

The Influence of Vision on Perceived Organizational Support

By **Katherine Hyatt**, Reinhardt University

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About the Authors: **Dr. Katherine Hyatt is an Assistant Professor of Business at Reinhardt University where she teaches a variety of graduate and undergraduate business courses such as: management, leadership, and finance. She completed a Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) program in Management at Nova Southeastern University and her dissertation was on leadership. Her professional research interests include topics such as: leadership, organizational behavior, and ethics. She is also a current member of the Academy of Management, Southern Management Association, Society for Business Ethics, and Georgia Business Educators Association.**

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Abstract

There has been an intense interest in leadership behaviors that influence others over the past several years. A correlation between the leadership practice of “inspiring a shared vision” has been shown to be related to outcomes such as commitment, satisfaction, performance, and reduced turnover. A correlation has also been shown between these outcomes and perceived organizational support. The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a correlation between the “inspiring a shared vision” and perceived organizational support.

Introduction

Leaders are often considered to be visionary (Lashway, 2000; Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Covey, 2005) and communicating the vision is often viewed as the main source of a leader’s charisma (Leithwood & Jantizi, 2000; Bass, 1985). A vision represents the future dreams and goals of the organization (Covey, 2005). “Managing the dream” refers to the communication of the vision and rewarding performance (Bennis, 2000). Leaders determine success and failure criteria, organizational values, (Schein, 1985) and the organization’s vision. Many aspects of the organization such as commitment performance, and satisfaction are influenced by the vision communicated by the leader. An accepted vision that creates a common purpose is motivational (Tichy & Devanna, 1995), describes culture, explains a feasible way to accomplish a goal (Kotter, 1990), and can influence commitment, performance (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Nanus, 1992), and cohesion (Conger, 1990; Hamel & Prahalad, 1989; Hart, 1992; Porras & Silvers, 1991; Schoemaker & van der Heijden, 1992). A compelling vision positively

affects followers when they are uncertain about the future (Waldman et al., 2001; Javidan & Waldman, 2003). In this study, the researcher suggests that “inspiring a shared vision” influences employees’ perceived organization support as well.

Inspire a shared vision

What makes a great leader? Inspiring a shared vision is an important aspect of leadership because leaders are expected to create and communicate organizational direction (Snee & Hoerl, 2004). There are many definitions of vision. Vision is “an ideal and unique image of the future” explain Kouzes and Posner (1987, p.85). Another definition of vision is “a mental image of a possible and desirable future state of the organization” suggests Bennis and Nanus (1985, p. 89). Transformational leadership induces awareness and acceptance of common mission and purpose of organization (Krishnan, 2002). Leaders should inspire and motivate as well as focus on the future (Kouzes & Posner, 2000; Zagorsek et al., 2004; Conger, Kanungo & Menon, 2000; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999; Judge & Bono, 2000; Jung & Avolio, 2000; Feinberg, Ostroff & Burke, 2005). Weymes (2003) suggest managers should understand the power of an inspirational dream and be committed to it.

According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), an integral part of the strategic planning process is communicating the vision by organizational leaders. Westley and Mintzberg (1989) suggest three stages of articulating the vision: “(1) the envisioning of ‘an image of a desired future organizational state’ (Bass, 1987, p.51) which (2) when effectively articulated and communicated to followers...serves (3) to empower those followers so that they can enact the vision...” (Bass, 1987, p.17-18). The vision must be acknowledged by followers. According to Bennis (1999), a powerful vision can transform routine drudgery into energy that is collective and focused. Transformational leaders have clear goals, image new possibilities, and provide vision for the future (Tucker & Russell, 2004). An inspirational vision entails the direction, destiny, values, and essence of organization that motivates others to be proud of their association with the organization (Weymes, 2005).

Leaders should have a sense of direction, be forward-looking, and focus on the vision for the future as well as be able to communicate it (Kouzes & Posner, 1990, 2004). Kouzes and Posner (1985) found that superior leaders “Envision the future” and “Inspire a shared vision” (Posner et al., 1985, p.302). They measured leaders’ performance and found “the higher scores on leadership practices the higher the leaders’ perceived effectiveness and the higher the satisfaction with the leader” (Posner et al., 1985, p. 302).

Ackoff (1999) describes leaders as guiding, encouraging and facilitating. Leaders communicate visions of the future by appealing to shared values (Felfe et al., 2004). The leadership practice of inspiring a shared vision, communicating a common purpose, and the expression of warmth and enthusiasm through charisma is equivalent to Bass’ (1985) intellectual stimulation components of vision creating or inspirational leadership, and charisma. Inspiring a vision involves looking at the future with passion in order to make a difference and persuade others to own this vision.

Leadership practices such “Inspiring a shared vision” have been linked to outcomes such as commitment, satisfaction, reduced turnover, and performance. The literature has also shown a link between perceived organizational support and these outcomes. However, there has never been a study that has shown a correlation between the leadership practice of “inspiring a shared vision” and perceived organizational support.

Organizational support theory

According to Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Shore, 1995), employees personify organizations as they develop perceived organizational support (POS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). “POS is an experience-based attribution concerning the benevolent or malevolent intent of the organization’s policies, norms, procedures, and action as they affect employees” (Eisenberger et al., 2001, p. 42). Since employees make attributions about the organizations, then they perceive their treatment as whether the organization favors or disfavors them. Attributional processes of employees are used to infer organizational support. These attributional processes are based on experience concerning the caring or non-caring intentions of policies, norms, or actions of an organization that affect employees (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

When perceived organizational support is high, the employees feel obligated to be committed and engage in behaviors that further the goals of the organization (Wayne et al., 1997; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Rhodes et al., 2001; Randall et al., 1999; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). Subordinates’ perceived organizational support helps to achieve company goals (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rousseau, 1989; Wayne et al., 1997; Osca et al., 2005; Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003).

Transference occurs daily since people project human-like qualities upon the organization, and organizations have psychological meaning to their employees (Zaleznick, 1975). This phenomenon occurs because: 1) organizations are responsible for their agents’ actions legally, morally, and financially, 2) organizational policies guide the behaviors of its agents at different locations and times, and 3) there is perception consistency of an employee by others in the organization based on experiences with the employee and a review of their actions as indicated by performance appraisals (Levinson, 1965; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Due to transference and employees’ efforts to fulfill a psychological contract with the organization, reciprocation occurs. Employees reciprocate by commitment to the organization due to perceived organizational support (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Settoon, Bennett & Liden, 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Yoon & Thye, 2002).

Hypothesis

The following research hypothesis and null hypothesis were examined in this study of the influence of leadership practices on perceived organizational support:

H1_N: A significant relationship between the leadership practice of “Inspire a Shared Vision” and subordinate perceived organizational support does not exist.

H1: A significant relationship between the leadership practice of “Inspire a Shared Vision” and subordinate perceived organizational support exists.

Method

Variables

The relationship between the dependent variable of perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and the independent variable of inspire a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) was studied.

Instrumentation

The instruments that were used for data collection in this study contain three important sections: General Demographic Questions, Leadership Practices Inventory: Other (LPI-O) published by James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2003), and the Survey of Perceived organizational support (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). The general questions section of the questionnaire was used to gather personal demographic characteristics of respondents of the sample population. This information was important in summarizing and comparing characteristics. Characteristics included gender, age, type of organization, position in organization, years of service, and education completed.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of the Leadership Practices Inventory: Other (LPIO) instrument. The LPIO consists of 30 descriptive statements (6 statements for each practice) regarding five different leadership practices. The responses were based on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 10 (almost always) with responses placed in five categories of leadership: “Inspiring a shared vision” is the ability of the leader to inspire commitment in subordinates to a shared vision for the organization.

Posner and Kouzes (1993, p.191) in *Psychometric Properties of the Leadership Practices Inventory-Updated* note: “Leadership continues to play a critical role in the operation and understanding of organizations. The ability to reliably measure leadership is important to researchers concerned with the relationship between leadership and other key social-psychological phenomenon.” The Leadership Profile Inventory-Other (LPIO; Kouzes & Posner, 1988) was used. It is useful to evaluate leader behaviors as perceived by subordinates (Herold & Fields, 2004). The LPIO has been shown to have strong reliability and validity (Posner & Kouzes, 1993). It allows subordinates to confidentially assess perceptions of leaders’ performance and effectiveness. Internal reliability scores range from 0.81 to 0.91 in a study of 36,000 managers and their subordinates involving both public and private companies (Posner & Kouzes, 1993). The reliability scores listed in Table 1 of the instrument range from 0.82 to 0.92 in many studies (Posner & Brodsky, 1992). The test-retest reliability was completed using 157 MBA students and was .93 and above for each of the five practices (Posner & Kouzes, 1993).

TABLE 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Reliability Indices

	Mean	Std Dev	LPI (N=36,226)	LPI-Self (N=5,298)	LPI-O (N=30,913)	Test-Rest (N=157)
Inspiring a Shared Vision	20.44	4.89	.87	.80	.88	.93

Posner and Kouzes (1993)

The third section of the questionnaire included the Survey of Perceived organizational support consisting of 36 questions in which the employees indicated the extent they agreed with each item. Half were positively and half negatively worded to control response bias based on a Likert-scale. Some questions (1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9,17,20,21,22,23,25,27,35) are used for a short version of the survey (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The negatively worked questions (3, 6, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 26, 28, 31, 32, 34) were reverse coded. According to Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986): “A reliability and item analysis were performed on the survey. The analysis resulted in a reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) of .97, with item-total correlations ranging from .42 to .83. The mean and median item-total correlations were .67 and .66, respectively. These findings indicate that employees develop global beliefs concerning the degree to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being.”

Results

Data collection, analysis, and descriptive statistics

A cover letter was emailed to 127 MBA students at a major private south Florida University. The cover letter explained the research to each student and contained a link to click on, if they wished to participate anonymously in the study. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of the leadership practice of “inspire a shared vision” on perceived organizational support. The survey was entered into a web-based instrumentation tool. This study was administered directly on the website using this online survey tool for data collection. A cover letter explained the reason for the study and the details of the study. The cover letter detailed the survey content and outline, as well as directions for completion, and assurance of confidentiality was attached to the surveys. The cover letter was emailed to each of the participants containing the link to the website containing the survey.

Of the 127 students that chose to participate, all 127 completed each section of the survey: general questions, Leadership Practices Inventory-Other, and Survey of Perceived organizational support online and submitted their answers confidentially and anonymously. Participants were employed students and permission was obtained from a school official to administer the survey. Permission was obtained from the developers of the surveys to use the surveys in this study. Respondents were asked to complete the survey and submit it via the web. Web-based surveys are becoming increasingly popular due to the reduced cost to administer, flexible format, required completion of answers,

convenience, and reduced turnaround time (Granello & Wheaton, 2004; Evans & Mathur, 2005). A web-based survey format was chosen due to the convenience of being out to send out the survey via email instead of gathering all the participants in the same room or mailing a survey. A web-based survey also allowed participants to take the survey at their convenience. All questions had to be answered in order to submit the survey and the researcher was able to collect responses within one month of sending out the survey.

The Leadership Practices Inventory-Other contains 30 descriptive statements that employees used to rate their supervisor on the usage of five leadership practices with six statements for each practice. In order to test the hypotheses concerning the leadership practices inventory results, the Pearson product moment correlation was used. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample population, dependent, and independent variables. Correlational analysis was performed to reveal the relationship between the variables. Cronbach alpha was performed to show the internal reliability of the survey instruments.

This study examined the influence of the leadership practice of “inspiring a shared vision” on perceived organizational support. This study indicates a relationship between “inspiring a shared vision” and the variable, perceived organizational support. The descriptive statistics for this leadership practice is shown in Table 2. The answers of respondents ranged from a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 10. The results show the mean score of “inspiring a shared vision was 6.0879 and the standard deviation for was 2.56707.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Leadership Practices Inventory

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard. Deviation
INSPIRE A SHARED VISION	127	1.00	10.00	6.0879	2.56707

The Hypothesis was tested and analyzed using the Pearson Correlation 2-tailed test. Table 3 shows the correlation between “Inspire a shared vision” and Perceived organizational support. The data indicates a significant positive relationship ($r = .619$, $p < 0.01$). The null hypothesis is rejected. In order for employees to perceive organizational support, the organization must have a shared vision among subordinates and supervisors. If there is not a common vision, then employees do not know what direction the company is headed and do not feel supported. Employees must “buy into” or assist in developing the vision in order to feel a part of the organization. If the supervisor shares the vision, their subordinates feel connect to the organization and supported by the organization (Tichy & Devanna, 1995; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Nanus, 1992; Conger, 1990). If leaders do communicate the vision to followers, then they are more likely to share in the goals of the vision.

Components of “Inspire a shared vision” include envision the future and enlist others (Gabris & Ihrke, 2000). Leaders can communicate inspire a clear, sincere, shared vision that influences followers (Waldman et al., 2001; Javidan & Waldman, 2003) and is linked

to POS (Allen, 1992; 1995). The researcher summarizes that once a shared vision is perceived, then organizational support is also perceived.

Table 3: Correlations between “Inspire a shared vision” and Perceived organizational support

		INSPIRE A SHARED VISION	PERCIEVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT
INSPIRE A SHARED VISION	Pearson Correlation	1	.619(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	127	127
PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT	Pearson Correlation	.619(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	127	127

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The null hypothesis was used to test whether a relationship existed between subordinates perceived organizational support and supervisor’s leadership practice of “inspiring a shared vision”. Perceived organizational support was tested by the Survey of perceived organizational support (Eisenberger, et al., 1984) and leadership practices were tested by the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

The results of this research showed a significant positive relationship between perceived organizational support and “inspire a shared vision” (Kouzes & Posner, 1988). It is important to understand that this leadership practice contribute to subordinates’ perceived organizational support since this information could direct leaders to valuable information about commitment, performance, turnover, organizational citizenship behavior, and satisfaction.

Discussion

Practical implications

The researcher’s findings were consistent with the findings of Bass (1997). According to Bass (1997), now and in the future leaders must do more envisioning, enabling, and empowering including the five leadership practices addressed in this study. This research established a relationship between “inspiring a shared vision” and perceived organizational support. Managers need to recognize the importance of the exchange relationship between supervisors and subordinates everyday in organizations. Employees spend so much time in organizations working with others that they identify with the organization and ascribe feelings and characteristics to the organization (Eisenberger et

al., 1990) based on the supervisor's behaviors. Leaders' actions or behaviors reflect their feelings about employees and the organization as a whole. This study confirms the vital importance that leaders engage in leadership practices that will encourage employee commitment and perceived organizational support to performance (Eisenberger et al., 1990).

This study substantiates a significant positive relationship between inspire a shared vision and perceived organizational support. Thus, this study supported the hypothesis. The practice of inspiring a shared vision has a profound impact on employees and organizational performance. The significance of the relationship between the behaviors of leaders on subordinate perceived organizational support in this study cannot be ignored. The practical implications of research suggest agreement with findings from previous studies. This study also proposes leader behaviors provide powerful communication to employees (Grojean et al., 2004). Effective leaders communicate the mission and vision of the organization in a convincing, inspiring manner (Weymes, 2004; Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001).

The researcher established a significant positive relationship exists between "inspiring a shared vision" and perceived organizational support. These findings imply that developing and communicating a shared vision connects employees to the organization which can lead to feelings of perceived support at work. A shared vision provides meaning and purpose for the organization and its employees (Weymes, 2004) including greater identification with the organization for the employees, which leads to feelings of involvement, cohesiveness, commitment, and enhanced performance (Bass et al., 2003). When the values, goals, mission, and vision of the organization are aligned with those of the employee, there is increased commitment and satisfaction with the organization. Employees that are not inspired by their jobs, not challenged, or lack opportunity have little satisfaction in their work and have little motivation to improve performance (Weymes, 2004). This shared vision creates "we" the organization instead of an "us" versus "them" and the organization will benefit.

The implications of this research can be useful to organizations indicating managers need to share the organizational vision with employees in order for employees to perceive organizational support. A shared vision guides the performance of an organization. According to Snee and Hoerl (2004), to succeed a leader must: (1) create the direction, (2) communicate the direction, (3) set people up for success, and (4) catch people doing things right. This study shows that leadership practices such as: inspiring a shared vision, modeling the way, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart are related to perceived organizational support. The importance of leadership practices in employee perceived organizational support cannot be underscored as evidenced in this study. Research has shown that a relationship between perceived organizational support and performance (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Kouzes and Posner's (1987) leadership practices can serve as a guide for aspiring leaders in order to improve organizational effectiveness. If leaders do not engage in "inspiring a shared vision", it may cost the organization in terms of performance (Dawson et al.,

1972; Swanson & Johnson, 1975). According to this research, this leadership practices will result in employees' perceive support. Leaders should make every effort to support, sustain, maintain, and promote support through "inspiring a shared vision". The researcher concurs with Kouzes and Posner (1987) that extraordinary outcomes are achieved by inspiring a shared vision. With today's rapidly changing environment organizations cannot produce mediocre results but must achieve extraordinary outcomes to be successful.

Assumptions, limitation, and suggestions for future research

This study assumes that the data collection method was appropriate and valid. This study was limited to employed students and it will be assumed that the respondents were competent and answered honestly. Assumptions were made by the researcher that their answers were useful to make generalizations regarding the influence of leadership practices on perceived organization support in most organizations.

One limitation of this study was the population consisted only of MBA students at one prestigious South Florida University. The respondent sample size was adequate but a larger population may have improved the results. Further research with a different population could provide more insight into leadership practices and employees' perceived support. Also another limitation of this study was that it was cross-sectional and not longitudinal. A longitudinal survey may have been helpful to see if perceived organizational support changed based on changes of demographics, such as years of service, type of organization, and position in the organization or if the leader was changed throughout the term of the respondents' employment.

Further studies should be performed on different populations in different types of organizations ranging from government, nonprofit, private, and public sectors as well as various industries or employees from one specific industry or organization. Further students should be completed using larger populations and across longitudinal time frames. The relationship of gender differences between supervisors and employees should also be studied. Both leadership practices and perceived organizational support have been found to be linked to increased commitment, satisfaction, performance, decreased turnover, and absenteeism. Further research should be executed in a variety of areas including any intermediate factors between leadership practices and perceived organizational support.

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