



Research is
the cornerstone
of strategy

ACHIEVING LEADERSHIP RESULTS THROUGH EMPLOYEE SURVEYS

A THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PIECE

By Ryan Williams, MAL

October 12, 2007

FOREWARD

The purpose of this project is to examine leadership practices, suggest a preferred leadership approach, examine employee survey practices and identify their relationship. Transformational leadership was identified as the most effective approach for achieving sustainable organizational results. Transformational leadership has been tested in a variety of contexts and was shown to meet follower's expectations of a leader and has achieved higher levels of organizational performance. (Bass, 1997) To further define transformational leadership employee engagement and servant leadership were reviewed as possible applications of transformational leadership. This literature reviewed suggested that effective leaders listen to followers and seek to understand their point of view when engaging them in the purpose and mission of their organizations.

Organizational surveys are an effective method for achieving broad based feedback from employee/followers. The most effective survey practices are those that enable local level decision making. The literature reviewed suggested that a survey program can have an important part in gaining support and creating the momentum for change. It would be reasonable to conclude that organizational surveys can enhance transformational leadership. Further primary research will need to be done to isolate which aspects of the survey process have the greatest impact on the leader member exchange.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the past ten years, I have been involved in designing and administering employee surveys. These surveys have covered many topics and used varying degrees of processes. At times, I am frustrated with the lack of change that occurs during survey programs and other times I am amazed at the cultural shift. The diverse response to the same process led me to seek out research on what causes the changes in employee attitudes or inhibits them. The purpose of this project was to examine how leadership may impact the survey process and conversely how the survey process may impact leadership.

Starting with a review of contemporary leadership research it is clear that any form of leadership intervention has a positive impact on performance. The level of impact and the ability to sustain that impact varies with the approach and methods used. Positive sustained leadership is one that involves followers freely choosing to commit and act on a shared system of values and purpose. This process can be enhanced through leader member/follower exchanges. When a follower perceives a relationship with a leader the impact on performance is demonstrable. This process is a two way exchange in which the leader challenges the followers by creating a social contract with them on a mutual interest. The transformational leader provides a context where the ethical behaviour of both the leader and follower is enhanced. This enhanced relationship spurs on extra effort and commitment. Both leaders and followers listen and acting in a dynamic response.

Organizational surveys act as a platform for broad based involvement in decision making. A well designed survey will focus the entire organization around a few key strategic priorities. The most robust design process will involve representatives from across the organization under the facilitation of a survey administrator. This representative group becomes the survey team. The survey team provides feedback on survey design and administrating. After distribution of the questionnaire they become champions of the process.

For the survey to be actionable it has to balance the interest of the senior executive team, the stated strategic plan and the needs of localized work units. With a good design the survey then has to encourage full involvement. The survey team will participate in promotion and encourage dialogue around the process. The higher the percentage of employees that participate the more powerful that data becomes in the change process.

Employee survey participation has gone up with the increased access to email and internet access. Survey administrators can expect high levels of participation. The administrator and survey team need to decide if they are going to sample or ask all employees to participate. For the purposes of leadership enhancement it would be recommended to seek full involvement. This process ensures equal access to providing feedback and has the best possibility of creating useable work unit data. After asking good questions and gathering opinions the survey and organization has created expectations that things will change.

The expectations created by a survey can be both a positive and negative. Realistic expectations and follow-up action communicate that the organization cares and that employee feedback is valued. If the expectations are too high and the employees do not see changes in their work area the survey can cause apathy and further act to disengage employees.

The ultimate outcome of survey reporting and planning would be for all employees to embrace and use the findings. This process starts with the survey team and senior executives modeling the use of survey feedback to create change but ultimately the real change happens when supervisors and their teams use the data to make specific changes in their units. When each person in the organization owns their role in creating the findings and individually works on changing themselves as a result of the findings, transformational leadership is being realized.

The conclusion of this project is that it seems probable that the survey process acts as a change agent in organizations. A survey focuses employees on evaluating the aspirations of the organizations and sets the context for change. When follow-up surveys take place accountability becomes part of the process as the survey tracks progress. The degree to which design, administration, reporting or implementation creates the impact is not clear. It is possible that each stage works in synergy or one phase is prominent.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	1
Sub-problems	1
Hypotheses	2
Methodology	2
Limitations	3
Gap in the Research	3
LEADERSHIP	4
Defining Leadership	4
Transactional versus Transformational Leadership.....	4
What a Transformational Leader Does.....	8
Engaging Employees	10
Servant Leadership.....	12
SURVEY PRACTICE.....	15
Organizational Survey History.....	16
The Survey Process.....	18
Design Surveys That Enable Change.....	18
Administration that Enables Participation and Valid Data.....	25
Reporting the Findings.....	27
Creating Change/Action.....	31
The Impact of Increased Employee Satisfaction and Engagement.....	34
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	36
SUGGESTED FURTHER RESEARCH	38
REFERENCES.....	39

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Sustainable organizational leadership requires willing followers. Robert Greenleaf described this phenomenon as “a new moral principle that is emerging which holds that only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion of, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader” (Greenleaf, 1995,p). Given this as an epistemology, the understanding of followers and relationship leaders have with them is of great importance. The focus of leadership studies, however, is disproportionately on the leader. The reaction of the follower should be made an equal priority.

Leadership researchers regularly collect data by observing leaders, tracking organizational performance and using competency assessments. This type of leadership research has not recognized the important role followers play in the dependent relationship that exists. Benefits would occur if employee participation in the leadership relationships took on a greater focus.

A variety of opportunities exist for leaders to involve employees. Employee opinion surveys, focus groups, meetings and web forums are all ways to elicit feedback. By gathering feedback, research processes have encouraged organizational alignment by using responsive techniques.

Qualitative approaches are expensive and time consuming. To overcome limited time and money, participation occurs with a sample of employees. These representatives are used and full involvement is not achieved. This review intends to compare and contrast how employee survey programs may offer enhanced leadership practices by achieving full involvement and acting as a powerful two-way communication channel. By understanding better what aspects of survey research are in a transformational leadership paradigm, we can intentionally build those factors into a survey process and achieve enhanced leadership outcomes.

SUB-PROBLEMS

Sub-problems are the measurable factors that allow for examining smaller steps that add up to the broader problem. Below are the sub-problems answered in the body sections of this review:

1. What are the attributes of sustainable leadership?
2. What survey practices would enhance leadership?
3. What transformational leadership factors are involved in effective organizational surveys?
4. What evidence exists that demonstrates survey research has enhanced leadership?

HYPOTHESES

Using deductive reasoning this review will examine four hypotheses. Each hypothesis relates to the next. If the current research concludes the first three hypotheses statements are probable, it would suggest that the last hypothesis is likely to be true.

Transformational leadership involves empathy between followers and leaders. Walking alongside followers, transformational leaders seek to accomplish mutually beneficial goals. For this to occur, we expect to see the following:

H1: Transformational leaders listen to followers.

H2: Survey research enhances organizational unity.

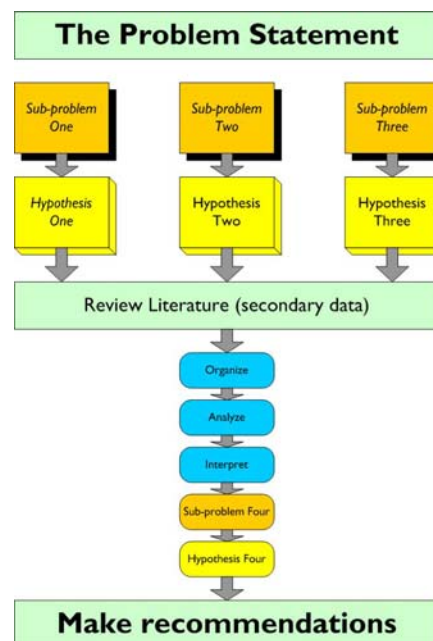
H3: Organizational survey processes can share transformational leadership attributes.

H4: Organizational surveys can enhance transformational leadership.

METHODOLOGY

This review will provide an examination of organizational concepts relating to leadership, employee engagement and organizational survey programs. The foundation of the review will examine literature on leadership to identify factors that involve participation and listening to employees. With these factors identified, the study will compare and contrast organizational survey practices with leadership practices.

The literature reviewed will be organized to inform judgments on the hypothesis statements. Below is a flow diagram of the proposed research methodology.



The first phase of organizing the data will be to separate studies, books and articles into two categories: effective leadership practices and effective organizational survey practices.

The analysis should identify patterns of behavior in the different practices. Using this secondary research, the focus will be on the descriptive nature of the studies.

To interpret the data the researcher will seek to contextualize the information and draw a conclusion to accept or reject the null hypothesis around the role surveys may be able to play in organizational leadership practices.

Based on limitations and illumination from the data, the review will make some practical recommendations for survey practitioners to enhance survey practices.

LIMITATIONS

This review will be based on secondary research. The reviews used were designed for other purposes and have a variety of contexts that create bias or gaps in the interpretation. The nature of this review will be descriptive. The data will be treated as qualitative research and expanded to appreciate the complexity of the social phenomenon.

The researcher's ability to interpret and make sense of the data offers a bias; however, the bias may be necessary to understand the survey's role in leadership as a social phenomenon. The researcher is an instrument that will measure and judge the data. A single truth may not be discovered, but rather multiple perspectives on the practice of employee surveys should emerge (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The data and findings should then be stated as a starting point for experimentation. Doing follow-up studies with quasi-experimental quantitative research would enhance the confidence of the findings of this review and allow the statistical testing of the findings.

GAP IN THE RESEARCH

During a journal search for links between leadership and employee surveys, a gap emerged. Thousands of surveys are conducted each year in North America and millions of respondents participate. However, organizations have very little research on the behavioral impact of the survey process itself. This was pointed out a few years ago by a group of researchers who found "given the ubiquity of surveys, it is surprising how little research has examined individuals' attitudes toward this frequently used research methodology" (Rogleberg, Fisher, Maynard, Hakel, & Horvath, 2001). While aspects of surveys have been examined such as distribution practices and response rates, what has not been explored is the response of participants to being involved (Armenakis, Albritton, Feild, Gregory, & Moates, 2005). By deductively exploring the body of research collected, this paper endeavors to fill this gap and create a context for future primary research in this area.

LEADERSHIP

DEFINING LEADERSHIP

To explore the concept of leadership we first have to understand it is an aspect of power. Power over people is exercised when the wielder of that power uses that base to influence behaviors. This power becomes leadership when the “motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of the follower” (Burns, 1979, p. 381). Power alone does not need a competition or conflict; however, leadership taps the motivation of the followers to satisfy a mutual purpose and it is a source of power.

The first modern attempt to describe a theory of leadership was by Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1841) who ascribes the construct on the person themselves. This extension is the great man theory. In 1868 Marx and Engels took the opposite approach by defining leadership purely in situational terms. The circumstance was the deciding factor of when leadership occurred (Popper, 2004). Today, the research literature focuses on the relationship between the leader and the follower (Popper, 2004).

Classic management theorists examined leaders based on the position they held, the activities they participated in and the results that were attributed to an individual. These leaders were people who planned, organized, directed and controlled resources. This approach looks at leaders as individuals with a position. Leadership author Warren Bennis described this phenomenon: “The idea of traditional top down leadership is based on the myth of the triumphant individual” (Bennis, 1999, p. 72). This limited perspective has evolved over the last 30 years.

Leadership has had a definition of connoting followership and the addition of sustainability is a relatively new perspective. It has been pointed out that “you are a leader only if you have followers” (Daniels & Daniels, 2006, p. 2). James MacGregor Burns in his foundational book on leadership (1978), examined leadership like an onion which has many layers. He defined leadership as “inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers” (Burns, 1979, p. 381). Leadership then involves and requires the participation of followers.

Models of leadership have emerged from similar assumptions, namely that leader-follower relationships are based on exchange that is conscious and instrumental both for the leader and for the followers (Popper, 2004). The two leadership foundational forms that have been studied extensively over the last 30 years are transactional and transformational leadership as presented by MacGregor Burns (1979).

TRANSACTIONAL VERSUS TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transactional leadership occurs “when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things” (Burns, 1979, p. 381). This exchange can be economic,

political, or psychological. Both the leader and the follower are aware of the exchange and it forms a social contract. This is a limited relationship that may end when the contract is fulfilled or the transaction is complete. The transactional leader works within the constraints of the organization; the transformational leader changes the organization (Bass, 1997).

Transformational leadership occurs when leaders “engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1979, p. 382). This is a mutual relationship which shares values, mission, and vision for what each participant seeks to accomplish. The relationship becomes moral because it raises the level of human interaction and ethical aspiration of both leader and follower. The relationship has a transforming effect on the leader and follower in the means of achieving the goal and the ends they are seeking. Leaders take the initiative in making the leader led connection and allow for the communication exchange to occur (Burns, 1979).

Transformational leadership is not limited to a position or resources as the leaders “serve as an independent force in changing the makeup of the followers’ motive base through gratifying their motives” (Burns, 1979, p. 382). This process can be practised by any person in an organization. Transformational leaders move followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group, organization, or country (Bass, 1997).

Transformational leadership is essentially leadership that motivates followers to transcend their self-interest for a collective purpose, vision, and/or mission. This form of leadership tends to foster trust and admiration toward the leader on the part of followers (Feiberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005).

Transformational and transactional leadership do not have to be mutually exclusive. In studies it has been shown that transactional leadership can be augmented by introducing transformational leadership. Measures of transformational leadership add to measures of transactional leadership in predicting outcomes, but not vice versa (Bass, 1997). When a relationship is not present, a transactional leadership perspective may be the start of a venture. As complexity grows to achieve sustainable results, the evidence suggests a transformational leadership style is required.

Using Burns’ foundational works, Bass examined a framework for measuring the effectiveness of observable leadership styles. His conclusions were that “transformational leadership tends to be more effective and satisfying, contingent rewarding is more effective and satisfying than managing by exception and managing by exception is more effective and satisfying than laissez-faire leadership” (Bass, 1997, p. 137). The minimal interaction of a leader has a positive effect but, to achieve the greatest result, transformational styles of leadership are the highest level.

Bass took his research and wanted to know if it was a consistent human experience across cultures. In his study he found that across countries when people think about leadership, transformation is considered ideal. The application of how transformation would be employed did vary. In North America, Bass found that more participative leadership practices would be expected (Bass, 1997).

Other studies have identified limitations to transactional leadership. "Transactional leadership based on contingent reward is postulated to result in followers achieving the negotiated level of performance" (Howell & Avolio, 1993, p. 892). This negotiated level of performance occurs before performance takes place and limits the effort that might be required to a simple contract.

The world is complex and changing. It requires more flexibility than a predefined contract. Today, our society has been described as post modern. We have emerging technology that deconstructs our traditional information systems and requires flatter, more malleable organizations. Transformational leaders perform better in environments described as innovative (Howell & Avolio, 1993). This style of leadership enables decentralized decision making and responsiveness to customers' needs. Bass reflects this view when he notes, "People jockey for positions in a transactional group, whereas they share common goals in a transformational group. Rules and regulations dominate the transactional organization; adaptability is a characteristic of the transformational organization" (Bass, 1997, p. 131).

An additional risk of transactional leadership is in the contingent reward used by the leader. It may foster a perception by the follower "as restricting their freedom of action, then it is possible that followers' motivational levels might decline" (Howell & Avolio, 1993). The nature of a contract is that we are being compensated for something we may choose otherwise not to do. The nature of the award used can be seen as manipulative and counter to the followers' interest.

The motivational function of the leader consists of increasing personal pay-offs for work-goal attainment and making the path to these pay-offs easier to travel by clarifying it, reducing road blocks and pitfalls and increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction en route (House, 1971). The perceived simplicity of transactional leadership is that we can articulate the extrinsic rewards of followers in wages and benefits and then they will perform to achieve these ends. This would be true if motivation was as simple as extrinsic rewards. Transformational leadership has the ability to motivate based on a more complex model of intrinsic rewards that are individually developed and encouraged. The encouragement can take on the attributes of a dynamic relationship. To enter into a relationship one has to become more vulnerable and that involves leader consideration.

Leader consideration is used to describe the degree to which the leader creates a supportive environment. This environment may include psychological support, warmth, friendliness, and helpfulness. Observable activities like being friendly, approachable, looking out for the personal welfare of the group, doing little things for subordinates, and giving advance notice of change make up activities of leader consideration (House, 1971). Leader consideration requires the ability for a leader to view the followers' perspective. The construct of transformational leadership extends beyond being nice and supportive. The transformational leader will seek to share leadership.

Transformational leaders encourage followers to question assumptions, generate new ideas, develop their capabilities, and aspire to accomplish challenging future goals (House & Hall-Merenda, 1999). The

goal of a transformational leader will be to share power in a unity of mutual goals. The role then becomes a facilitator of decision making and equipping others to be leaders in accomplishing shared goals.

The role of a transformational leader is not an easy one in the business environment today. Trust in governments and business organizations have been falling for the past several years. An international “Team Trust Indicator” has been developed to measure and strategize to meet this challenge. Four of the 12 factors that are measured have a strong relationship to transformational leadership. They are commonality, benevolence, inclusion, and accessibility (Trickey, 2006). A transformational leader has to be trustworthy and able to trust others. Given the negative findings from the team trust indicator we can appreciate why so many leaders opt for transactional leadership approaches even though they are not sufficient to sustain an organization. “Trust becomes the emotional glue that bonds people to an organization” (Bennis, 1999, p. 78).

Leadership guru Bass has observed that, “Knowledge work will dominate the 21st century. It requires more envisioning, enabling, and empowering leadership” (Bass, 1997, p. 131). This reality suggests that we cannot be comfortable with the limitations of transactional leadership in dealing with our organizational challenges. Bass has stated that “the transactional – transformational paradigm views leadership as either a matter of contingent reinforcement of followers by a transactional leader or the moving of followers beyond their self-interest for the good of the group, organization, or society by a transformational leader” (Bass, 1997, p. 130). The separating of the two elements is not necessary but, when Bass examined the addition of transactional approaches to existing transformational approaches, he found no measurable difference on the outcome. Chan and Chan (2005) suggest that they should be used together. “Transformational leadership can augment transactional leadership to produce greater synergistic effects on the employees’ outcomes than either transformational or transactional leadership in isolation”

Transformational leadership results in extra effort by followers. A few of the reasons suggested for this extra effort include a commitment to the leader, intrinsic work motivation, level of development, and/or a sense of purpose or mission (Howell & Avolio, 1993, p. 892). The cause of this response to the leader may be “a set of dispositional attributions by followers and a set of leaders’ manifest behaviours” (Feiberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005, p. 472). The cause of any construct like transformational leadership results can be challenging to prove. What is clear from the studies that examine transformational leadership is that it has a correlation with business unit outcomes. To make this information more useful in the following section, I will more closely examine what exactly a transformational leader does. The actions of a transformational leader must also correlate with the character of that leader to follow Burns’ (1979) advice: “Watch out for the towering giant with feet of clay, especially if we are the giant” (p. 383).

WHAT A TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER DOES

To be a transformational leader one is operating in a variety of dynamics simultaneously. Transformational characteristics would include influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1997). In achieving these characteristics, Bass (1997) asserted “socially oriented transformational leader engages in moral uplifting of followers” (p. 131). The leader-follower relationship has a purpose or meaning that drives the mutual motivation. This purpose is the platform where, “the leader, through his or her behaviours, interactions, and communications, fosters a oneness in perceptions that pervades the way followers view their work context, including the leader him or herself” (Feiberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005, p. 475). This style of leadership is a process.

The concept of us and we is important in establishing a transformational leadership context. A leader should engage in a set of behaviours that promote a similar mindset or similar perceptions among subordinates (Feiberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005). Individuals have a fundamental need to belong to social groups and that fulfillment of this need may promote cooperation because it leads individuals to assign more weight to the group’s interest (De Cremer & Kippenberg, 2002). The foundation of transformational leadership is positioning the organization to have a collective identity to aspire towards.

It has been found that group belongingness mediated the interactive effect of procedural fairness and charisma. This may be a step forward in uncovering the process through which leader behaviors affects group member cooperation (De Cremer & Kippenberg, 2002). The desire to be part of a group that has value and meaning will precipitate other factors of transformational leadership.

Transformational leaders prefer to work in adhocratic or clan-type culture. When studied, this was supported by the data that 94.5 percent of the transformational leaders showed a preference for a clan culture (Masood, Dani, Burns & Backhouse, 2006). A clan culture is a family-type organization with teamwork, employee involvement programs and corporate commitment to employees (Masood, Dani, Burns & Backhouse, 2006). This culture promotes the group unity required in transformational leadership.

Up to this point, we have introduced characteristics of the leader and the preferred positioning of the organization for transformational leadership to be practiced. At a tactical level transformational leaders have some consistent behaviors associated with their leadership. Six main transformational behaviors were identified: articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model, fostering the acceptance of group goals, high performance expectations, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation (Masood, Dani, Burns & Backhouse, 2006). These activities balance the group perspective and the individual experience of the follower and leader. It is this combination that allows both a personal relationship and a collective identity.

The dual nature of transformational leaders has been witnessed in studies of work units. Transformational leaders had a dual effect, exerting their influence on followers through the creation of

personal identification with the leader and social identification with the work unit (Masood, Dani, Burns & Backhouse, 2006). The attachment to the social unit is what creates the context and limits for decision making. The transformational leader in this context aims to give decision making authority to the individuals in the unit.

The ideal situation for a transformational leader is one where others are equipped to make decisions based on good information in the best interest of the group. A transformational leader will try to create work situations where employees are given discretion and freedom to make decisions in their work, hence increasing employee morale and confidence (Masood, Dani, Burns & Backhouse, 2006). To make these decisions, a number of factors have to be in place.

A transformational leader will have instituted a number of structures. “Leader initiating structure is used to describe the degree to which the leader initiates psychological structure for subordinates by doing such things as assigning particular tasks, specifying procedures to be followed, clarifying his expectations of subordinates and scheduling work to be done” (House, 1971, p. 321). One structure will be an information system that enables a knowledgeable decision maker. Every employee who knows more results in better performance and higher morale (Bennis, 2004, p. 28).

The leadership guru Warren Bennis offers a few other structural tips to the transformational leader. He or she “will encourage healthy dissent and values those followers courageous enough to say no” (Bennis, 1999). With a strong clan culture this aspect of structure must be present to avoid group thinking among your team. This occurs when team members form consensus without critical analysis. The leader’s role is to remind the group about what is important and then act as a facilitator for critical analysis (Bennis, 1999).

To operate in a cohesive group and have healthy conflict, a leader must encourage both respect and dignity for each person. All great leaders must have the support of great groups and these values are a foundation for the other activities to occur (Bennis, 1999). These leaders will not have the loudest voice, but the most attentive ear.

When seeking leadership as a relationship, it “permits an integrative view of leaders, followers, and circumstances” (Popper, 2004, p. 118). A leader can urge others on toward heroic tasks to meet challenging circumstances and where they go, the leader has to follow (Bennis, 1999). Exemplary leadership is impossible without the full inclusion, initiatives, and cooperation of followers. A transformational leader should not have preconceived fixed notions while ignoring or rejecting any contrary signs (Bennis, 1999). The leader is both leader and follower to the circumstances they find themselves in.

Effective leaders get more out of their followers than they are required to give (Daniels & Daniels, 2006). This outcome requires transformational leadership, but the best leaders are still able to wisely use

transactional leadership when appropriate (Bass, 1997). The concepts of inspiration and contingent reward appear to be universal as the concept of leadership itself (Bass, 1997).

The charismatic leader has credibility with followers. Leaders perceived as charismatic might promote cooperation because they motivate others to pursue the group or organizational interest (De Cremer & Kippenberg, 2002). The perception of charisma can be enhanced through building trust and operating the other activities identified in transformational leadership.

One model of transformational leadership is servant leadership. The factor that identifies servant leadership apart from other forms of transformational leadership is its core of character development. Character development is the foundation for an inspirational relationship with followers. The specific character being developed is that of a servant first.

One individual does not make a leader. There are simply too many problems to be identified and solved, too many connections to be made (Bennis, 1999). A servant leader equips others to lead. As Macgregor Burns (1979) stated, “The ultimate test of practical leadership is the realization of intended, real change that meets people’s enduring needs” (p. 383). To meet these needs, one will need to focus on character, process and outcome given the circumstances, the followers’ and the leader’s attributes. In business today, the focus to implement transformational leadership has been under the topic of employee engagement initiatives. In the following section, I describe what is commonly understood by employee engagement and how it is similar to transformational leadership.

ENGAGING EMPLOYEES

This paper has thus far reviewed the concepts of leadership. While many organizational leadership styles have shown to produce results, the style that encourages extra effort and provides for changing dynamics is transformational leadership. This style of leadership aims to “engage followers, not merely to activate them, to co-mingle needs and aspirations and goals in a common enterprise and in the process to make better citizens of both leaders and followers” (Burns, 1979, p. 383). Many organizations today have gravitated to this approach in terms of employee engagement. The general agreement is that “employee engagement involves the interplay of three factors: cognitive commitment, emotional attachment and behavioral outcomes that result from an employee’s connection with their company” (Gibbons, 2006, p. 5). The activity of engaging employees is the same as applying transformational leadership approaches in an organization.

The focus on employee engagement comes from the desire to be more competitive by retaining talented employees and having those employees freely choose to give an extra effort. While the desire to implement employee engagement practices has been widespread, the implementation has not been successful. The management consulting firm of Towers Perrin conducted a study in 2003 that indicated that 27 percent of employees felt that senior-level managers were too distant for the employees to make

an assessment about whether or not their managers cared about them as employees (Gibbons, 2006), The leadership in most organizations is still distant from the work unit lives of most employees.

With the help of other studies like the one conducted by Hewitt and Associates, which indicated that there was a corresponding increase in financial performance when engagement scores increased, senior management teams can appreciate the business case for engaging employees in their business (Gibbons, 2006). The case for transformational leadership and employee engagement are based on results. The process of achieving those results may be counter intuitive. How does employee engagement start? By listening to employees.

Employers who have developed an engaged culture are considered employers of excellence. An employer of excellence encourages dialogue, dissent, and new ideas. They share decision making and hold people accountable for their actions. The employer's agenda and the employee's agenda are seen as one (Elmhirst & Dalthazard, 2006, p. 13). As with transformational leadership frameworks, there is a balance of having a voice, maintaining a responsibility, and feeling that fair practices are applied.

To identify what employee engagement entails, a Canadian meta-analysis was conducted by the Conference Board of Canada. They identified eight drivers of employee engagement. These drivers include: trust and integrity, nature of the job, line-of-site between individual performance and company performance, career growth opportunities, pride about the company, coworkers/team members, employee development, and a personal relationship with one's manager (Gibbons, 2006). These drivers involve cultural issues, relationship issues, strategic awareness, and competency. For employees to be engaged, they must feel supported and able to achieve a collective goal.

Leadership and engagement are positively impacted by how positional leaders listen. Listening practices are highlighted in employee expectations of both trust and integrity of managers and senior executives. The perception that managers were concerned for well-being of employees, they listen to employees and follow through with action and they demonstrate the company's expressed goals and values through their own personal behavior. These activities makes up some of the leadership behaviours expected from employees. Under the driver of "nature of the job" the behaviors included opportunities to participate in decision-making and having autonomy (Gibbons, 2006). The initiation of engagement drivers are synonyms with transformational leadership attributes.

Effective leaders constantly search and explore for new knowledge, rather than seek the data and opinions that confirm their opinions (Roberto, 2005). Searching for new data is what the Gallup Organization did when it surveyed more than one million employees and 80,000 managers to identify the core elements of employee engagement. The necessity of engagement came from Gallup's researchers who believed that, "Each individual employee can decide what to do and what not to do. He can decide the hows, the whens, and the with whoms." (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p. 109). Gallup researchers concluded that managers have many opportunities to influence how engaged staff are. The role the

researchers prescribed for managers is to release unique talents by asking questions, listening and working with each employee. (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Managers need to be a catalyst in the transformation of employees and themselves to focus people towards performance (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

The role of leadership in employee engagement "enters around the process of creating, coordinating, and controlling a social self-categorical relationship that defines what leader and follower have in common and that makes them 'special.' The success of their leadership hinges on an ability to turn "me" and "you" into "us" and to define a social project that gives that sense of "us-ness" meaning and purpose" (Haslam & Platow, 2001, p. 1471). Support for a leader/manager/organization is strongest when the capacity to affirm a distinct, desirable, unique identity emerges. This identity is the enabler of engagement and the participation of followership (Haslam & Platow, 2001).

To start the process of engaging employees we first have to treat people as if they're part of the solution and not part of the problem. (Schoeff, 2006) To be part of the solution we need a management process with social, political, and emotional aspects of decision-making (Roberto, 2005). This process will entail building the capacity of others through envisioning, engaging, enabling, inquiring and developing employees (Higgs, 2006). This process equips the leader to be effective through understanding followers as individuals and adapting behaviors and adjusting the direction appropriately (Higgs, 2006).

Engagement can take on three elements that can be termed as people equity. First, it is having people focused on the right things (alignment). The right things in this context would be the purpose and mission of the organization and understanding the unique value proposition the employee can deliver. Second, employees are capable of delivering the value proposition to the customer. Thirdly, employees are truly committed to the mission, goals, and values of the organization (Schienmann & Morgan, 2006). People equity would be seen as the output of an engaged workforce, but the outcome can also be seen in financial terms.

Employee engagement can have a direct financial benefit. In a recent study it was found that the stock prices of 11 high-morale companies increased an average of 19.4 percent in 2005, outpacing the 8 percent rise attained by competitors in their industry (Schoeff, 2006). These are impressive results, but to achieve them the focus must be on the people. As Mahatma Ghandi expressed, "The most powerful legacy in life is to enable others, to let them be the best they can be" (Higgs, 2006, p. 5). Focusing on others is the key to making employee engagement and transformational leadership a reality.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The activities of a leader are not the total of what makes them effective. The effective leader is one who does "good" for the society in which they operate and sustains that impact by building more leaders. McGregor Burns (1979) offers this advice to perspective leaders, "In real life the most practical advice for leaders is not to treat pawns like pawns, nor princes like princes, but all persons like persons" (p. 383).

For a leader to have an authentic influence means it has to be a collective process and “it emerges from the clash and congruence of motives and goals of leaders and followers” (Burns, 1979, p. 382). The leadership style that focuses on developing the character of a leader is servant leadership.

The term servant leadership was first coined by Robert Greenleaf in the mid 1970s. He believed that there had to be a better way to address organizational challenges than the traditional top-down leadership style he witnessed. He believed that “if one is servant, either leader or follower, one is always searching, listening, expecting that a better wheel for this time is in the making” (Greenleaf, 1995, p. 476). A leader must be a servant first.

Servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve” (Greenleaf, 1995, p. 477). In servant leadership, it is believed that authority is granted by the follower who freely chooses to grant the leader authority in response and proportion to the servant stature of that leader (Greenleaf, 1995).

Trust is earned and received through the servant status of the leader who through service is elevated to leader. Through making sure other people’s needs are being met, a servant leader can expect that “all men and women who are touched by the effort grow taller, and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous and more disposed to serve” (Greenleaf, 1995, p. 477).

The philosophy of servant leadership has had many reaching definitions that have included aspects of spirituality and humanism. With such varied definitions, a measurable framework had been elusive. In 2000, Dr. Page and Dr. Wong of Trinity Western University created a working definition to enable the systematic process of evaluating servant leadership. Their definition asserted that, “A servant-leader may be defined as a leader whose primary purpose for leading is to serve others by investing in their development and well-being for the benefit of accomplishing tasks and goals for the common good” (p. 2). Out of their definition, a framework was developed. Through the process of their framework development, they came to some conclusions about servant leadership that I will summarize to highlight its effect on practicing transformational leadership and employee engagement practices.

The core of servant leadership is the heart or character of the leader. To truly serve others, one needs to have a desire to serve others for the common good. The leader’s interests become intertwined with the collective interests. The focus is on the means and not just the ends. The means matter and when not focused on, they will detract from the ability to achieve the ends.

People and process will always be more important than tasks and organizational structure in accomplishing goals and productivity. Effective systems and processes are only effective if the people who make them work are effective. Highly motivated and well-trained human resources provide the only assurance that any organization will be effective in accomplishing its goals. Servant-leaders motivate followers through investing in them and empowering them to do their best.

(Page & Wong, 2000, p. 2)

To be able to lead as servants, it starts with developing the right character. We must be people with a commitment to serving others with integrity and humility (Page & Wong, 2000). Servant leadership does not end with character, but it is the means by which the leader can then be effective at managing people, tasks, and processes (Page & Wong, 2000). The heart of the leader will determine the authenticity through which all their decisions are made. The authentic leader will have the consistency and transparency to motivate and encourage others.

The title or position is not what makes a servant leader. When an organization embraces a servant-leadership paradigm, it means no one person will need to be designated as “the” leader. The leader is determined by the activity and stage of the team (Page & Wong, 2000). When expertise or direction is required, the leadership given is by the most appropriate person. This philosophy means no one has a lesser role. Every part of the team is important and necessary to the success of the entire group (Page & Wong, 2000). We can think more collectively of leadership. It occurs among and through people who think and act together (Page & Wong, 2000).

The results of servant leadership can be the greater acceptance of decisions, better communication, and the expansion of leadership to others (Page & Wong, 2000). As discussed, the results to be achieved must come naturally out of the process and not by becoming the focus. The challenge for a perspective leader is to seek transformation of their own character and not for selfish means, but at the same time be aware of the potential benefits.

Servant leadership can be classified into a number of observable outcomes. This checklist can “enable individuals to take the necessary steps to overcome their deficiencies and acquire new skills” (Page & Wong, 2000). The classification used by Dr. Page and Dr. Wong resulted in 12 categories: Integrity, Humility, Servanthood, Caring for Others, Empowering Others, Developing Others, Visioning, Goal-setting, Leading, Modeling, Team-Building and Shared Decision-Making (Page & Wong, 2000). Although these categories overlap, each has distinct attributes. The challenge with this approach is the synergy experienced by all the categories cannot be implemented in isolation. For example, a servant leader must not only care for others, but do so while setting goals and visioning.

The next major section of this paper will look at organization employee surveys. Alone, these surveys could be just another process. But, when we explore surveys that produce results, they may share common features with transformational leadership, employee engagement practices and the model of servant leadership. There is a distinct relationship between the results shown from transformational leadership, employee engagement practices and the model of servant leadership. Serving others in the pursuit of common good by equipping, enabling, and involving employees in decision making are aspects that all three concepts share. As we begin our discussion on effective survey practices, we will explore how this tool can enhance these practices.

SURVEY PRACTICE

Surveys are processes by which we gather opinions from a specific group of individuals. In organizations we may choose the survey process by asking the same set of questions to every employee or by selecting a group that represents the total organization. The initiator of a survey can perceive many different benefits for conducting the process. For anyone conducting an organizational survey they should appreciate that the very act of surveying itself influences attitudes (Walters, 2002). The process and activities that occur after the survey determine if the attitudes influenced are positive or negative from the perspective of the organization. A good starting point is to understand the positive expected outcomes of entering into a survey process.

Survey practitioner and author Joe Folkman (1993), in his book *Employee Surveys That Make a Difference*, identified three broad benefits to conducting employee surveys. They offer a consistent source of feedback, they produce opinions from the entire organization, and they reveal strengths and opportunities about the organization. These advantages are consistent with many researchers' views. An alternative purpose for a survey may be to seek organizational alignment. Surveys provide a framework for alignment. The organization-wide survey can prioritize aspects of the entire system in which the organization operates including strategy, structure, shared values, systems, staff, leadership style, and skills. The results of the survey can identify current strengths and challenges. Each participant can focus and move towards a shared vision. Topics that support this framework may be clarity of a shared vision, adequate resources, decision-making processes, cohesion and links between the strategy and daily operating decisions (Folkman, 1998). The survey then sets the limits or boundaries for a creative and innovative discussion around continual improvement.

While most employees consider surveys a single event for a particular need, they offer an important opportunity in creating change (Walters, 2002). One output of a survey can be "objective information that contradicts our self-image" (Folkman, 1998, p. 11). The survey provides a device that focuses people on others and how they relate to each other. The survey data can be a uniting agent that enables discussion and empathy to build through the greater appreciation of other work units.

For the survey process to improve overall employee engagement a majority of people from top executives to employees need to believe that it can work (Folkman, 1998). Much of this belief has been persuaded by the service-profit chain. The service-profit chain is based on the premise that employee satisfaction leads to increased employee satisfaction/retention which is related to higher customer service and increased profitability (Quinn, 2006). The satisfaction and retention of valued employees has motivated many organizations to ask the employees what they expect and what they value. The foundation for this survey practice examination would suggest that the process may offer more than simply some good information.

