

# Leader Visibility: A Case Study Approach

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## Abstract

*This case study examines the impact of leader visibility on servant leadership and leadership in general. Interviews with leaders and followers indicate that leader visibility is necessary to influence constituents. However, at the New Jersey site of the ABC Chemical Company, where I conducted the study, leaders shunned visibility, which leads to less communication than required for high-performance organizations. Leaders that are not visible are less able to share the vision of the organization with employees. Therefore, it is difficult for these leaders to influence the climate of the organization and hence the organizational change. This case study provides leaders and potential leaders with behavioral information from a Christian point of view that could improve their approach to leadership.*

## Definitions of Terms

**Climate** is the employees' perceptions of the quality of relationships and communication, the exchange process, within the organization (Goldhaber, 1993).

**Collaboration** is the process through which parties who see differently can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that surpasses their limited vision of what is possible (Kotter, 1996).

**Cooperation** is a situation in which participants have linked goals, so any individual participant can only achieve his or her goal only if the other related individuals also attained their goals (Deutsch, 1973). It is a mutual endeavor; we must reciprocate the choice to cooperate.

**Collectivism** emphasizes collective opinions or ideas and group input in the decision-making process. However, it does not imply that the group has primacy over the individual.

**Competence** is the perception of expertise, expertness, authoritativeness, or qualification (O'Keefe, 1990). It includes knowledge about methods, processes, procedures, and techniques for conducting specialized activities of the leader's organizational unit (Yukl, 1998).

**Competition** is the opposition in the goals of interdependent parties, such that the goal attainment of one party reduces the opportunity of the other party (Deutsch, 1973).

**Influence** is the attempt to affect the behavior of another person by altering the perceived gains or costs of his or her choices (Deutsch, 1973). It is the effect that one agent has on another (Yukl, 1998).

**Integrity** means that the leader's behavior is consistent with espoused values, and the leader is honest, ethical, and trustworthy (Yukl, 1998)

**Leadership** is the act of inducing followers to act towards specific goals that represent the values and motivations-the wants and needs of the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers (Burns, 1978). As opposed to management, which is an authority relationship, leadership is an influence relationship (Rost, 1991; Sanders, 1994). According to Gini (1998), it always occurs in the context of others.

**Transformational leadership** is the process of exchange, or engagement, of two or more persons that leads to higher levels of motivation and morality for both the lead and the

leader (Burns, 1978).

**Trust** is a habit formed over time between people (Putman, 1993).

**Values** are the ideas and beliefs that influence and direct our choices and actions, both consciously and unconsciously (Gini, 1998).

**Vision** is the beckoning signal of all that is possible for the organization; it is a shining destination (Nanus, 1996), a guiding philosophy that leads to a visible image (Collins & Porras, 1997).

**Visibility** is the perceived presence of the target. It relates to how well we can see or sense the target or the target's attributes.

## **Introduction**

The literature on servant-leadership indicates a relationship between servant-leader and leader visibility. Accordingly, effective leaders visibly interact with followers, which results in heightened trust and motivation (Tucker, Stone Russell & Franz, 2000). Additionally, they are flexible and easily relate to others. However, we rarely see the visible servant leadership model and the totality of its attributes in practice (Melrose, 1996).

This case study is an exploratory attempt to correlate the relationship between servant-leader and leader visibility. The purpose of the study is to describe how employees at the New Jersey site of the ABC Chemical Company perceive the impact of leader visibility on their performance and hence the site. Additionally, the study reveals employees' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of leader visibility. Thus, it provides leaders with useful behavioral information that may improve their approach to leadership.

### **The ABC Site Leadership**

The site leadership team (SLT) includes the site manager, operation and maintenance, engineering, information technology, accounting, and human resources superintendents. The SLT, however, has struggled with leadership problems. For instance, the 1999 strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (SWOT) analysis documents lack accountability, lack of trust, low morale, low level of communication, lack of direction, diluted focus, lack of clear vision, silo mentality, poor leadership, and other organizational deficiencies. Additionally, a departmental communication audit revealed similar weaknesses, such as lack of consistency and leadership follow through. For instance, the SLT failed to implement the recommendations from the 1999 SWOT analysis.

The scope of the study is limited to a single case, and it is time-bounded. However, these limitations do not affect the outcome of the study. The study looks at the site leadership team from the subordinate viewpoint to ascertain the link between servant leadership as reflected through leader visibility and the site's leadership problems.

## Literature Review

### Servant Leadership

In 1970, Robert Greenleaf began to advocate in writing the concept of the servant as a leader (Greenleaf, 1998). For Greenleaf, the words, serve, lead, and persuade, are paths to restoring much of the dignity lost through the depersonalization caused by industrialization. He believed that a better society, one that is more caring and provides an opportunity for people to grow, is possible by raising the performance as servants of as many institutions as possible. He asserts that this is “possible by new voluntary regenerative forces initiated within these institutions by committed individuals: servants” (p. 17).

Greenleaf’s definition of “The Servant as Leader “ is:

“Do those being served grow as persons: do they while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will she or he benefit. Or at least, not be further deprived? And no one will knowingly be hurt by the action, directly or indirectly.” (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 43)

Greenleaf’s definition of servant-leadership is similar to the Pareto Criterion, where “a Pareto improvement is a social change from which at least one person gains and nobody loses” (Layard & Walters, 1978, p. 30). For Greenleaf (1998), to be a servant is to knowingly not harm.

According to Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999), servant leaders are transformational leaders. Transformational leadership is evident when the leader and follower raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire others to do more than they originally intended. Followers respect them because they are trustworthy and often consider the needs of others over their own needs. Additionally, they create clear commitments and expectations that the follower yearns to meet (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978). Transforming leaders, like Jesus, accept people as they are, not as they would like them to be (Bennis & Nanus, 1997).

Institutions, however, are “competitive,” and many individuals operating within are also competitively. Thus, the cultural framework of competition that produces winners and losers influences the mindset of individuals; competitive behaviors often involve negative messages (Littlejohn, 1999). As a result, Greenleaf believed that institutions lack the appropriate vision to become serving institutions. A vision contingent on long-range thinking and a sense of history. He asserts that liberating visions in stable organizations or societies are rare because stability acts as a barrier to change. In essence, mindsets, or timidity, restrain individuals from maturing as servants and from transforming institutions so that they become substantially more serving.

It is, therefore, difficult to see the visible servant-leader model within institutions because servant-leadership requires leaders to reflect what they see in God in their leadership (Schawchuck & Heuser, 1993). Jesus is the embodiment of a servant leader, and Greenleaf (1998) was aware of this fact. He was also aware that in an imperfect society, leaders might need coercion to deliver some services and that society does not have a mechanism to ensure that no one is made worse off in any given transaction.

Thus, Layard and Walters (1978) assert that if society is willing to seek only Pareto improvements, “doing no harm,” we will spend much of our time in suspended animation. Unfortunately, many leaders adopt Layard and Walters’ utilitarian view. Consequently, they fail to incorporate the servant component of leadership and focus on skills to manipulate people to serve them. Nevertheless, Jesus tells us, “whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 20:26, NAS). Servant leaders must serve constituents just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

Greenleaf’s (1998) “Servant as Leader” essay is, in part, a search for a structural basis for hope. He recognizes that institutions could become more serving when those that inhabit these institutions serve better and work together towards synergy. Thus, he wants us to dedicate ourselves to serve well in institutions, our homes, and our communities.

The competitiveness embedded in capitalist systems is often in conflict with the servant of the Judeo-Christian heritage as well as in the other traditions. For instance, in a competitive environment, participants behave in such a way as to increase their chances of goal attainment at the expense of others (Deutsch, 1973). However, Deutsch notes that competition is not always destructive. In some instances, the competition provides a useful mechanism for selecting the more able. Greenleaf (1998), nonetheless, believed that the visible outcome of the competition is, more often than not, a low-caring society.

Cooperation, on the other hand, fosters mutual trust and openness of communication (Schawchuck & Heuser, 1993). Deutsch (1973) also agrees that participants in cooperative situations are more prone to mutual influences than in competitive cases. Influence is important, particularly in accomplishing stated goals (Farling et al., 1999).

Thus, being a servant leader appears to embody spiritual, vision, transformational, cooperative, and persuasive components. Therefore, leadership that nurtures and lifts, as opposed to depresses and lowers, the quality of life for followers is of the servant nature (Greenleaf, 1998). Too often, however, in organizations, leaders depress and lower the quality of life of followers to increase their remuneration and status.

## **Leader Visibility**

*“Where there is no guidance, the people fall,  
But in the abundance of counselors there is victory.” Prov. 11:14*

We can perceive leader visibility as positive or negative, low, or high. Low visibility reduces the chances of important contacts and networking (Valentine & Godkin, 2000). Negative visibility tends to reduce collaboration. Leaders become more visible when they develop relationships and a network of contacts that enhance trust, credibility, and cooperation (Thompson, Alvy & Lees, 2000). A leader who values collectivism is more prone to be visible and places greater value on information from low-rank individuals than leaders without collectivist values (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Leader visibility, therefore, is a reflection of the leader’s value system. Thus, lack of visibility may imply a less caring and nurturing leadership; since a conscious leadership act requires caring and attention (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). Additionally, Fiore (2000) asserts that successful leadership in schools is a result of principals being visible and that principals cannot accomplish effective school leadership from within the confines of the office. Visible actions signal a tangible and undeniable commitment to the cause (Kouzes

& Posner, 1997).

Fiore (2000) found that principals who spent an inordinate amount of time in their office were inaccessible to stakeholders. Furthermore, such inaccessibility caused a negative school culture. Conversely, he found that principals of schools with a more positive culture were highly visible to stakeholders throughout the day. The visible principals believed that it was important to be available when needed (Fiore). They understood that visibility is important to the school culture; it is critical if leaders want to make shared values an important part of the organization's culture. Visibility forces leaders to reveal their choices and enhances their ethical choices and commitments (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). Additionally, it exposes leaders to their constituents and provides a means for the exchange of ideas, visions, behaviors, service, as well as other attributes identified in the literature.

Positive visibility creates positive role models, which leads to an improved working climate, and interpersonal connection with stakeholders reduces the aura of fear and mystery that surrounds the leader and makes the leader more personal and reachable. Thus, positive visibility and the ability to develop relationships with stakeholders is a result of significant interpersonal skills (Fiore, 2000). When leaders spread the news of the activities of their group members, they foster visibility and build a stable political coalition (Kouzes & Posner, 1997).

According to Greyser (1999), "managerial fitness" is the maturity required when we appropriately use personal power rather than resort to domination. It is the ability to be sensitive and the personal resilience needed to deal with increased visibility. Leaders demonstrate maturity through magnanimous spirit and broad vision (Sanders, 1994). Increased visibility, however, makes leaders more vulnerable. Therefore, insecure leaders decrease vulnerability by becoming less visible. Organizations are better off with high-involvement leadership (Howard, 1996). Howard believes that leaders must shape their organizations through concepts and feeling rather than through rules or structures. Thus, visible leaders influence followers, and followers influence visible leaders.

The need for recognition and visibility may lead some leaders to distort reality to enhance their image (Conger, 1990). When the leader loses sight of reality or loses touch with followers, the organization's vision becomes a liability (p. 251). Leaders gifted with interpersonal skills may use these skills to manipulate followers (p. 256). Visibility, therefore, is a two-edged sword.

In the context of servant-leadership, leader visibility should expand the capacity of followers and should not be manipulative. Followers, however, may not be able to readily distinguish if manipulation is absent from a visible leader's schemes, except if they have a discerning spirit. If they do, they will sense the leader's inherent liabilities, such as autocratic leadership styles, dishonest behaviors, exploitative relationships, as well as failure to develop successors of equal ability, and other non-caring behaviors. Clinton (1988) tells us that the heart of the discernment stage is the enlargement of our outlook, and God enlarges it.

For Christians, Christ is the visible image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15). Thus, Christians believe that through Christ, they have redemption and deliverance from the power of darkness. However, a visible Jesus is not necessary for Christians to believe in Christ. Jesus said to Thomas, "because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). And Ephesians 6:12 tells us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, rather it is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Thus, "physical situations may well be

caused, controlled, or instigated by spiritual beings” (Clinton, 1988, p. 112).

Merriam-Webster collegiate dictionary (2001) defines visibility as “the quality or state of being seen,” and visible as capable of being seen or discovered or perceived. Therefore, the leader’s physical presence does not appear to be a necessary condition for influencing followers. Leaders can project visibility through communication mediums and representatives. For instance, the Disciples of Christ promulgated His message after His death and resurrection. Thus, the spiritual presence, not the visible physical presence, of Christ is necessary for continuing to promulgate the Christian faith; this is also true for promulgating other beliefs. However, Christ’s incarnation was necessary for Christianity to exist. Likewise, Greenleaf’s permanent physical presence is not necessary to promulgate his view of what large institutions should become. Similarly, the U.S. government projects its military might throughout the world, but its military machine and personnel are not permanently visible everywhere. However, most foreign governments and their citizens perceive the U.S. military as visible, even though the US military is not physically present in their region. Likewise, Frederick the Great believed that his soldiers should fear their officers more than the enemy (Morgan, 1997). Thus, he was able to extract obedience, even when officers were not physically present on the battlefield.

Tucker et al. (2000) define leader visibility as “the public presence, behavior, and interaction of a leader with followers, whether before a large organization or small group” (p. 10). Their definition appears to imply that the necessary condition for visibility is the leader’s physical presence. Therefore, it may be appropriate to expand their definition of leader visibility to include “capable of being discovered or perceived;” this would imply that the leader’s physical presence is not necessary for the leader to project his or her visibility. For instance, Clinton (1988) tells us that literary and word items are usually positive experiences that, by reading what others wrote, can provide the reader with vicarious learning. In other words, a servant leader can become visible through literary and oral exposition.

The literature on servant leaders indicates that high visibility is an essential component of servant leadership (Tucker et al., 2000). Thus, visibility is akin to vicarious leadership. Tucker et al. also assert that there is a relationship between servant leadership and leader visibility and that the relationship involves two components: the leader’s character and his or her interaction with followers (Melrose, 1996).

There is, however, a need to ascertain this relationship in the field to facilitate conceptual models for future research. Additionally, by identifying how this relationship works, we can develop learning strategies and expand them to other areas. Thus, a case study of leadership within the ABC Chemical Company New Jersey site may be helpful. The study presented in this paper is a qualitative analysis of leadership interaction at the New Jersey ABC Chemical Company. The author asked the following questions: Who are the leaders at the ABC site? Are the ABC leaders visible? Do the ABC leaders project a caring attitude? What anecdotal stories can employees provide in favor of or against leader visibility? What themes emerged during the study? What theoretical construct sheds light on the findings?

### **The ABC Chemical Company**

A former chemical company, which attempted to remake itself into a bioengineering and pharmaceutical concern, spun off the ABC Chemical Company in September of 1997. A pharmaceutical company subsequently absorbed the former chemical company.

The New Jersey facilities of the ABC Chemical Company began operations in 1961 and have since seen significant expansion as well as contractions. It has experienced varying styles of management, locally and at the enterprise level. Local control is the Site Leadership Team (SLT), which has considerable discretion in decisions affecting the site. Enterprise management is corporate management, and it deals with corporate policies, which generally affect all of ABC's manufacturing sites.

Currently, at the New Jersey facility, three manufacturing units produce intermediate chemicals for the merchant market. The facility is located on the 460-acre site and uses approximately 125 acres for production and storage facilities. In addition to the manufacturing units, facilities are also available for making and shipping various blends; storing and transshipping other related products; and supplying utilities and processing waste.

Approximately 150 employees operate the facility. Most are production operators, supplemented by utility operators, mechanics, engineers, managers, and contractors. Each of the manufacturing facilities operates independently. However, the support network, mechanics, utility operators, contractors, engineers, and site leadership staff, provide services to all manufacturing units and support facilities at the site.

The structure is hierarchical, with a loose matrix relationship. However, at the top of the site pyramid is the site manager. The site manager and superintendents make up the SLT, and they reside outside the manufacturing facility; all possess chemical engineering degrees, except for the personnel manager. None have graduate degrees, and only one was promoted internally. Second and first-level supervisors, engineers, operators, mechanics, contractors, and other support employees work within the manufacturing facilities; some of the supervisors, engineers, and operators have post-graduate degrees. A fence separates the manufacturing facilities from the SLT building.

The site leadership hierarchy is the site manager, superintendents, and second and first-level supervisors. However, the technical decision-making process does not necessarily follow the scalar structure. Instead, technical leadership is a result of individual expertise, and policy leadership is often a result of corporate mandates.

### **The Research Study**

This research is a narrowly focused case study and limited to a small sample of interviewees. It is a single case study of the ABC Chemical Company New Jersey site and bounded by time. Initial interviews involved mechanics, engineers, operations, safety and utility leaders, supervisors, and contractors. The author did not structure formal meetings. However, he gathered observational data and documents (see table 1 for the type of information and sources).

The protocol consisted of the following questions: Who are the leaders at the ABC New Jersey site? Do you perceive that the New Jersey site leaders are visible? Do they project a caring attitude? What anecdotal stories can you provide in favor of or against leader visibility? What are the ramifications of leader visibility? Also, the author used the direct observational technique and experiential background information. The interviews were open-ended. Thus, following Yin (1998), the author considered the respondents as informants and corroborated their reports with other informants, including a member of the SLT and the author's historical observations.

The narrative blends related literature, comments, and edited quotes from interviewees, the author's interpretation of events from an organizational point of view, and his experiences at the facility. It is an exploratory attempt to describe the employees'

perception of leadership visibility at the ABC New Jersey site. Both techniques, unstructured interviews, and direct personal observations can lead to a biased outcome. However, the author verified the narrative by providing a sample of the write-up to selected interviewees and non-participants for feedback and incorporated their comments in the final draft (Creswell, 1998). The author asked the interviewees and those that did not participate in the study: Is his description of ABC New Jersey site leadership accurate? Are the themes that he identified reflect their experiences? Did he miss anything? What type of leadership would they like to see?

**TABLE - 1** Data Collection Matrix: Type of Information by Source

Information/ Information Source	Interviews	Observations	Documents
Operators		Yes	
Mechanics	Yes		Yes
Engineers	Yes		Yes
Operation Leader	Yes		Yes
Maintenance Supervisor	Yes		Yes
Utility Leader	Yes		Yes
SLT Member	Yes		Yes
Purchasing	Yes		Yes
Safety	Yes		Yes
Contractor	Yes		Yes

### Themes

#### Communication

At the New Jersey site of the ABC Chemical Company, the SLT and department leaders are not visible. The design of the site, stand-alone buildings, and manufacturing facilities inhibit inter-group relationships. As a result, inter-department leader visibility and hence communication is low. Visibility, however, is a prerequisite for effective communication. One of ABC's production managers agrees that leader visibility is necessary to instill organizational and individual values in others and as a means of demonstrating what leaders say and do. Likewise, Tucker et al. (2000) posit that leader visibility affects the dissemination process of values and beliefs. It supports the leader's words with the leader's actions and leads to increased leader credibility (Farling et al., 1999). Moreover, it enhances and provides a viable and consistent means of sharing the leader's vision.

Employees at the New Jersey ABC Chemical Company do not believe that the SLT and department managers model visible leadership. Rather, they indicated that the administration is aloof and mostly non-engaging; and when they engage, subordinates perceive the exchange as disingenuous and expedient. Honest exchanges between leaders and followers set the tone for the acceptance of a shared vision that incorporates or accommodates subordinates' views, sentiments, and needs.

One way that the SLT avoids visibility is by relegating visible initiatives to subordinates and hence avoiding participation. For example, they assigned the Behavioral Safety Program to a non-managerial employee and did not provide visible support. As a result, the program failed to generate employee support. Their aloofness leads some



employees to believe that SLT members are reluctant to engage in communication exchanges with personnel within the manufacturing facility. They indicate that some SLT members even avoid eye contact and often do not enthusiastically acknowledge their presence. Additionally, they often dismiss the history of the site and the employees, lessening their ability to influence the site's culture and traditions. Thus, the lack of leaders' visibility appears to inhibit communication and any upward-shared vision that engages the spirit of the employees. Nonetheless, involving others in the visioning process allows them to share their values and dreams; it brings about a broader range of viewpoints and makes it easier to gain commitment (Bennis & Nanus, 1997).

Visible leaders that nurture their subordinates tend to heighten subordinates' self-efficacy. In many instances, subordinates have the necessary skills to perform but do not perceive themselves as capable. For example, when children identify with a successful model, their self-efficacy increases (Miller, 1996). A similar effect occurs when subordinates identify with visible leaders, and when leaders use verbal persuasion to convince employees that they can achieve their goals. Leaders at the ABC New Jersey site seldom encourage subordinates to improve cognitive abilities. The site leaders operate as if the individual improvement is a "zero-sum" game.

Comments from some SLT leaders indicate that increasing visibility is a time-consuming process and one that may have only limited results (Goldhaber 1993). Such a view leads them to shun visibility, which lessens their ability to transfer the site's vision to the employees. This view also appears to be prevalent in the supervisory rank. However, "leaders who shut the door to the outside world will never be able to detect change" (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. 47). For example, the intricacies of the informal organizational structures, the emergent trends, will elude them. Besides, prescribed changes will seldom include employees' interests.

There is an indication that honest interaction between ABC leaders and subordinates often leads to adverse outcomes for the subordinates. Moreover, autocratic site leaders often label outspoken subordinates as aggressive, difficult, and negative. Additionally, tenured site leaders are less visible than untenured leaders. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) believe that leadership tenure reduces the sources of the leader's information. Accordingly, tenure leads to the establishment of informational routines, the cultivation of trusted sources, and the tendency of these sources to cater to the leader's preferences. Leadership tenure is also positively associated with conformity to industry tendencies and low-risk behaviors. The values held by the ABC leaders also influence their informational sources and the formation of preferred relationships.

## **Competence**

Visible leaders are more confident in their competence and interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal competence is the ability to deal with others in a face-to-face relationship. Interpersonal relations refer to everything that transpires between one person and another, or between an individual and a group (Rush, 1978). Rush argues that it encompasses our perception of others, our evaluation and understanding of them, and how we react inward and outwardly towards others. Moreover, the interaction must be perceived as genuine or authentic. For instance, the day-to-day actions of leaders are often observable by subordinates, and some of their activities have immediate consequences for the performance of the team or group (Yukl, 1981). Thus, visible actions or inaction influence followers' perception of leader competence. The leader must be capable of solving their problems and satisfying their needs. Visible leaders oriented

towards participation enhance interpersonal expertise and the commitment of subordinates to a given course of action, mainly if subordinates had input in the planning process. However, participation is not “consultative supervision,” where subordinates’ input is merely to give them a sense of involvement (Rush, 1978). Many employees at the site believe that the ABC leaders practice “consultative supervision.”

Interpersonal competence involves conflict, a natural outcome of an interaction. However, the managerial propensity of the New Jersey ABC site leaders is conflict avoidance. Thus, avoidance behaviors employ little or no communication (Littlejohn, 1991). Nevertheless, some amount of conflict is healthy and even creative, provided leaders deal with it openly (Rush, 1978; DePree, 1987). Conflict often stimulates interest and curiosity. Additionally, it is a medium to air problems and arrives at solutions; it is also the root of personal and social change (Deutsch, 1973). Visible leaders tend to approach conflict in a problem-solving manner, seeking “win-win” outcomes. Autocratic leaders prefer “win-lose” results that create entrenched hostilities, unnecessary internal competition, and unresolved lingering conflicts (Rush, 1978).

When leaders view the organization as a “living system,” they recognize that, like our bodies, the internal needs of employees must be satisfied to enhance organizational performance (Morgan, 1997). However, a former ABC site leader indicated in a strategy session that the concerns of the employees, the internal customers, were not important. Hence, given such views, it is difficult for ABC leaders to understand the importance of the internal needs of employees.

Greenleaf (1977) believes that organizations exist to provide meaningful work for the employees, and the employees exist to provide a product or service to customers. Unfortunately, when the needs of the employees remain unsatisfied, it often leads to diminishing organizational performance.

## **Emulation**

An ABC production leader believes that leader visibility is necessary for followers to emulate the behaviors of the leader. Bandura and Walters (1963) confirmed that individuals acquire relatively new behaviors by merely watching a model. For instance, “Children who see a hard-working classmate praised by a teacher learn to try that behavior” (Miller, 1996, p. 185). However, leaders who shun visibility cannot model the way or share the organization’s vision. Ironically, often they act as if by decree, they can command emulation. One of the ABC maintenance supervisors recalled a former visible site manager that would signal the importance of housekeeping by strategically picking up improperly discarded trash in front of subordinates. The site manager would then proceed to share his housekeeping and other standards with observing employees. The supervisor also indicated that the lack of employee participation in the site’s current Behavioral Safety Program might be due to the absence of visible leadership participation. Yukl (1998, p. 345) indicates “one way a leader can influence subordinate commitment is by setting an example of exemplary behavior in day-to-day interactions with subordinates.” Similarly, Piaget suggests that moment-to-moment interaction with people and objects leads to a better understanding of the world (Miller, 1996). Thus, positive leader visibility enhances follower emulation.

The production leader also said that the emulation of the leader’s behavior occurs even when the leader is not visible. That is, observational learning occurs whether the leader is in focus or out of focus (Miller, 1996). All leadership action, or inaction, carries added meaning to subordinates who are detecting intentions, values, predisposition, and

leadership direction (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Hence, the behaviors of visible leaders shape observational learning. However, if they are not conveying organizational and personal meaning, the current social context within the organization will influence followers' behaviors, and such influence may not align with organizational goals.

The leader's continuous physical presence is not necessary for imitation to occur. "Imitation of the model's behavior when the model is no longer present is an important learning skill" (Miller, 1996, p. 192). Miller points out that imitation is vital for acquiring behaviors in areas where mistakes are costly. She points to Bandura, who labels this type of behavior "abstract modeling" (p. 192). Therefore, subordinates may not immediately reproduce observational learning; instead, they may store it for future use. Miller also reminds us that failure to imitate a model may be due to inadequate attending, encoding, and retention of behavioral events, as well as failure to perform due to physical limitations or lack of motivation. Thus, leaders should become aware of these behavioral obstacles and recognize that most employees reproduce behaviors they perceive as desirable. When leaders facilitate subordinates' growth and success, the leader's action results in beneficial outcomes.

## **Integration**

"It is not leaders who make movements; it is movements that make leaders" (DeLeon, 1912). Movements by themselves cannot exist apart from the followers, whom the visible leader symbolizes rather than leads. Hence, the unity of interests of those led makes leadership possible (DeLeon, 1912). Therefore, agreement of interest requires the integration of followers and organizational goals.

For Greenleaf (1977), leadership must meet the needs of others. In essence, "the leader must be genuinely interested in the welfare of the employees and serve on that basis to realize the full potential of servant leadership" (Tucker et al., 2000). For example, Toro's Ken Melrose (1996) tries to know people personally and communicates his appreciation to them. Conversely, ABC leaders are not sensitive to the leader-subordinate relationship. Thus, it is difficult for ABC leaders or their subordinates to mutually influence one another. As a result, trust between employees and the site leadership team is low. Hence, it is also challenging to integrate employees and organizational goals. During recent feedback training, supervisors voiced their concerns regarding trust and goal integration. The response of the SLT was to propose a training course on trust. Trust, however, is a reciprocal relationship developed over time. For instance, personal knowledge of the other person's past behaviors affects individual willingness to cooperate (Kouzes & Posner, 1997).

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) indicate that, more often than not, the leader's frame of reference, not the objective characteristics of the situation, is the basis for action or inaction. Thus, functional background, education, experience, personality, and other demographic attributes may affect the leader's behavior and choices, including the conscious decision of visibility.

According to Goldhaber (1993), McGregor's concept of integration, allowing employees the freedom to satisfy their higher needs-esteem and self actualization-by aligning personal goals with the goals of the organization results in improved organizational performance. Thus, integration may mitigate the need for heightened leader visibility. However, integration requires trust in the leader-subordinate dyad. At ABC Company's New Jersey site, leadership dismisses the value of integrating employees' personal goals with organizational goals. For instance, although tuition

refund is a component of the employee benefits package, they deny access to tuition benefits to employees. They do not see a performance link between individual improvement and organizational performance. More often than not, they perceive the integration of subordinates' goals as a threat rather than an opportunity.

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) note that social inclusion is more amenable when group members are similar. Thus, depending on the leader's value system, he or she may not be comfortable in a particular work environment, and therefore he or she becomes less visible. The maintenance supervisor recalls in amazement, a former plant manager who one of his coworkers never knew. He wonders how a leader can be invisible in a small facility. If leaders are not visible, they cannot effectively collaborate with subordinates.

Organizational integration of subordinates' goals, as well as visibility, appears to be a function of the leader's values. Nevertheless, visibility enhances the leader's sensitivity to the organization's history, the operating culture, and, most of all, to the employees. A visible leader who exchanges with his or her subordinates has an expanded field of vision by those associations (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Conversely, if the leader is not embedded in the internal organizational processes, subordinates can initiate projects, employee morale can deteriorate, and illegal behavior can occur without his or her knowledge.

## **Listening**

We expect leaders to direct the behavior of others. However, at the ABC site, leaders seldom listen or accept feedback from employees. Thus, they diminish their influence with those they direct. Moreover, since they are not visible, they cannot share their visions.

Feedback sharpens the leader's understanding of the organization, the environment, and impending changes (Harrison & Shirom, 1998). It allows visible leaders to adopt a diagnostic approach in their exchange with employees. Thus, they can examine the current and potential future states of the organization before formulating strategies (p. 32). Harrison and Shirom indicate that diagnostic activities, particularly from leaders, affect subordinates' expectations concerning change and are likely to influence how they think of themselves and the organization. In essence, leaders have a unique opportunity in the exchange process to challenge and mold the subordinate's self-conceptions and behaviors or handle inconsistencies observed during their interaction (Farling et al., 1999).

Leaders who listen to their constituents obtain a comprehensive overview of the operations and can focus on core problems and challenges and, if knowledgeable, they can use theoretical frames to organize core problems and challenges and link them to the organizational features. Additionally, they can develop models that capture the nature of the critical challenges and roots of ineffective outcomes. Finally, they can discuss the model and relevant data with their staff and constituents; Harrison and Shirom (1998) call this process Sharp-Image Diagnosis.

When visible leaders exchange and build relationships with subordinates, they help focus subordinates on specific issues or problems; this is particularly effective when it occurs in an informal setting. Moreover, when leaders signal that it is appropriate for subordinates to question the status quo, they enhance the organizational process of learning to learn (Morgan, 1997).

A visible leader listens and shares his or her views, but if he or she is unconcerned

about the employees' perspective, he or she will cause subordinates frustration and lack trust in the leader (Harrison & Shirom, 1998). Some ABC employees believe that the ABC leadership is not genuinely concerned with employees' interests. For instance, some employees feel that SLT favors substituting them with contract personnel. They point to the fact that there is no investment in expanding employees' capacity. Kouzes and Posner (1997) indicate that education means, "to lead from ignorance" and recommend updating the ability of employees, so they may not depreciate over time. When employees experience growth, they become motivated. Therefore, the growth of those that do the work ought to become a primary organizational aim (Greenleaf, 1977). Organizations must embrace both work and learning.

## **Climate**

Visible leaders who exchange thoughts and vision with followers create positive environments. Conversely, visible leaders that are autocratic, intolerant to subordinates' views, and impose their ideas and insight on followers often create an adverse climate. Climate is more important than communication skills in creating an effective organization (Goldhaber, 1993). Thus, visible leaders can create the appropriate climate for organizational efficiency by listening, serving, aligning, and reinforcing followers' behaviors with the goals of the organization.

Unfortunately, many followers doubt the integrity of the ABC leaders, making it almost impossible for them to establish a positive climate. Additionally, when employees learn that unethical leader behaviors often lead to favorable outcomes, some will also practice these behaviors. Conversely, if they perceive leadership integrity, they will adhere to high ethical actions. For instance, another maintenance supervisor alluded to a climate of integrity under a former plant manager: "There was an explicit understanding that he did not tolerate unethical behaviors." He also noted that even wage employees are capable of establishing benevolent or detrimental working environments among their peers within the organization. Thus, it concurs with Morgan's (1997, p. 168) views that "factory workers are able to control their pace of work and level of earnings, even when under the close eye of their supervisors or efficient experts trying to find ways of increasing productivity."

In essence, even micro-level interaction can affect performance and shape the organization (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Harrison & Shirom, 1998). Thus, when subordinates correctly interpret the leader's shared vision of the organization, they are more prone to align themselves with the organization's goals. And, this can only occur if the shared organizational vision incorporates the needs of subordinates. Furthermore, the degree to which subordinates interact with leaders determines the level of trust. It also affects identification with corporate objectives, compliance with procedures, and willingness to resolve disagreements and conflicts (Harrison & Shirom, 1998).

## **Conclusion**

Personal and anecdotal observations seem to confirm that a leader's visibility influences the leader's constituency. However, whether the leader is visible or not, his or her actions are affecting followers. At the New Jersey ABC Chemical Company, employees appear to have superior memory recall for visible leaders than for leaders that were not visible. Additionally, they indicate that visible leaders have a positive influence on their behavior. Conversely, they suggest that leaders that are not visible give the

impression that they do not care.

Servant leadership is about caring and meeting people's needs (Greenleaf, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 1997). The themes of communication, competence, emulation, integration, listening, and climate highlighted by the study are themes that could be used to enhance caring and understanding. Though the study failed to identify visible caring leaders at the ABC New Jersey site, the employees understood the effect of positive leader-member relationships, and leader visibility is one way to develop these relationships.

There was no evidence of the New Jersey ABC leaders making a conscious choice to be visible or to serve. Rather, it appears that the conscious decision was to erect confining barriers and to command others to help them. Thus, the spirit of servanthood was not evident. Moreover, subsequent conversations with one of the SLT members confirmed these findings. He believes that there is a mental blockage preventing ABC leaders from embracing a more caring attitude towards people. Accordingly, they do not perceive caring and sacrificial spirit as leadership attributes. In essence, they are unaware of the Christian model of leadership and focus only on personal gains.

What is puzzling is that everyone seems to be aware of the existing leadership problems, which are pervasive. However, although visibility enhances communication, and research indicates that more communication leads to higher performance (Kouzes & Posner, 1997), there has been no significant effort to change course and heighten the visibility of the SLT members or that of the supervisors. Conger (1990) points to the cognitive dissonance that prevents the leader and advisers with closely allied views from changing course.

The ABC leaders may be overworked and thus unable to be as visible as they would like to be. The study did not ascertain the validity of this assumption, but casual observation seems to rule overwork as a constraint to leader visibility. However, efficient management of time by the leaders is critical because it allows them to spend more time performing Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) (Fiore, 2000). Accordingly, we seldom find MBWA leaders in their offices. Instead, they are wandering with a purpose. Their commitment is to be with people, and they believe that subordinates are a source of diagnostic information and solutions to problems (Frase & Melton, 1992).

ABC leaders, therefore, should interact more frequently with the site's employees and demonstrate, over time, genuine interest in employees' concerns. Additionally, when they assign visible initiative to subordinates, they should provide visible and continuous nurturing support. Nurturing subordinates will lead to an expansion of human capacity. Likewise, the site leadership should seek inputs and solutions throughout the site, which would improve interpersonal skills and provide an enhanced view of the site's challenges and opportunities. They should also view conflict as a tool for personal and social change and seek win-win outcomes. In conflict, we can find creative tension, a way of deciding with clarity where we want to be, our vision, and the truth about where we are, our current reality (Senge, 1990).

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