ACHIEVING LEADERSHIP RESULTS THROUGH EMPLOYEE SURVEYS

A THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PIECE

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UPDATED FOREWORD

In 2026, the tools available to leaders and organizations have expanded dramatically. Yet as our capabilities have grown, so too has the complexity of the environment in which we lead. We are operating in a time marked by disruption, uncertainty, fragmentation, and rising cynicism. In this kind of context, the fundamentals of human connection become more important.

When this paper was first written in 2007, the internet was only beginning to emerge as a meaningful channel for engaging publics, and smartphones had not yet been widely adopted. Today, leaders operate in a world shaped by always-on connectivity, accelerated information flows, and AI-enabled insight. We can analyze sentiment at scale, reach people instantly through their devices, and engage in an environment defined by both extraordinary opportunity and extraordinary noise.

What has not changed is the need for clarity, intentionality, and the discipline to listen well. Wisdom lies in discerning what remains enduringly true while adapting to a fundamentally different context. Leadership, at its best, creates the conditions in which people can respond with purpose and help shape a preferred future.

In that work, surveys remain one of the most scalable and effective tools available to leaders. They allow us to hear, reflect, and better understand how people are experiencing their circumstances. Used strategically, surveys are not merely instruments for gathering data; they are tools for insight, alignment, and action.

In 2016, TWI Surveys refined our mission from positioning research as the cornerstone of strategy to helping people see each other in pursuit of a healthy, harmonious, and productive world. That evolution reflected a deeper truth: meaningful progress depends not only on what we know, but on how we understand one another and act together.

As you revisit this paper, we invite you to consider both the enduring principles it contains and the new realities that shape leadership today. From the intent behind change to the practice of leading, the opportunity before us is to elevate our intentions, strengthen our institutions, and advance collective flourishing.

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. i

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. ii

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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.

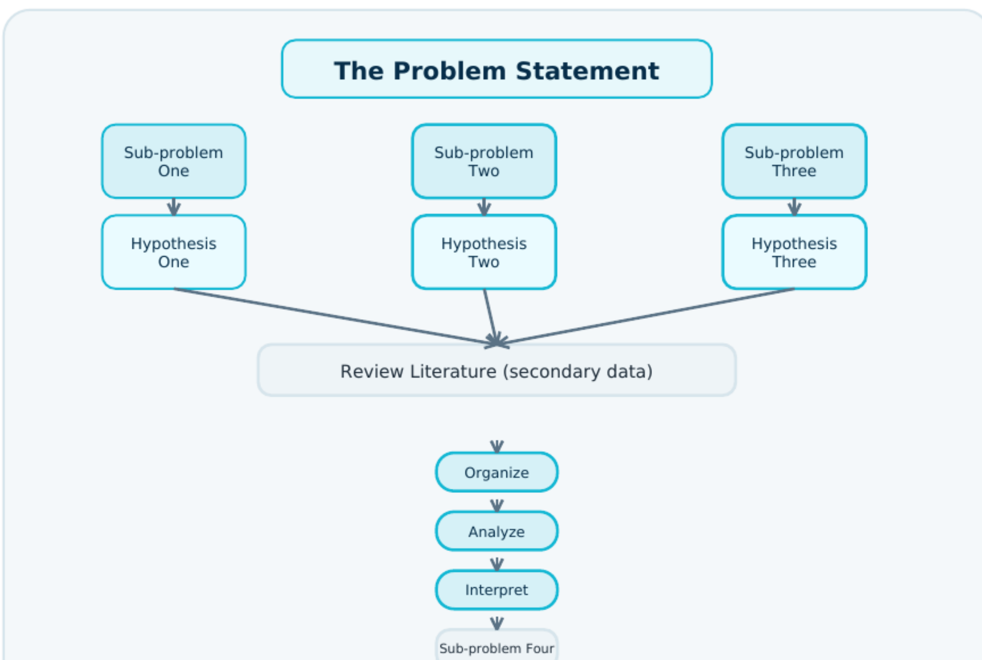
H3: Organizational survey processes can share transformational leadership attributes.

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 frame-work 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.

Employees value the ability to provide anonymous feedback. Less enfranchised organizational members need communication opportunities. Employee surveys were identified as an appropriate method to ensure employee feedback and inclusion. The reasons for seeking this anonymous feedback include: avoiding personal retribution, discomfort with confrontation, communicating sensitive topics, protection of others, promoting honesty/openness, and no need to identify individuals. The strongest finding was clearly to avoid personal retribution (Scott & Rains, 2005). If employees are not given the opportunity to share their feelings of discontent, they tend to express their protests through whatever channels are available (Walters, 2002). The mitigation of risk to an organization's brand becomes a potential competitive advantage when the survey is "used mainly as a platform for a meaningful dialogue between managers and other staff members" (Kraut, 2006, p. 21).

The survey communicates what is important to an organization. What is asked and responded to creates a social contract. The process can tell employees you care about their issues and that you are willing to do something about these issues (Church & Oliver, 2006). The survey may create momentum and an expectation for change. When employees see that nothing has been done with the results, they can actually harm morale (Kraut, 2006). With raised expectations, the importance of action exceeds that of the feedback itself (Kraut, 2006).

Surveys provide structure to the collection of employee opinions and this structure enables more activities to create change (Folkman, 1998). When a survey is designed with critical drivers of the business as the foundation, it can act as leading indicators of performance. Measuring key drivers builds understanding of performance gaps and enables an opportunity to address them (Schienmann & Morgan, 2006). With strategic topics being measured and productive discussions taking place, employees can see real changes based on the feedback they provided. A good survey process becomes a powerful leadership tool that enables change and alignment of the direction of the organization with employee expectations.

ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEY HISTORY

Edgar B. Stern Jr. was on the Board of Directors for Sears, Roebuck and Company when they created ground-breaking studies in the late 70s and early 80s that linked employee satisfaction to customer satisfaction and sales. In a forward to the book Organizational Surveys (1979), he stated, "It is also my conviction again born of experience that management is well advised to listen and respond to employees" (Dunham & Smith, 1979, forward). It is in this wisdom that management gurus have been studying employees for the last 100 years. The studies have taken two paths: one of efficiency represented in the work of Fredrick Taylor and scientific management; the second in humanistic management practices promoted by thought leaders like Elton Mayo.

"Elton Mayo has often been called the founder of both the human relations movement and of industrial sociology" (Pugh & Hickson, 1997, p.138). The foundational study that impacts how we conduct employee surveys today was the Hawthorne Experiment. In this study, outputs for workers went up with continued communication and observation. They intensified the workers relationships with supervisors during the experiment and the supervisor took an interest in their work. Later, explanations for the outcomes were related to norms of cooperativeness and the workers feeling of importance (Pugh & Hickson, 2006). The act of studying the workers and their conditions changed the behavior of both the leaders and the followers.

Surveys have been recognized and applied as a behaviour change agent for more than 50 years. Kurt Levin (1946) and his action research model involved representative groups in decision making (Church & Oliver, 2006, p. 105). His action research processes impacted how committees are used in the change process and continues to be practiced today. The remaining challenge from his process was the limited ability scale the experience to involve larger numbers of employees. Action research takes a large number of resources represented in time and effort and thus is only useful in limited circumstances. However, it introduced principles that can be applied in other contexts.

Early survey practices were driven from the belief that job satisfaction would increase performance. The goal of the survey was to better understand employee preferences and then adjust programming to meet those needs. Before the 1960s, starting from around 1930, the research was focused on protecting the organization from unionizing movements. The motivation was really to minimize risk by reducing dissatisfaction. By 1970, this focus started to change with the realization that satisfaction may also drive performance and make organizations more competitive (Dunham & Smith, 1979). The satisfaction link was questioned in 1973 by a Herman study which did not find a significant link between satisfaction and performance. This discovery laid the groundwork for future studies to understand the required positioning of employees to enhance performance. The Gallup Organization studies of the late 90s shifted the focus from satisfaction to engagement (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). This paralleled with the studies that found a link to transformational leadership and performance (Bass, 1997).

Today, most high performing companies use employee surveys. Best Practices LLC (2005) indicates that 64 percent of high-performing companies report using external employee surveys on a regular basis and that 74 percent of Industry Week's Best Plants 2001-2004 use employee surveys at least once per year (Gibbons, 2006). With all these surveys, it is a common belief that polling employees, creating action plans based on feedback and publicly demonstrating the steps taken to achieve the plans' goals will impact employees' perceptions of trust (Gibbons, 2006). Further than trust, it is expected that employees will be more satisfied, managers will have better information for making decisions, and both employees and managers will have the means to check on collective progress.

In the meta analysis of employee engagement, Gibbons (2006) asserted that "business leaders understand that one vital key to financial success is to connect with employees in a way that engages their intellect, their emotion and their willingness to work" (p. 14). This engagement happens in discussions but primarily through listening. The great basketball coach Phil Jackson commented that high performers or "athletes are not the most verbal breed. That's why bare attention and listening without judgment are so important" (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p. 204). The survey is the biggest and broadest ear in an organization. It allows for comparisons to identify the individual differences and the systemic opinions across the organization. Another coach, Bud Grant, has an illustration of why we should begin our people strategies by learning about our employees. As he states, "When I draw up my playbook, I always go from the players to the plays" (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p. 137). Surveys are commonplace in today's business world and how we employ their use will determine if they have a positive or negative impact on leadership. Knowing more about our employees enables us to design plays that are more likely to make them successful.

The internet has accelerated the easy way by which people can conduct surveys. It has made surveys cheaper and more accessible. "While the Web has made it easier to conduct elaborate surveys, many organizations continue to struggle with the process" (Greengard, 2004, p. 2). Although the word processor gave everyone the ability to write, it did not make everyone an effective writer. The ability to write a question and distribute it does not make it effective. The skills and processes for organizational surveys need to be articulate and applied with wisdom. The progressing ability to access employees with surveys increases the need to understand what the implications are for how we manage this process. With new speed and flexibility, surveys can offer new opportunities for leadership and new challenges with abuses (Kraut, 2006).

THE SURVEY PROCESS

DESIGN SURVEYS THAT ENABLE CHANGE

Involving employees in designing the actual survey is not always the best approach. Some preliminary questions should be answered before we design a survey process. Three suggested questions are: 1) Why do we need to gather data? 2) Is a survey the best vehicle for obtaining that information? 3) Should the survey be developed by staff or with the assistance of a contractor? (Edwards & Thomas, 1993) These questions will focus the effort and identify if others need to be involved in the design.

The design will be set in the context of what we expect the data collection to achieve. Reviewing organizational survey literature, two types of survey approaches were identified. A prospective survey informs future decisions. A retrospective survey evaluates initiatives after they have taken place. (Walters, 2002) A third survey approach that was not present in the literature is an integrative survey; this is a survey that enables collective decision making. The survey goal may incorporate one, two or all three of these approaches.

The first step in the survey process after the initiator has answered the prospective questions and understands why they may be gathering the data, is to construct a goal statement that guides the design, implementation, reporting and action planning. To construct this goal statement, the leadership team and survey team should be engaged in a conversation about their business goals, the critical people to achieve their desired results, and what the drivers are to enable those people to achieve the desired results (Schiemann & Morgan, 2006). Using these conversations, a goal statement that is directional and focused will be created.

Before designing the survey, it is important to gain a preliminary understanding of the audience being surveyed. Those participating and their willingness to participate will determine the robustness of the survey design process. With a resistant audience, a full change management plan with a high level of involvement may be necessary to ensure participation. Research indicates that “the usefulness of surveys in answering important research questions depends on participants’ willingness to respond and provide high-quality data” (Rogelberg, Fisher, Maynard, Hakel & Horvath, 2001, p. 20). If adequate pre-survey work has not been done, the survey process may not be valid. Individuals who have poor attitudes towards a survey are more likely to not follow directions, more likely to respond inconsistently and/or may not complete items at all (Rogelberg, Fisher, Maynard, Hakel & Horvath, 2001). To overcome these challenges, the survey initiator may need to secure senior sponsorship, link the survey to business results, and seek participation in the design of the process and the survey itself.

The survey itself can come in the form of a standard tool that has been tested for reliability and validity. Internal staff “are usually not highly skilled at research and are more likely to correctly use standardized surveys than to conduct reliable and valid interviews or observations” (Zeitz, Johannesson & Ritchie, 1997, p. 415). Customized surveys are tailored to fit the needs of a specific organization; however, psychometric characteristics (e.g., reliability and validity) of standardized surveys often exceed that of customized surveys (Edwards & Thomas, 1993, p. 4). The survey designers must balance their expertise and resources with the needs of the organization when deciding between a custom survey or a standardized evaluation.

External experts may be brought in for guidance in the process and creation of a customized survey instrument. A benefit for utilizing outside consultants is the possibility that the survey may provide "more accurate results because employees may feel freer to express what they really think" (Zeitz, Johannesson & Ritchie, 1997, p. 434). The creation of a unique survey offers the benefit of matching the organization's priorities to its situation. In best practice organizations, 15 to 30 percent of questions are unique items and the remainder is typical questions used across organizations (Schiemann & Morgan, 2006,p. 85).

In creating surveys that make a difference, survey expert Allen Kraut (2006) suggests a process where one creates a customized model of business. This model is a diagram of how leadership, employees, and resources interconnect to create client experiences and ultimately the company results . This visual depiction highlights the key business relationships, process, and resources that are believed to make the organization effective. Using this approach enables researchers to test the impact of employee responses against the performance of business units. The questions and results become relevant information for every individual in the organization. The questionnaire communicates alignment and provides valuable information for making decisions.

The model many businesses have focused on in the past 10 years is employee engagement. With many definitions of engagement for measurement purposes, it is useful to divide the concept into two parts. Attitudinal engagement is a feeling of commitment or attachment to one's organization. Behaviour engagement is characterized by citizenship behavior within the work unit. Findings that are behavior engagement tend to have more direct action planning associated with them (Macey & Schneider, 2006). The two definitions allow for the incorporation of each measure into the survey design. The attitudes are meaningful benchmarks and the behaviors allow for action planning.

Along with a model of business we design surveys with some presumptions about why people do what they do. It is useful then to articulate a theory of human behavior to set up the structure of the survey. This theory may evolve over time, but being explicit allows for critical analysis and a deeper understanding of the responses received. Surveys are based on opinions and perceptions of the respondents and can be used to better understand three areas of human experience. Dunham, in his foundational book on employee surveys, suggests looking at these attitudes from three perspectives: cognitive (the facts), affective (the feelings), and behavior (the action). The combination of the three enables the analysis of what attitudes are prevalent and with all three the understanding of how to influence these attitudes becomes possible (Dunham & Smith, 1979).

To construct a strategic survey, "we ask whether people understand the strategy and their role in achieving business objectives, whether they are engaged with these objectives and with the company itself and whether they have the resources they need to get the job done" (Schiemann & Morgan, 2006, p. 76). The strategic component is highlighted in separating awareness, understanding, support and championing of the organizational mission. The survey helps identify where people are at in this engagement process and enables dialogue to build towards a stronger shared vision of where employees and managers are going.

If it is the first time a survey is being conducted or a number of changes in the organization have occurred, a survey designer may wish to start by conducting interviews and focus groups. Interviews should be used to investigate issues or offer the flexibility to explore possibilities. The investigation conducted in the qualitative gathering enables the designer to receive unstructured feedback. The questionnaire is a standardized tool. It should be socially desirable, acquiescence (agree or disagree with all) and extremity (not responding in extremes) (Dunham & Smith, 1979). You want to identify, what would be the typical opinion and set it? in the current context for interpretation (Dunham & Smith, 1979). The content and presentation of the content should be guided by these basic design principles. Focus groups may also surface additional issues that can be addressed both in the survey design and the distribution methodology.

Some issues may relate to attitudes towards surveys in general. The negative attitudes towards surveys are linked to the number of surveys administered. Survey administrators need to influence the volume of surveys being conducted and reinforce the act of survey participation by linking feelings of both the survey value and the survey enjoyment (Rogelberg, Fisher, Maynard, Hakel & Horvath, 2001). The design should focus on what the respondents would find valuable. The survey should start with the most interesting content and have headings that tip the respondent to the topics being covered. Additional recommendations to improve survey value and survey enjoyment include having clear instructions, well- written items, limited redundancy, being easy to understand, having a clear purpose, an attractive layout and addresses topics of interest to employees (Rogelberg, Fisher, Maynard, Hakel & Horvath, 2001).

The content of the survey is very important. Surveys should “build on a sound framework of organizational performance, should focus on the claims embedded in the key corporate statements of aspiration and should be based on a strategic analysis of issues and risks” (Brooks, Milne & Johansson, 2002, p. 21). These claims should be validated by asking top management what they think is important and build that into the framework of the survey (Kraut, 2006).

When probing employees, managers, and senior leaders to generate a strategic framework for a survey, three questions can be asked: “1) What are the most important business goals for your organization? 2) What do your people have to do and be to achieve these results? 3) How do we support our people to achieve results?” (Schienmann & Morgan, 2006, p. 79). To probe a little deeper, employee focus groups can be used to gather information prompted by these four questions: “1) What do you believe to be the organization’s strategy and its business objectives? 2) Do you believe that employees generally buy in to the strategy? 3) Do you understand how the work of your department and your own work contribute to the company’s achievement of its business objectives? 4) Does your unit have the resources and talent you need to meet customer requirements? If not, what are the gaps?” (Schiemann & Morgan, 2006, p. 87). The survey that is constructed with the information and answers from these questions is “one emphasizing performance rather than satisfaction” (Kraut, 2006, p. 6). To explore gaps in what we say we would like our organization to be and what our stakeholders believe we are, creates opportunities for continual improvement.

An additional set of questions can be asked to clarify what content may be focused on in a survey design. Brooks, Milne, and Johansson (2002) focused on these performance-based questions: “1) How well do the types and quality of services we deliver match stakeholder needs and expectations? 2) Are these services able to be delivered in a safe and productive work environment? 3) Are our current claims about intended organizational performance credible to stakeholders? 4) Is our organizational performance viewed by stakeholders as sustainable? 5) What suggestions do stakeholders have for performance improvements? 6) What are the gaps in knowledge and understanding of stakeholders’ views and requirements?” (p. 21).

During the qualitative data gathering phase it may be useful to identify individuals who could be part of a survey committee or team (Folkman, 1998). This enables the use of subject matter experts from different levels, functions, and locations during the design of the survey. This should improve the relevance of the content and build a greater commitment to the success of the process (Edwards & Thomas, 1993). The survey team should set a project goal, clarify their roles, find champions, and enlist support from the entire organization (Folkman, 1998). Survey teams are then responsible for the success of the program and can become highly knowledgeable about the process. They become information providers and communication channels.

The survey construction should still be centralized to a professional that has the role of merging the competing demands into a cohesive questionnaire. This person should be able to ask questions that address root causes of issues (Folkman, 1998). When the questions are directed toward root causes, the findings will be more actionable.

The length of a survey is determined by its strategic importance, the willingness of the audience to participate, and the clarity of organizational priorities. A general limit on the number of categories should be no more than six to eight broad topics (Walters, 2002). These topics may include important issues such as job satisfaction, good communication, coaching, leadership style, priorities, and teamwork or innovation (Folkman, 1998). Many organizations have performance frameworks. These can act as a good starting place to articulate the key evaluation questions (Brooks, Milne & Johansson, 2002).

Before questions are selected or written selecting broad categories to include can help balance the questionnaire design. The designer will want to pick the five or six section headings that will make up the content of the survey. It is recommended to use these headings to group items and make it easier for respondents to determine what the survey intends to measure (Edwards & Thomas, 1993).

The sources of the content and the focus of actionable content has been highlighted and now we need to ask the questions in such a way that we can get a consistent interpretation of the question and have an actionable finding. The questions should be written in short, simple, declarative sentences. Additionally, one should keep the reading level low to decrease the likelihood of multiple interpretations of the question. The nature of the question should be positively worded to avoid confusion on the respondents’ part by switching from positive to negative wording (Edwards & Thomas, 1993). These styles of questions will be easy to read and consistently interpreted.

In a formal survey one does not include only questions. We also provide scales for the respondents to identify in relationship to the question. There are many factors to consider in determining which scale to use. A common scale in organizational surveys is a Likert scale which rates attitudes from negative anchors to positive anchors, ensuring comparability between questions (Edwards & Thomas, 1993). Based on Joe Folkman's (1998) research, he recommends a five-point Likert scale. He found that removing the midpoint skews the responses to the positive and using a "don't know" category can make interpretation of the midpoint confusing. Instructions should explicitly state to leave items blank if respondents don't know. If the question has a high number of non-responses, the question may have been designed poorly. With a context and items in place, it is also useful to know how effective common questions have been at indicating performance.

Using multiple scales can increase the complexity of the survey. It requires the respondent to interpret questions in multiple ways. From the researcher's perspective, it has been found that a two-scaled instrument only added three percent additional information (Folkman, 1998). When constructing the survey items and choosing scales, one should seek to use the fewest number of scales possible to achieve the greatest amount of insightful information.

To have meaningful interpretation of the data, a designer should include attitudes, behaviors, and descriptors of the respondents. The attitudes and behaviors are covered in the main body of the survey while the descriptors are the demographics. These questions allow the designer to gather identifying characteristics of the respondents so they can be grouped together. The number of demographics must be limited so the respondents do not feel that they will be identified. Some of the most useful demographics are division, position, and tenure (Folkman, 1998).

The order in which we ask questions can impact the number of respondents and influence the responses given. The designer will want to minimize a positive or negative bias by logically ordering the questions. The second goal should be to increase participation. Participation increases when items most important to respondents are positioned at the beginning of the questionnaire (Folkman, 1998). Demographics are the least important questions from the respondent's point of view and thus should be placed last. (Folkman, 1998) Like a good news story, you want to capture the attention of your audience, but have them respond to just the facts.

Research has been conducted into what items are the root causes of employee engagement. Gallup's research of 2,500 organizations and over one million employees identified six items that most strongly correlate with engagement. The items are: I know what is expected of me; I have the materials and tools to do my job; I am able to do what I am best at every day; my opinions count; someone at work cares for me; and I am encouraged to develop (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). These findings have been linked directly to performance.

Taking items like the ones from the Gallup research, "companies should establish a direct link between the survey and critical measures of company performance" (Folkman, 1998, p. 18). Having results related back to the survey findings can act as motivation for improvement. Joe Folkman (1998) has found it "exciting to see that groups that scored highest on the survey also generate the highest profit, had lower turnover and greater customer satisfaction, increased productivity, and so on" (p. 18). The ability to link survey items to other critical business unit measures "allows managers to identify problem areas and act on them" (Brooks, Milne & Johansson, 2002, p. 26).

Survey practitioners and organizations should see the survey as a long- term process including early planning to follow-up and repeating the process. The focus should be on the action to follow (Kraut, 2006). A core group of questions can be identified and used to track progress. Organizational change and the survey process and design must enable adjustments over time. The core survey can stay relevant by changing five percent of the questions to capture the current challenges (Greengard, 2004). The long- term perspective enables your managers and employees to adjust to the process, but adjusts overtime to maintain its contextual relevance (Folkman, 1998).

The challenge for the survey designer is to meet these varied goals and not to create a survey that is too long to be useful. Shorter surveys serve all parties in the long run. "Employees are then not burdened with surveys that are too lengthy and redundant, managers can more quickly digest what they need to focus on, and researchers have more opportunity for longitudinal studies since the end user has a more useful experience" (Harter & Schmidt, 2006, p. 49). The outcome of a tighter focused survey is information that one can act on. This survey must balance the expectations it generates with the ability for processes and feedback to initiate action (Folkman, 1998, p. 44).

The optimum organizational survey should have between 20 and 50 items. The goal should be to cover key drivers and enablers of performance. This number of items will focus the thinking of both management and employees. Three reasons for this length are "1) there is a limited tolerance for long exercises 2) there are complementary tools for root cause analysis 3) findings should be used as a springboard for exploring root causes and not the final diagnostic tool" (Schiemann & Morgan, p. 84).

Employees will respond to surveys if they believe it will spur positive change (Folkman, p. 51). The foundation of that effort, which has been discussed in this section, is to build ownership of the survey content throughout the organization, ask performance-based questions and be focused. To be effective, surveys require more than a good questionnaire design. They require time, effort, commitment, and resources (Folkman, 1998, p. 21). The survey process includes six phases: planning, questionnaire design, information gathering, analysis, reporting, and implementation (Schiemann & Morgan, p. 86). Thus far, we have addressed the planning and design suggestions for an effective survey. As part of the planning process, multiple plans may require design such as the administration plan, communication plan, analysis plan, feedback plan, and change plan (Folkman, 1998, p. 120). These plans and phases will help the survey administrator to organize which requirements are relevant in each situation. Not all the tactics discussed are relevant in all situations, but the general principles should guide a quality survey process.

The last point of consideration is to include questions about the survey process itself. Ask the employees whether or not their manager shared results of any previous surveys and whether or not they took action on those results (Church & Oliver, p. 108). Being able to adjust the survey process and as an indicator of trust in the process will enable the survey team to continually improve. With the content in place, the testing should begin. With a new survey instrument have a pilot test with a small group (Dunham & Smith, p. 80). The testing should evaluate reliability, validity, content and scales, time frame to complete the survey, and language ability (Dunham & Smith, p. 80). The tests allow the last bit of tweaking before entering the considerations of distribution and administration.

ADMINISTRATION THAT ENABLES PARTICIPATION AND VALID DATA

Administration is when the planning and the well-designed survey are received by the potential respondents. This process should be simple and should set limited expectations with the audience (Folkman, 1998). This section aims to clarify some issues around timing for the distribution, what a reasonable response would be, methods of distribution, and maintaining the trust of respondents.

The reasons given for not conducting a survey may include, “We just went through a big change and we want to wait for things to calm down.“ “We are too busy.” “We don’t have enough resources right now.” “We will be changing so we should wait until after.” This is the life of most managers and the challenge is that we could all answer ‘yes’ to those statements most of the time. There is no right time to survey, but there are compelling reasons to do so anyway. Joe Folkman (1998) points out that “if your organization has been waiting for the right time, for optimum conditions, or for a more supportive climate, you may be creating disadvantages for your company” (p. 71). When we make surveys part of our everyday activity and learn how to use the results, they give employees powerful snapshots of the context in which they work. If we wait for the right time to start, we may never achieve the benefits received after the process has begun.

While there may be no right time to survey, there may be better times. The timing of surveys should take into account the seasonal work flow. The administration team should seek a regular procedure that aligns with decision making frameworks and avoids peak work times (Dunham & Smith, 1979). These factors are the predictable cycles all organizations have. When it comes to change, having information will help the organization deal with the change. If the challenge is resources, that limits the scope of the process but does not have to be a barrier to the actual survey.

In the early days of employee surveys, Dunham and Smith (1979) believed “employees frequently welcome a survey as a means of having their say in organizational affairs, they may resent a sampling procedure that fails to include them” (p. 66). Their observation is an encouragement and a warning. As a scientific researcher, I am concerned primarily with the data, but as an organizational survey process, we must also think about the interaction with employees. Employees have a vested interest in the organization they belong to. As a result, we may need to include more people than is necessary to obtain for good data so we can achieve a sense of fairness in the organization.

The response rate of employees participating in surveys continues to increase. This suggests that most employees appreciate the opportunity to offer input. In the late 1990s, it was typical for an employee survey response rate to range between 60 and 80 percent (Folkman, 1998). Today, with the improved online distribution techniques, anything below a 75 percent response rate is considered mediocre (Greengard, 2004). The internet has enabled a more convenient and effective means of transmitting surveys to employees. The issues are now transitioning into a concern of multiple publishers of surveys resulting in survey fatigue by both the number of survey an individual receives and the confusion of having multiple messages sent by a diverse group of publishers.

Employee surveys are typically sent a link in an email or as a paper form with a cover letter. Each method can have its bias. This occurs when employees with a particular attribute become more or less likely to participate. The result is data that may not represent the organization. When your distribution has a bias it is possible to use a “mixed-mode surveys combine two surveys modes, such as online and mail surveys, to compensate for the weaknesses of each” (Deutskens, Ruyter & Wetzels, 2006, p. 347).

There is a concern whether or not online surveys would produce results consistent with paper distributions. The research found online and mail samples produce virtually identical results, but online distributions produce a higher response rate (Deutskens, Ruyter & Wetzels, 2006). Another difference between the two distribution methods is the length of comment responses; online surveys prompt longer comments. This is encouraging because online distribution is cheaper and faster and it reduces data entry errors.

The survey administrator should be aware that the chosen distribution method may create a coverage error, prohibiting equal access to the survey. Online distribution can create this challenge between frontline or non-office employees and those who work in an office (Simsek & Veiga, 2001). To avoid this situation, a number of tactics can be used such as setting up kiosk terminals in lunch rooms and on shop floors and/or distributing the survey electronically and on paper.

Because electronic surveys have become the dominate method of distribution, it has created a new challenge. The online tools can track responses. This may seem like an advantage because it ensures single submission and full participation. However, they may undermine the entire survey process. Surveys offer employees an opportunity of candor because there is no fear of retribution. However, if employees feel like they are being tracked, they may not complete the survey or it may influence their response. It is critical that employees trust the survey process and that tracking methods are not used. Employees must receive a clear explanation that steps have been taken to ensure respondents remain anonymous. (Simsek & Veiga, 2001). Administrators must balance the need to make the survey convenient with the assurance that responses are private (Greengard, 2004).

Prior notification of a survey encourages participation. This notification should include a social appeal about the worthiness of the survey and egoist appeal to stress the importance of the respondent’s feedback and an appeal to help the researcher (Simsek & Veiga, 2001). This communication can and should be distributed through multiple channels such as managers, intranets, and message boards.

The goal of prior notification is to clarify what the survey seeks to accomplish and to increase response rates. Other methods of improving response rates can include persistent reminders with a lag between invitation and reminder (Gupta, Shaw & Delery, 2000). The response rate is also impacted by questions that are salient, procedures are high quality, preparation work occurs and a closely developed relationship with informants is involved (Gupta, Shaw & Delery, 2000). These activities and relationship development should be part of the survey communication plan. One of the indicators of repeat respondents is if they believe the survey results will be used.

Two strategies for full inclusion have been used in organizational surveys. One is the full audit of all employees. The other strategy is to sample employees a few times throughout the year ensuring that everyone is surveyed by the end of the year. There is a clear advantage to the polling method. “Obtaining multiple measures of satisfaction across time can also increase reliability of the satisfaction measure” (Harter & Schmidt, 2006, p. 44).

This method has been used at Bell Canada. This company produces quarterly polling surveys to track initiatives and conducts more comprehensive employee surveys annually. And they experienced a jump in response rate from 65 to 88 percent when they moved to a web-based surveying system (Greengard, 2004). The challenge, however, has been the ability of the organization to demonstrate action created from each survey (Allen Kraut, 2006).

To create a survey that can be used to activate change, it must be relevant at the unit level. Unit level measures of satisfaction are summaries of many respondents. These item-level scores are more reliable than they would be if they reported individual level satisfaction (Harter & Schmidt, 2006). Most organizational statistics are created at the unit level and can be applied best to change by managers and frontline staff. To enable the survey data to be used for change the sample must enable the managers and frontline staff to create activity based on the data they receive.

The need to achieve unit level findings can cause another challenge – the feeling of less anonymity on behalf of the respondents. “If too much demographic data are requested, respondents may be suspicious about whether their answers are anonymous” (Edwards & Thomas, 1993). The groupings must enable summary data to be constructed. When using comment questions, this threshold for individual respondents needs to increase. Individuals have writing styles and content that is recognizable. Caution managers and the survey team away from identifying individuals.

REPORTING THE FINDINGS

The reporting process should be guided in such a way that encourages action and enables priority areas to improve. This process is more than writing an accurate report, but creating a system where all participants, managers, senior leaders, and specialists are involved in creating change. The first place to start is to realize that respondents are likely to expect feedback in exchange for their participation (Edwards & Thomas, 1993). This is an opportunity to include the respondents in creating change.

The reporting process starts during the design phase. At that point, one should establish ground rules for reporting (Dunham & Smith, 1979). These rules may include timing, accuracy, logical order, group categories, and standardization of reporting format (Dunham & Smith, 1979). Along with the format the report creation should enable the processes that the findings will be used to make decisions. This will encourage actions and offer the opportunity to manage expectations.

Before creating a survey report, it is important to realize what opinion surveys can and cannot do. Surveys measure opinions and we find correlations; these are associations between two variables. This should not be confused with causation which seeks to prove that one variable caused the reaction in the other one. Correlations are very helpful in building evidence but have limits (Lindermann & Likely, 2002). The survey report should set the context for interpretation by highlighting important correlations but the action planning and qualitative follow-up is the appropriate time to discuss and create theories of causation.

Within a survey report we should also understand the nature of the types of data that we can include to add context and provide a fuller interpretation of the findings. One should seek to identify a variety of measures as part of assessing an organization. These should be separated into outputs (the number of units produced), outtakes (received a message or experience), and outcomes (what is the resulting opinion or behavior) (Lindermann & Likely, 2002). The opinions created by our systems, cultures, and missions are best measured using a survey. The areas we can focus on in survey research are the outtakes and the perception of outcomes.

Using the results, the survey team should test the company's theory of business. The second area of inquiry is to identify the performance gaps. The issues that emerge should have a relationship to an outcome and then they become a high priority for action (Schiemann & Morgan, 2006). The report creator and/or survey team can gather output information such as number of programs, products produced, or customer interactions. They can take the opinions from the survey as it relates to the experience of employees and then complete the picture by looking at the profitability, safety numbers, and/or staff retention. The other sets of data complete the picture of the theory of business and enable a fuller discussion on the accuracy of the model and the current performance.

The tactical written report that will support other communications has a standard format. A basic final evaluation report should include: an executive summary, the purpose of the survey, a description of the initiative and the sample, caveats about the survey process, overview of the analytical process, summary of the data, conclusions and recommendations, and appendices (Martineau & Hannum, 2004). This is the skeleton of a report, but the analytical practices used to identify the key issues and priority areas for action can be enhanced.

Priorities are necessary because survey administrators work with limited focus, resources, and energy. Three factors can help identify priorities. The factors to frame priorities are those that relate most closely to the business' strategic priorities, the issues that are most important drivers of business outcomes, and the issues that are systemic across the organization (Schiemann & Morgan, 2006). These issues along with simple sorting of data into high and low findings overall and within each categorical section will enable the researcher to set a frame for the audience to identify issues for action.

Good scores and bad scores on an opinion survey are relative. The use of normative data helps to establish an external reference point and repeating the same questions over time offers the ability to compare with internal benchmarks. Normative data is helpful in interpreting the findings (Dunham & Smith, 1979). When interpreting, provide, where possible, both benchmark data and normative comparisons (Dunham & Smith, 1979). Researchers like Joe Folkman(1998) have offered a rule of thumb for Likert scale responses. "Strengths are 70 percent positive and weaknesses are considered 25 percent positive or less" (p.145). The value judgment, if a score is positive, relates back to each organization's theory of business. If an item is the highest priority given the organization's value proposition, a good score may not be sufficient.

Scores must be used in context. In some organizations, while the situation improves, the scores may go down. If employees trust the process and believe that the findings will be acted on, they may become more critical (Folkman, 1998). This response would be found in the follow-up work conducted with the survey team, managers, and work units. When members of an organization take ownership of the outcomes, the opinions may become more critical, but the organization gains an engaged worker.

Survey administrators should encourage the use of survey data as an organizational improvement tool, not for performance appraisals or for administrative decisions regarding individual performance (Martineau & Hannum, 2004). Survey results reported on a Likert scale have a determined maximum finding. The perception of employees impact how they interpret this scale and make thus the scale should always be viewed in the context of additional information. The relative nature of the findings makes them poor absolute measures of performance. In context, the survey findings are a powerful change tool used by each employee and manager to seek continuous improvement.

Findings are tools for improvements and not tests. Judging people on the results undermines the opportunity to improve. The judgment can be moved to what is done with the results to encourage actions (Folkman, 1998).

The use of opinion data is not intuitive. The formal reports are a supportive tool to offer context and clear communication of the findings, but it is up to individual managers to informally report and work with survey findings. For this role, managers require training. They need the skills and insight on how to use the data. Reporting should allow managers to see the organizational issues and their work units' aggregate findings. The training should enable managers to view employee reactions, seek understanding of their issues, and build a plan for addressing these issues (Dunham & Smith, 1979). In a face-to-face presentation of the data, managers should have a single purpose, be informal, have sufficient time, not offend, use humor, and set the tone for constructive criticism (Dunham & Smith, 1979).

High performing work units have also found that they need to focus on strength and manage around weakness (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). The survey process can easily devolve to identifying the lowest finding and seeking to improve this area. This may not be the best course of action. Improving a weakness has the ability to manage a risk, but it may never become a strength. Organizations have collective talents that should be harnessed to become a competitive advantage. Employee surveys can uncover what these talents are and trained managers can seek ways of enhancing these strengths further to generate high level performers across the organization.

A practical approach is required to position managers to effectively involve their teams in creating change. Joe Folkman (1998) recommends five steps:

1. Acknowledge employees' feedback,
2. Share concern for the issue,
3. Acknowledge threat they can't change the issue,
4. Ask for employees' input on how best to cope with the situation, and
5. Select three issues they can change and move forward on those (p. 51).

As discussed in the transformational leadership section, it is important for the manager to be concerned about the issues. If a manager is viewed as caring and acting, the process can begin the transformative experience. It is not practical to believe we can train people to care. But, if managers and employees enter into a dialogue that seeks to support and care about each other's situation, their relationship may deepen. Managers and employees need to build surveys and the follow-up practices into their regular business practices. (Folkman, 1998). The result should be an increased sense of empathy, a shared focus, and higher levels of performance.

Reports should be tools for creating action. To achieve this, it is important to determine which level of the organization has the ability to create real change. As Joe Folkman (1998) observed, "The level at which results are shared with employees tends to dictate who is responsible for taking action" (p. 87). "Unit-level research is important because it is the level at which employee survey data are generally reported and at which many important outcomes are measured (profitability, sales, customer loyalty, safety, turnover)" (Harter & Schmidt, 2006, p. 49). With good manager training and unit level reporting, action planning should occur across the organization. Bell Canada is an example of an organization that generates more than 3,500 unique reports every year to ensure middle managers receive customized reports (Greengard, 2004). The leaders at Bell Canada believe that to get the full value from their employee surveys, employees need unit level information.

As one aims to provide more detailed data, other decisions are required. One should consider buffering group levels. Is there a benefit to comparing business units to create competition or is it better to have an internal focus for improvement (Dunham & Smith, 1979)? This decision will be impacted by the organization's culture and situation. Other research suggests that "in all cases, there is a need to modify the nature of feedback to fit the individuals for whom it is intended" (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor, 1979, p. 368). This view would have the survey team produce reports that are focused on meeting the recipient's communication style, reading level, and functional role. The opposite view is that all employees receive the same information in the same format. Fortunately, these two perspectives are compatible. Researchers, therefore, should seek a healthy balance by creating reports informed by both the culture of the organization and the circumstances. The principle of transparency and openness should also guide the researcher.

Some of the reporting process has been consistent over the past 30 years and other areas have taken on greater importance. The ability to map and explain a theory of business has evolved and the need to distribute unit level findings gained importance. These findings are now more likely to be linked with unit level performance and outputs. It has been consistent that surveys and reporting are believed to "improve alignment and focus as well as identify competitive advantages" (Folkman, 1998, p. 44). The foundation that has not changed is creating survey programs that have active feedback loops throughout the process including the reporting phase, which improves their effectiveness (Dunham & Smith, 1979). Other suggestions for creating effective reports has been to provide a summary, be candid, offer trends, identify significant variations, and focus on core priorities (Dunham & Smith, 1979).

Reports are a platform to create change. The change happens with individuals. The role of effective reports as information resources offers a consistent focus, provides relevant analysis, and enables priority setting. What is done with the reporting will determine if the report was successful.

Survey literature indicates that the act of surveying creates expectations that something will happen (Folkman, 1998, p. 80). Reporting should be focused on encouraging positive change.

CREATING CHANGE/ACTION

When an organization initiates a survey process, people within the organization expect it to improve the organization. To conduct an effective survey program is simple. For one to ensure the uses of survey findings, they must be effectively communicated, courses of action identified, plans developed for the actions, and monitoring of the action plan's implementation (Martineau & Hannum, 2004).

By combining and unpacking this advice, complexities emerge. People have to be involved, they have to believe the process matters, and the process has to be achievable given people's other demands. In his study, Quinn (2006) asserted that "surveys and focus groups can clearly identify what employees feel and why they feel that way. To create change, each individual has to believe they are potentially responsible for creating the issue and, even if the problem is widespread, it can be changed" (p. 517). The role, then, for creating change is to facilitate a process that enables a holistic responsibility for issues that enables widespread change. It is not enough for the human resource department to offer a new program or for senior managers to create more face-to-face meetings. To transform, every employee has to see his or her role in the organizational system.

Two studies explain why surveys can be such a useful tool in organizational feedback. First, Zeitz, Johannesonn and Ritchie (1997) found that "regular, well documented, accurate feedback can itself be a powerful force in changing an organization" (p. 436). For people to change, they must be aware of their true self. Surveys can clarify what the collective group believes itself to be. In their article, Church and Oliver (2006) focused on how changes occur using feedback. They stated that "all feedback is designed to allow an individual or group to unfreeze from their existing state of dissatisfaction, create the opportunity for movement by taking action toward a desired future state" (p. 106). This opportunity for movement occurs every time a well-designed survey becomes an opportunity for employees to discover ways of changing undesirable aspects of their current state.

Challenging the undesirable state occurs when employees have the opportunity to talk to one another and listen to one another. This provides the context and opportunity for effective knowledge transfer. With that knowledge transfer the opportunity for a shift in consciousness and the creation of a new state emerges. The survey acts as the initiator of this conversation. (Davenport & Prusak, 2000)

The feedback that surveys provide is a foundation of reliable, measurable data that can be used as the basis for less formal or more speculative enquiries (Walters, 2002). The queries are from a consistent frame of reference across an organization. This allows for unique planning around similar issues. Although the actions may differ, the outcome still aligns along a common purpose.

While the process and the attitude behind a survey process is important, one still needs to apply all available tools to make the process effective. A survey is a communication process with the pushing of information, the pulling of information, and a dialogue throughout the process. To enable good communication, one should use multiple methods to communicate: oral, presentations, executive summaries, flyers, memos, email, intranet, blogs, question and answers, newsletters and/or posters (Martineau & Hannum, 2004). The communication starts early in the planning phase when we start to define and share why employees will be surveyed. In the administration phase, the communication shifts to encourage participation. During the reporting stage, the communication clarifies the findings and positions the information to be actionable. The survey program does not end when the reporting is completed. The communication of activities and the successes throughout the organization is important for participants to connect that activity with their feedback. This continual communication does not end. The next planning cycle will begin by communicating achievements from the previous year and the challenges left outstanding.

The act of sharing and discussing the information at a work unit level has demonstrated a positive impact. Work units that share the survey results and take action have significantly higher satisfaction scores. This finding was coupled with longitudinal studies that showed sharing and taking action led to greater improvements over time (Church & Oliver, 2006). This finding highlights the assertion that being aware and discussing common challenges at a work unit level correlates with improvements in perception.

What causes a change in performance or attitude can be collective learning, an undeniable realization and/or a greater sense of ownership of the group. Researchers Martineau and Hannum (2004) asserted that "when individuals and groups reflect upon their experiences and share what they've learned with others in the organization, the organization as a whole learns" (p. 70). This learning can cause action by offering specific feedback on trends that leave less room for distortion and may be harder to deny which enables dealing with issues (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor, 1979). This process allows for individual consideration in interpretation, but within the limits of what topics are being discussed. Each recipient's perception of the feedback and response "depends upon his or her personal characteristics, the nature of the message, and characteristics of the source of feedback" (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor, 1979, p. 350). Surveys allow this individual consideration to be reflected off of the whole organization or work unit. The individual becomes more aware of the whole and how they relate to that whole.

An employee survey at JPMorgan demonstrated the change process. They built a culture of inclusion among five business units. The core to their change program was the use of employee opinion poll data that established accountability for change (Quinn, 2006). The five units had individual accountability and a new awareness of the other units. The survey was both a personal and a collective experience.

Using the experience at JPMorgan and other similar findings, one could contest that the process is equally important to the content. Those seeking alignment can use employee surveys as an ongoing catalyst to change (Quinn, 2006). The process involves everyone and is repeated. Groups plan with the data by identifying where they are and where they want to go. This process focuses people on what is being measured and what is being measured influences what is critical for each person to focus on (Folkman, 1998).

The reports and planning meetings should result in action plans. These plans should include: objectives, resources, implementation, steps, responsibilities, and a timetable (Folkman, 1998). One approach preferred by other researchers is the SMART approach. The acronym stands for specific, measurable, aligned, reachable, and time-bound plans (et el Lacke & Latham, Kraut, 2006).

Combining the two approaches creates some redundancy but the elements are consistent. The plan needs a future end state, steps to get there, resources, individuals responsible for facilitating and monitoring process, and ways of determining if the action is making progress.

One unique area that is not often highlighted is celebration. When the survey is complete and actions have been taken, make sure the organization puts an exclamation mark on the process with a celebration (Verheyen, 1998). The survey team should recognize those who assumed key roles, all the participants for their valued contributions, and those who made positive changes happen. This gives the process momentum and a sense of accomplishment. Success makes people happy and as the organization progresses, it can gain momentum (Folkman, 1998).

The training of managers highlighted in the reporting phase must also include the action phase. Managers with or without preparation have challenges to make effective changes. The numbers of managers who are able to use this information is about 30 percent and, even with training, 20 percent will still have trouble (Schiemann & Morgan, 2006). These numbers highlight the need to focus on equipping managers to share and use employee feedback. The first time a survey is done, some managers will be successful. The survey team has to find these examples and share throughout the organization where teams made actions happen. With a long-term survey program orientation, the goal is to increase the number of managers who are able to lead to positive change each year and build off the success of previous surveys.

There are three recommendations for survey teams to enable change: 1) Demonstrate how the information can be used to create change; 2) Support managers and work units in interpreting the findings; 3) Actions have to be communicated using multiple communication vehicles (Church & Oliver, 2006). This process is the modeling, support and repetition required to lead others to become more effective at creating change.

For change to become reality, individuals need to experience it. Some of the required changes may be structural and organization wide, but for it to be appreciated that change has to impact the local work unit (Folkman, 1998). The success of the survey program will be a measure in how many change leaders are created dealing with similar issues throughout the organization in different contexts. The survey should be a tool for creating more leaders and improving the system of the entire organization. The survey, if successful, is “a springboard to improvement” (Folkman, 1993, p. 68). THE IMPACT OF INCREASED EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

The first section of this paper dealt with the concept of sustainable leadership and that that engenders both satisfied and engaged employees. Using research and recommendations on employee surveys, we have reviewed practices that encourage engagement. Correlating positive survey results with business improvements suggests a positive relationship. When action is taken with survey results business outcomes improve (Church & Oliver, p. 112). When business results improve engagement and satisfaction also increase.

Using Gallup’s 12 questions, Buckingham and Coffman (1999) found correlations to increased productivity, profitability, retention, and customer ratings when scores on their 12 measures increased. These findings have been shown in a variety of contexts. In the model of business proposed by Sears Roebuck, their research showed an improvement of 5 points in employee attitudes and an increase by 1.3 points in customer attitudes, which translated to increased store revenues by 0.5 points in the following quarter (Kraut, 2006). These studies suggest that examining transformational leadership practices and using surveys can offer a real benefit to the business bottom line.

The profit of a business can be created by an increase in customers, a decrease in costs, or both. In a study of the actions based on survey results, it was shown that units that reported taking action had a 50 percent decrease in safety incidents (Church & Oliver, 2006). Safety incidents represent lost work time, increased insurance costs, and a decrease in morale. Through actions taken by involving employees, these findings suggest that employee safety can be enhanced and the business can benefit.

The benefit of a survey is rarely tracked. The cost of the survey process is easily tracked, but the return on that investment is rarely reported. Small improvements in people drivers can result in a significant financial impact. The key is to measure the best possible indicators and note when real change has occurred (Schiemann & Morgan, 2006). With the practice of reporting on the benefits of survey action, it may encourage effective use of surveys to increase employee engagement.

In the business world today, we have fragmented social media communication, multi-national companies, niche markets, and increased competition. This suggests an increase in complexity. Transformational leadership and the use of surveys should enhance the ability to operate under these conditions. This conclusion has been shown by Harter and Schmidt (2006). As complexity increases, the correlations to satisfaction and performance also increase (p. 37). As we become more interconnected and our markets become more fragmented, the necessity to move from modern organizational structures to post-modern approaches should encourage the adoption of progressive leadership approaches like servant leadership and business practices like a holistic survey program.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section will discuss the four hypothesis statements made at the beginning of this paper. Each hypothesis builds in its relationship to the other. At the end of this section, the last hypothesis discussion will expand to reach some reasonable conclusions based on the accumulation of evidence. The final commentary will provide direction for future research that can enhance this evidence and test the conclusions using experimental models and primary research.

H1: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS LISTEN TO FOLLOWERS.

Through the discussion of transformational leadership, employee engagement and servant leadership, it was found that listening was an essential element to leadership. It went further than passive listening; the leader should initiate structures to listen and seek the views of others. Employee involvement was consistently a preference of transformational leaders. Transformational leaders need to have achieved leader consideration which entails understanding the view of followers. To achieve this listening is necessary. These observations suggest that the hypothesis that transformational leaders listen to followers is true.

H2: SURVEY RESEARCH ENHANCES ORGANIZATIONAL UNITY.

The process of surveying acts as tangible evidence that the organization has a concern for employees' well-being (Dunham & Smith, 1979). This demonstrated concern that sets an expectation for action, but also creates the opportunity to build empathy. The act of conducting a survey indicates that management values employees and their ideas (Folkman, 1998). The reciprocal reaction is that employees are more likely to trust management. By listening, management becomes more in tune with the frontline workers' day-to-day challenges. Commitment to the organization increases as employees involve themselves in their own goal setting (Verheyen, 1998). This mutual dialogue enables a greater degree of unity. The survey can act as a platform to establish an "us" or" we" perspective. When actions are taken with survey results, the evidence suggests an enhanced unity.

H3: ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEY PROCESSES CAN SHARE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES.

Employee surveys become a means for delivering on the promise of transformational leadership. While the hypothesis was phrased as sharing attributes at the conclusion of this review, I suggest that the goals of a survey may be the attributes of transformational leadership. Some appropriate goals that can be achieved from survey programs and attributed to transformational leadership are inclusion, accessibility, and shared decision making.

Our organizations can have size and distance restraints that do not enable senior managers the ability to develop relationships with frontline workers. As a result, managers may be perceived in a stereotyped manner as figures "larger than life" (Popper, 2004, p. 109). The survey programs can minimize that perceived distance. "When followers get nearer to the leader and are in close contact with him, he becomes a creature of flesh and blood with vices and virtues" (Popper, 2004, p. 110). The survey program becomes the initiated structure to address distance or size challenges. Every employee has contact and a voice.

H4: ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEYS CAN ENHANCE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP.

Well constructed and properly implemented survey programs create action and leave employees feeling like they had influence. This process would enhance the quality of the leader and follower exchange. Low-quality leader- follower exchange relationships are characterized by unidirectional downward influence, economic exchange behaviors, formal role-defined relations, and loosely coupled goals. High-quality leader-follower exchange relationships are characterized by mutual trust, respect, influence, and obligation (Howell and Hall-Merenda, 1999). An authentic survey process enables high quality exchanges to occur.

The attraction of a survey program is that it is scalable for size and distance. Employees in remote locations or in large departments can each have a voice with minimal impact on the resources required to initiate the effort. This program can counteract the challenges experienced by increasing physical distance. Survey increase the likelihood of forming and sustaining high quality relationships by promoting opportunities for both leader and follower to engage in the necessary behaviors to form high-quality relationships (Howell and Hall-Merenda, 1999). Face-to-face dialogue may not be replaced by a survey but, a survey, in combination with local work unit action planning, can offer the structure to create a single identity. The additional opportunity of developing leaders around the organization that are used to involving and equipping others in the use of strategic information is also created by focusing on the survey follow-up program.

Macey and Schneider (2006) observed that "employees who are surrounded by many cues and clues about what is important to their organization are likely to behave in accord with the climate they conclude exists" (p. 67). This review would also indicate that leaders who are in tune with the needs and challenges of their followers will adjust their attitudes and behaviors to meet their followers' needs. The impact of listening and asking questions allows the potential for both leader and follower to change. This is the essence of transformational leadership – both the leader and follower become elevated to a higher personal and social good by seeking to meet each other's needs.

SUGGESTED FURTHER RESEARCH

This review compared and contrasted how employee engagement survey processes may offer enhanced leadership practices. The research was fully based on academic reviews and experiments designed to understand the impacts of leadership and the survey practices articulated by practitioners in case studies and best practices. This review of practices is a strong foundation for further research. To further explore the original problem statement which sought to identify survey practices that enhanced transformational leadership, one can test the dynamics identified using primary research methods.

Primary research offers two distinct options to further the understanding of surveys as they relate to the application of transformational leadership. The first option is to quantitatively test using a leadership assessment immediately after each survey phase. This process would seek to identify changes based on the timeliness of the measurement in conjunction with the survey phases. The second option is a qualitative approach that seeks to understand what might cause the leadership response given the multiple dynamics that occur during the survey process.

The quantitative follow-up research would review the five phases of the survey process which are identified in this study. Using experimental designs each phase can be isolated to identify the unique impact on attitudes and behaviours each phase may influence. The challenge, as with many practices in leadership, is that the synergy of all the practices may be what causes the most robust leadership response. The benefit of taking samples of employees' opinions during and after the survey process would test the accumulation effect and the progressive change in opinion. This study could be a longitudinal study that also tracks change in performance in correlation to the employee survey scores.

The qualitative approach can follow five phases. The focus would be on what the participants experienced in the leadership response during the exchange created by the survey phases. The advantage of using a combination of interviews and observational approaches is the ability to be creative and explore topics that are difficult to deconstruct (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Both the suggested areas of further research are still preliminary in understanding what the optimum impact the survey process would promote. The studies used in this approach have created a conceptual framework to test. The balance of qualitative inquiry will enhance the general knowledge while exploring this specific topic. To this point the research used was conducted to answer related but not exact problems. The proposed quantitative research aims to set some benchmark indicators for when and to what degree changes start occurring when followers are engaged in a survey program. Quantitative measures will enable the tracking of perceived changes in relation to the formal leadership positions in the organization being studied. Now, with the explosion of employee surveys, it would be beneficial to have a better grasp on the degree to which a survey process can improve leadership through the use of organizational research.

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