Some basic things such as learning good habits and professionalism or maintaining ethical behaviour were, of course, encouraged in class, but these teachers did not overall present themselves as role models for their students.
- **This model may not work with a larger cohort**- 80% design educators feel that the transformational leadership model may only work on a smaller group of students, say between 15-20. Theories and practices like "individual consideration" and "idealised influence" may not effectively or practically work with larger cohorts.
- **Time management**- 90% design educators were of the opinion that they hardly got any free time for experimenting with other educational systems, considering their tight schedules. They already felt over-burdened in their day to day class preparation, delivery & assessment. The act of informally clarifying student issues and concerns (beyond the classroom) effectively consumes much more time that is ever planned or expected.
- **Addressing a perception of bias towards students**- 20% design educators indicated that there are sometimes situations during which spending extra time addressing the very valid concerns of certain students individually and informally, sometimes creates a perception of bias in the mind of some other students.
- **Dependence on spoon-feeding**- 60% of educators feels that a lot of times, certain students expect the teacher to work out most of the details to the extent of finding solutions, just to avoid putting in the effort of working out the long and

unknown processes. This eventually results in a mind-set unwilling to innovate on its own ideas. The natural outcome of this attitude would be a restricted ideation process as well as lesser confidence to face the industry's real-life situations and expectations.

- **Difficult to motivate students online-** 70% of educators found it difficult to motivate students online. There seemed to be a reduction in the implementation of individual consideration; primarily due to practical restrictions in scheduling and organising online classrooms. Hence there were concerns towards its application and effectiveness within the online medium.

- **Student's pace of learning-** Different students come from various kinds of socio-economic backgrounds. This often results in a varying pace of learning for students within the same cohort. A method that works for one doesn't necessarily work for the other. Thus, 85% of educators indicated that certain students needed individual attention at various stages.

### **Key Findings- suggestions were given by Educators**

Following are the suggestion given by design educators to implement this method in teaching:

- This method works for smaller cohorts. If it is a larger cohort, then it should either be broken down into smaller sections. Another way is to assign one teacher for about 15 students and then assign the rest to another teacher, which becomes another form of co-teaching.

- Teachers should definitely influence the students in a positive manner but should not project themselves as 'role models' as it can restrict the learner's perspective to only one direction and may dissuade them from seeing the wider picture.

- These methods only work if students are willing to learn. The teacher can prepare a fertile field for learners, but they have to come on their own interest and dedicate themselves.

- These methods first need to be broadly discussed, debated and accepted within an academic community, which primarily consist of teachers. They are, after all the primary stakeholders in these processes and the eventual implementers of this pedagogy. They need to be properly sensitised and oriented to ensure a meaningful alignment with the already implemented education system.

- The possibility of this method improving the learning experience of students is high. The teachers can be given the liberty to decide how they would like to implement these tools within their own teaching style. There are chances that they may face initial hitches in their usual flow of delivering content. But they need to be encouraged to take this initiative for the larger benefits it offers to the students.

### **Indian Design Students Perspective on Transformational Leadership**

To enhance the research, an online survey was conducted with design students to understand better the impact of transformational leadership as a pedagogical tool.

Before asking the students to fill in the online questionnaire, a briefing was conducted to orient them to the idea of transformational leadership. It was important first to help them identify up to what extent the elements of transformational leadership were being applied in teaching and then to collect the student's response about these. This

survey became instrumental in understanding student concerns as well as the benefits they may have personally derived through this teaching method.

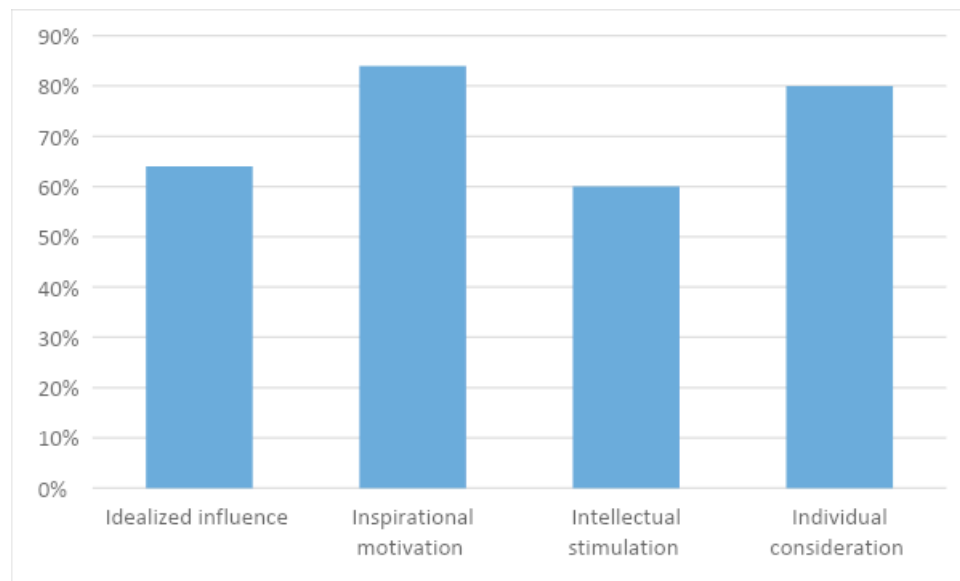


Figure 5: Student responses on the implementation of all the four elements of transformational leadership in the classroom

As per the recorded students' response, idealised influence received 64% votes, and inspirational motivation got 86%, intellectual stimulation got 60%. Individual consideration got 80% votes on the perceived implementation of all these four elements of transformational leadership in their classrooms (refer fig: 5). It became apparent that in the minds of the students, the application of idealised influence and intellectual stimulation are less as compared to the other two elements of transformational leadership.

After this, the students were asked about the importance of idealised influence and intellectual stimulation in their growth. To this, 92% responded that these two factors were equally important as the other two factors and that its application should be given more importance in classroom teaching (refer fig: 6).

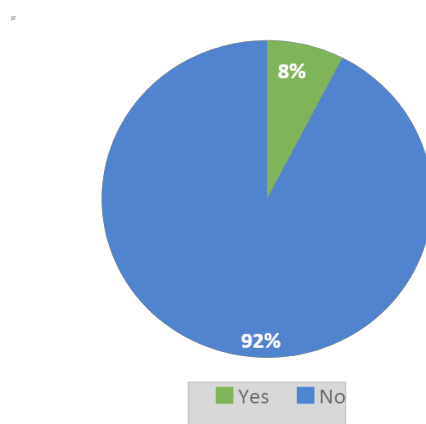


Figure 6: 92% of students said that the application of idealised influence and intellectual stimulation should be given more importance in classroom teaching and that these elements are as important as the other two.

According to the survey, after the conscious application of this method in teaching, 96.3% of students were able to build better relationships with their teachers (refer fig: 7). Further, 89% of students felt that they were able to improve their relationships with the other students in their class (refer fig: 8).

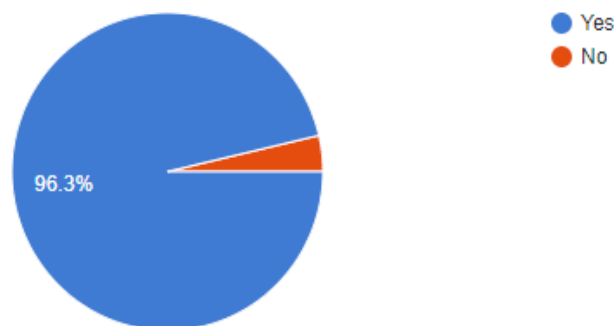


Figure 7: Pie chart representing the students' opinions regarding the effectiveness of the method towards building a better relationship with teachers

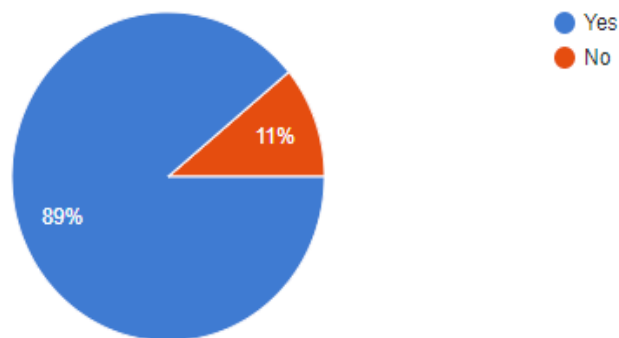


Figure 8: Pie chart representing the students' opinions regarding the effectiveness of the method towards building better relationships with their classmates

As per the interviews conducted, many design educators had previously identified positive transformations in students after the conscious application of transformational leadership as a pedagogical method. This aspect also got reflected in the surveys conducted with students. A total of 79% found themselves to be more confident, 81% felt more ownership towards their work, 75% developed a respect for each other, 78% felt an improvement in their final project outcome, 70% felt motivated to take newer challenges and 72% agreed that their class engagement has improved (refer fig: 9).

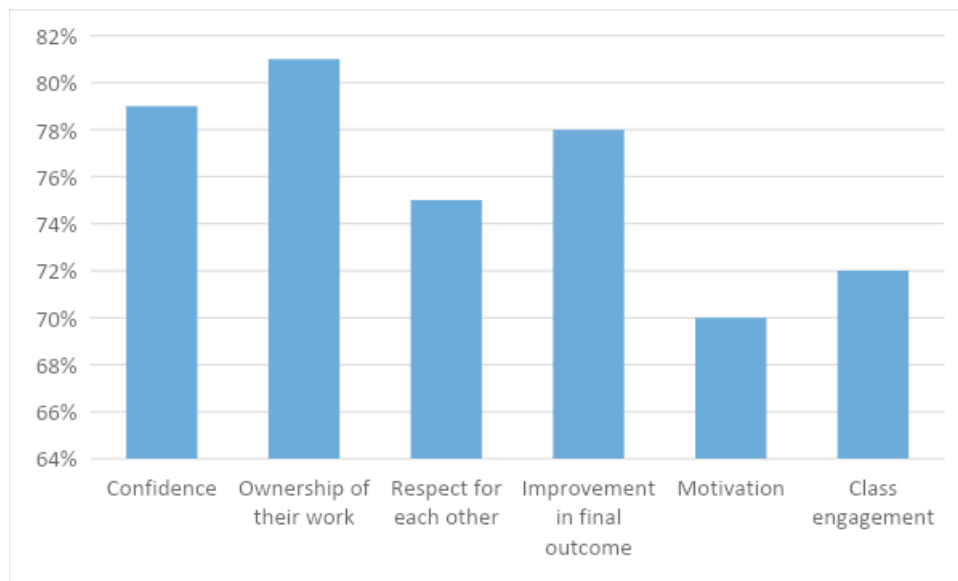


Figure 9: The graph represents an agreement from the students' side, with respect to the various positive transformations pointed by design educators (after the implementation of the method).

The pie chart is shown below talks about how 96.5% of students found themselves positively transformed through this method used in the classroom (refer fig:10).

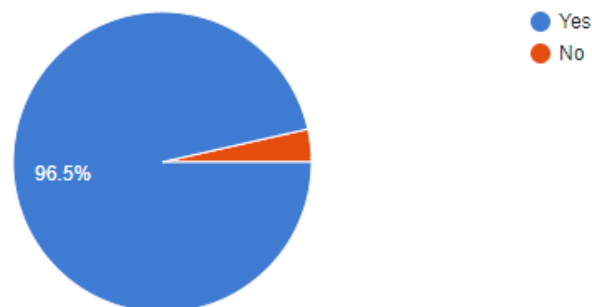


Figure 10: The pie chart presents that 96.5% of students found themselves transformed after the application of transformational leadership as pedagogy

When asked about the limitations of this method, 98% of students said that there were no limitations in this methodology (ref fig: 11).

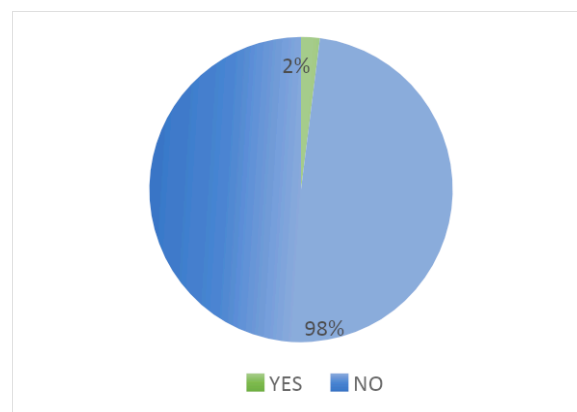


Figure 11: Pie chart represents that 98% of students found no limitation in this method

All students further indicated through the online survey, that it was a good idea to consciously apply all the four elements of transformational leadership as a pedagogical method in design education (ref fig: 12).

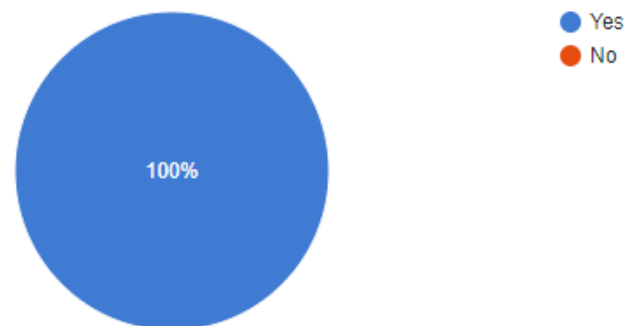


Figure 12: All students were in agreement that it is a good idea to apply transformational leadership as a pedagogical tool in design education

### Key findings from this survey

- There was complete agreement from all students regarding the need of having transformational leadership formally implemented as a pedagogical method in their classrooms.
- '*Idealised influence*' and '*intellectual stimulation*' as methods are less widely used in classroom teaching; these according to students were equally important and needed more attention.
- Majority of students found themselves transformed after the application of these methods in classroom
- Students formed better relationships with their teachers as well as with other students within their class after the application of this method.
- As per one of the written suggestions, they asked for more practical knowledge and industry connections in their classrooms, which can be considered to form part of *intellectual stimulation* and *inspirational motivation*.

### Analysis and discussion

Following are the gaps identified from the responses received from students and design educators:

Design educators felt that the application of '*individual consideration*' and '*idealised influence*' was less in their own teaching. The students, on the other hand, felt that the application of '*intellectual stimulation*' and '*idealised influence*' was lesser in their classroom experience. There seems to be a gap observed in the understanding between educators and students. According to students, they were not provided sufficient challenges, whereas the teachers were of the opinion that they were giving students adequate challenges, but they themselves were not able to work on individual

concerns of students. This discussion has been highlighted with red boxes on both the figures below (refer fig: 13 & 14).

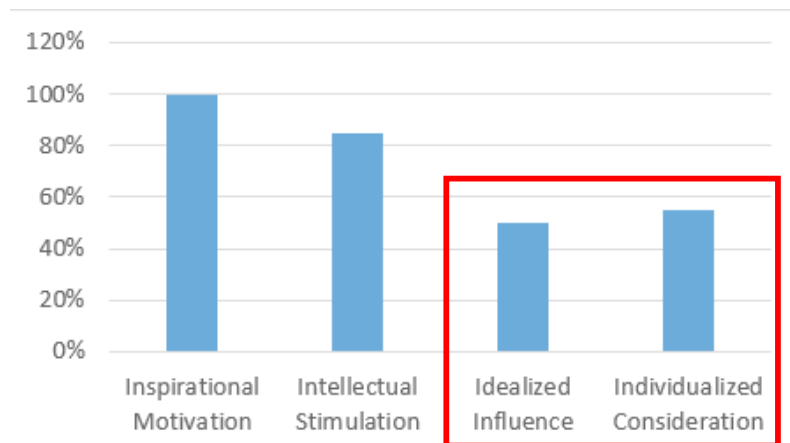


Figure 13: According to responses received from design educators, there is less application of the tenets of idealised influence and individual consideration in teaching

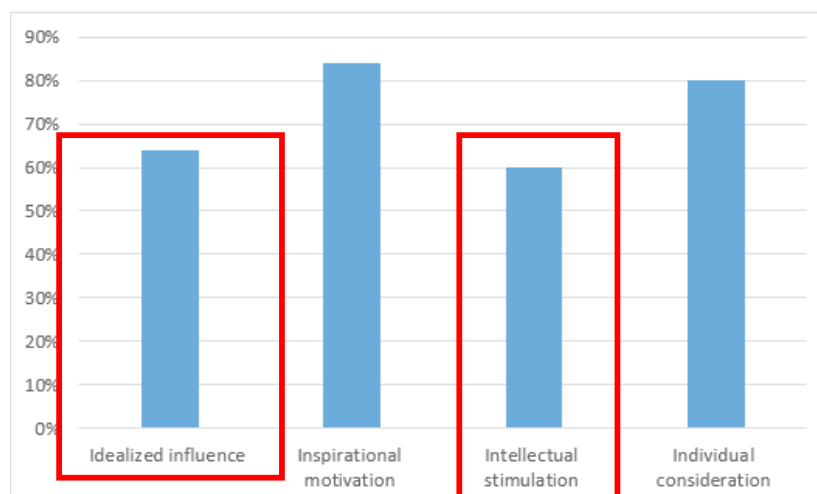


Figure 14: According to responses received from students, there is less application of the tenets of idealised influence and intellectual stimulation in classrooms

About 40% of design educators were consciously applying transformational leadership as a pedagogical method. 45% showed interest but were so far only partially using this method. This means that 85% of teachers are broadly interested in implementing this method as a pedagogical system in design education within the context of India. Approximately 15% of design educators were not interested in trying all four elements of transformational leadership and expressed certain reservations. On the other hand, 100% students agreed that this method had benefits and could surely help them transform and that it should be applied in the classroom by their teachers.

Majority of design educators responded that giving individualised consideration is not practically possible with all students. They felt that students should also take the initiative to come forward and discuss their concerns. Students on the other hand, felt that it helps if their teacher is receptive and friendly in nature and initiates a

conversation. It will be much easier for them to develop trust and have greater confidence to discuss their concerns with the teachers.

### **Proposed Transformational Leadership Model**

On the basis of the various interviews, recommendations and suggestions received from the design educators and interaction with the students, a transformational leadership model was developed. It is almost the same as the previous model but has been slightly modified by the author, based on the advice of the interviewed educators. Their suggestion includes self-reliance and related values to be added to the transformational teaching model for better adaptation to industry requirements. Listening to students' concerns has fed in to all the other three factors of transformational leadership. They also suggested exclusion of 'role models' which may not serve the purpose as intended. The figure below (refer fig: 15) proposes a way for design educators to effectively use transformational leadership as a pedagogical tool in design schools of India.

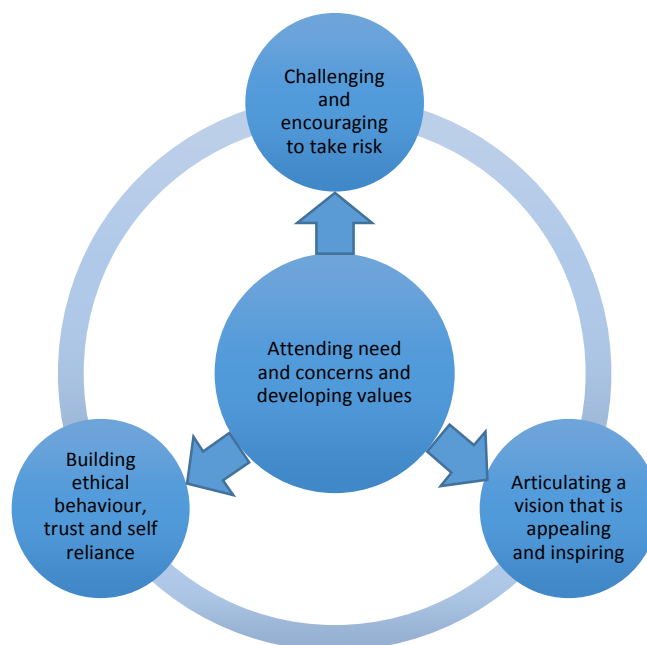


Figure 15: Proposed transformational leadership model for design education in India

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the potential of transformational leadership as a pedagogical method in design education in India with a focus on exploring the benefits and limitations for students and teachers. The interviewed design educators confirmed that the method offers immense opportunity to facilitate deep learning in students and the development of skills that are necessary for their professional life.

The theory of transformational leadership provides a known model for approaching transformative teaching for educators in the classroom. As an educator, we must practice and believe in what we teach to the students.



The student survey reflected the importance of all the elements of transformational leadership in classroom education and identified various benefits such as building better relationships between teachers and students, encouraging more profound learning and creating a positive environment in the class. However, educators have cautioned that some practical limitations such as issues around time management, prior biases in student's mind-set and over-dependency on teachers, etc. also need to be addressed simultaneously.

Appropriate preparation and planning are required to implement this model in teaching. Educators have to carefully apply the factors of transformational leadership as per student requirement. The successful implementation of this teaching method also needs strong institutional support and an alignment with their vision, so that the more practical, everyday aspects such as time management, etc. can be taken care of.

Based on the research done and understanding developed about the benefits and challenges (from discussions with students and teachers), a new transformational leadership model has been proposed. There is a definite scope for further research to investigate the effectiveness once this model is introduced within an institution as a systematic intervention. The intent and the expectation is to generate a better realm of existence, today and tomorrow.

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