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The Forgotten Leaders

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The Forgotten Leaders

The definition of leadership has been diverse and is yet to be defined or too agreed upon. The concept of whom and what a leader actually is, also remains just as elusive as ever. Many authors have tried to describe the ultimate leader, through a range of characteristic actions and behaviours, however, not one complete description has been universally accepted to date.

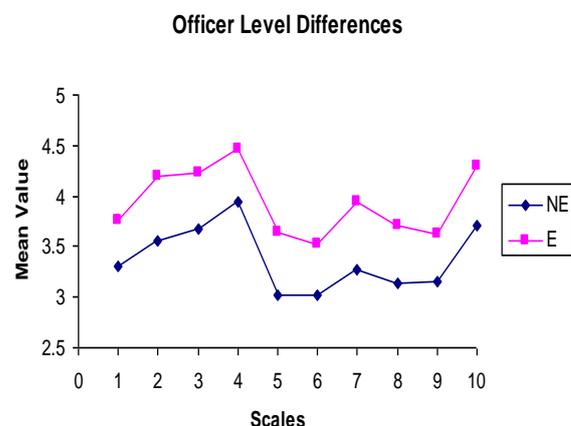
Today we examine another perspective that at present is hidden from view, and in the minds of most Australian Public Sector (APS) leaders, very little effort, in the context of leadership, is directed to those hard working constituents that populate the APS hierarchy from levels one to six. generally called followers, however, we title them assistant leaders.

One wonders how much better the workplace would be if the leaders actively engaged these assistant leaders in leadership education by debate, program, and knowledge dissemination as a part of their learning development. From this there will be a significant improvement in workplace outcomes, followers will understand the leadership framework, the pressures and obligations that go with

leadership, and are more likely to engage and assist the leader in achieving organisational outcomes.

In Doctor Ambrose's research titled "*Identifying the existence and Impact of Transformational Leadership in the Australian Public Sector*" there was a considerable difference in the opinion of transformational leadership behaviour as perceived by the executive officers and non-executive (assistant leaders) officers of the APS. Why transformational leadership?

Transformational leadership has been widely researched and supported by many authors throughout the world as the most effective leadership style affecting and improving workplace outcomes. Doctor Ambrose's research, through the following figure, illustrates the gap between the two groups mentioned beforehand.



Scale numbers one to ten; represent transformational leadership and outcome variable scales

NE= Non executive officers, E= executive officers. Source: Ambrose, 2009

The Vertical Scale is measured from 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Slightly disagree, 4= Slightly agree, 5= Agree, 6 = Strongly agree.

Transformational Leadership Scales

1. Showing Genuine Concern
2. Networking and Achieving
3. Enabling
4. Honesty and Consistency
5. Being Accessible

Outcomes

6. Achievement
7. Motivation
8. Satisfaction with Leadership
9. Stress
10. Commitment

The above figure displays the two main trends in officer level differences noting that the mean values of executive officers for all scales in both transformational leadership scales and variable outcomes are consistently higher, than those of non-executive officers by approximately 0.50, of a mean unit. There are statistically significant differences, between the two groups in all the scales, with the mean values of all scales for executive officers in the positive, for example, above the neutral point (3.5) with achievement being marginally positive. In contrast, six scales for non-executive (assistant leaders) officers were in the negative, that is below the neutral point (3.5) with only two scale means, those being the *honest and*

consistent and the *commitment* scale, approaching a mean value of four and representing the slightly agree answer. This demonstrates that the perceptions of executive officers are more positive than those of the non-executive officers, ranging from the neutral point (3.5) for achievement to the highest (4.5) for the *being honest and consistent* scale.

While the mean values reported for executive officers consistently exceeded those of non-executive (assistant leaders) the mean values are not high. *Showing genuine concern*, has a mean value (3.76) for executive officers, which equates to a ranking just above neutral, and below the slightly agree answer. In other words, even though this scale rating exceeds that of non-executive (assistant leaders) it is not an endorsement that the attributes associated with this scale are practised on a consistent basis in the day to day workplace. It is this scale which has been reported to account for the majority of the variance in the constructs representing transformational leadership by Alimo-Metcalf & Alban-Metcalf (2006). If this mean value is not high, then there is not much expectation that transformational leadership is the dominant form of leadership exhibited by leaders in the sample used in this research. Additionally, it should be noted, the mean value for non-executive officers, for the *showing genuine*

concern scale (3.30) is marginally above the slightly disagree answer. Then it could be proposed that the non-executive group of employees do not perceive this attribute, which is an important aspect of transformational leadership to be inherent in the workplace.

There is a difference in transformational leadership behaviours experienced by executive and non-executive officers.

The results of Doctor Ambrose's research indicate that in comparison to executive officers, non-executive (assistant leaders) have a higher level of dissatisfaction with the leadership behaviours displayed by APS leaders, and that this dissatisfaction is impacting negatively on the everyday work behaviours and outcomes of the non-executive staff. This is a problem for the APS as the low levels of perceived leadership behaviour are now producing low outcomes in the workplace.

From this finding, it appears that these leaders may have been victims of the hierarchal structure, or the constraints imposed by regulation and the workplace environment (Hales, 2002). Another consideration is that they may have been victims of the classical and transactional leadership paradigms inflicted by APS leaders, who have themselves failed to

move with the times to more appropriate and innovative leadership styles. Through this action the APS leaders have ensured that the non-executive officers' perception of leadership remains embedded in the old leadership paradigms that have now been demonstrated as ineffective in today's business environment (Bass, 1985a; Sarros & Santora, 2001; Robbins et al. 2004; Tsai et al. 2009).

A possible explanation for the result is that executive officers work closer to their leaders and, may, by that situation, perceive leadership to be better than it actually is. Another possible explanation is that executive officers situated by the hierarchal structure of the APS are afforded more information, confidentiality and are more frequently exposed to senior leaders. Given these factors, and the executive officer's position of influence within the workplace, it is likely that the executive officers feel that the leadership they experience is more effective. The executive officers may also accept the leadership style and the outcomes that go with it. This could be the result of them knowing little different, or being trapped by the hierarchal structure where expectations and leadership delivery may be experienced differently throughout the APS levels. In opposite, the non-executive (assistant leaders) feel disenfranchised by the leader's distance to themselves.

From the observations above, it appears that the more senior the APS officer is, the more accepting of the environment and the segment's leadership style she or he is. There is also the possibility that APS leaders who have reached the higher levels may think that they do not have to use their interpersonal skills to be an effective leader. If this is the case, then the APS leaders have not changed leadership styles in line with more recent research and thinking, and may be still entrenched in the classical paradigm completely unaware of the possibilities of a newer style of leadership. The effect of this, and worse still, is the view that their leadership style fits all situations.

The concern for the APS is that a high number of non-executive (assistant leaders) indicate that their leaders do not exhibit transformational leadership. While this position is supported by Korac-Kakabadse & Korac-Kakabadse (1997) who found the same situation existed some 14 years ago, the concern is the lack of change during this time, which demonstrates that nothing has changed in the relationship distance between the executive and non-executive (assistant leaders) since then. This outcome clearly indicates that the leadership direction, recruitment and training of leaders has not changed, and now needs to change as

nothing advantageous has happened for the APS, leaders and followers. The finding also indicates a continuance of the ineffective leadership that was discovered in 1997, or that if any change has been implemented, then they, the leaders, have failed to make a difference, or possibly that the APS has ignored the advice and continued with more of the same.

However, what is more disturbing for the APS is that Korac-Kakabadse & Korac-Kakabadse's (1997) study was based on the senior leaders of the APS. Whereas Doctor Ambrose's research has collected the perception of APS respondents from all levels, what this means is that ineffective and under performing leadership in the APS is widespread. This is a significant failing by the APS to bridge the gap, between the executive and non-executive (assistant leaders) and has assisted the non-executive (assistant leaders) in maintaining a negative view of leadership. The non-executive (assistant leaders) officers have been trapped into a negative cycle of their needs being neglected, and in turn have transferred the negativity to the level of outcomes within the workplace.

In consideration, the APS now needs to critically evaluate its hierarchical structure, and workplace in relation to leadership to determine if the hierarchical structure or

leadership are preventing the APS from delivering effective leadership. The APS needs to do this now to arrest the decline in the relationship and workplace outcomes between the executive and non-executive (assistant leaders). The APS also needs to implement an appropriate structure to facilitate the delivery of a new leadership paradigm and style such as transformational leadership, which will provide the non-executive (assistant leaders) what they are looking for, through increased inspiration, motivation and intellectual stimulation.

Doctor Ambrose recommends that all leaders, whether public or private, install a leadership education program for all their

employees. This action will assist in closing the gap between the executive and non-executive (assistant leaders) through education with increased understanding of the complexities of leadership. Also this becomes the first step of holistic engagement between the leaders and followers, resulting in improved workplace outcomes, improved relationships, less stress, and a much easier environment in which leaders can gain and enjoy clear space, and be allowed to think strategically.

Now who is a leader?