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Effective Leadership in a Service Center Setting: an Analysis of how to Increase Tenure Among Employees through a Blended Leadership Model

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EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN A SERVICE CENTER SETTING:

AN ANALYSIS OF HOW TO INCREASE TENURE AMONG

EMPLOYEES THROUGH A BLENDED LEADERSHIP MODEL

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN A SERVICE CENTER SETTING TO INCREASE

TENURE AMONG EMPLOYEES THROUGH A BLENDED LEADERSHIP

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Service Centers experience high turnover rates among employees. Creating a healthy working environment through effective leadership in a service center setting can be difficult due to the particular features of a service center. This analysis of the organizational literature on service centers leads to the development of a blended leadership model. Using the Transformational and Transactional Leadership models with an emphasis on role clarity, empowerment, trust, approachability of the leader, employee/leader relationship, contingent versus non-contingent behavior, and monitoring, the blended leadership model incorporates these concepts to provide an ideal type that would guide a call center leader in helping the group reach their shared purpose and decrease employee turnover The central claim of the analysis is: the advantage of the blended leadership model is that it helps create a healthy working environment for people to grow in their respective roles and as a group because it focuses on creating good relationships with individual employees and offering leadership and empowerment specific to their needs while communicating a group vision.

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I. Introduction

Leadership styles should differ from one field to another, adapting to best meet the needs of employees and the goals of the group. This paper examines leadership styles in a service center setting with an emphasis on leader behaviors that promote tenure among employees. A result of the analysis is a blended leadership model specific to call centers that was developed using both the pre-existing Transformational and Transactional leadership models and then applying the research from the literature review to create a unique model. This blended leadership model relies primarily on Burns' concept of Transactional Leadership, but also incorporates the Transformational Leadership to connect the employees' work to a larger picture. The literature review provided techniques that are incorporated into the model to attempt to lead through both Transactional and Transformational Leadership.

The specific challenges leaders face in the service center setting require analysis of the leadership behaviors to best deal with these issues and move forward as a group. Leadership is different than management in that leadership implies that change is occurring for the betterment of the department or organization. Management is typically maintaining a state of order. Management is a crucial part of leadership, but they are not the same.

For the purposes of this analysis, service or call centers are defined as a working environment in which employees provide service to customers over the phone and are expected to be available on the phone for >75% of their time at work.

II. Good versus Bad Turnover

High turnover rates plague the service center industry due to a number of circumstances including rate of pay, type of work and people looking to further their careers (Whitt 235). Whitt states that, "it is widely recognized that contact-center performance is often hampered by low employee job satisfaction, as evidenced by high turnover" (235). High turnover rates pose a problem because "the costs of time and lost productivity are no less important or real than costs associated with paying cash to vendors for services such as advertising and temporary staff. "The cost of employee turnover is very real - estimated to reach "150% of the employees annual compensation figure" (Bliss). The high cost of employee turnover is not surprising given the lost productivity, the need to ask service center agents to work overtime to meet the needs of the service center, and the time, money and effort of hiring, training and orienting a new employee to the organization's service center. Training is typically done by other agents in the service centers, which entails pulling the experienced agent off the phones in order to train the new employee. Given these multiple considerations, there are many reasons for leaders to attempt to decrease the rate of turnover through effective leadership.

However, not all employee turnover is considered negative for an organization; at times it is better for both the employee and the department if the employee moves on. "In the theoretical literature, a more balanced view on turnover has been upheld, according to which turnover may actually yield benefits" (Glebeck 278). This statement seems logical because there are low-performing employees who cannot live up to the employer's standards. These employees require more time, effort and, ultimately, money from the organization because of the coaching and re-training that is needed. There comes a point where these employees become a drain rather than a benefit to the organization. These

low-performers, coupled with problem employees (those who are not willing to work for the benefit of the organization but, instead, represent only their own needs) can be coached to improve. However, the decision to improve is dependent upon the employee, and the role of a manager is to coach to a certain point and then begin the discipline process to move them out of their position if they cannot, or are not willing to meet goals and expectations. The role of a leader in this situation is to find the balance-between when leadership to push an employee to his or her utmost potential is helpful, and when an employee needs to move on.

At the same time, some employees at the other end of the spectrum can rise to leadership roles within the call center. These high-achievers will only be satisfied in their position as long as they are challenged. The responsibility of a leader in these instances is to find roles for these employees that challenge them and allow them to grow. Eventually a service center job will no longer be satisfying for these high-achievers and a leader, should encourage those employees to move onward in their career, even though it might not be in the best interest of the department. In the meantime, a leader must find a way to utilize the high-achieving employees' abilities to the benefit of both the organization *and* the employee. While it may seem counter-intuitive for a manager to encourage a star-employee to leave the department to find better opportunities, a leader should do what is best for the employee balanced with what is best for the company. When a star employee leaves to find another opportunity, although it is a hardship for the department, it does create an opportunity for another employee to rise into a leadership role within the service center. This continual growth is the sign of an effective leader.

A leader, therefore, needs to manage a service center effectively to move low-efficiency employees, encourage the new people to grow and create a positive working environment for the rest of the employees to decrease unnecessary turnover. The following section examines at the literature focusing on characteristics of quality leaders in a service center setting.

III. Common themes throughout the literature

There is a plethora of literature on leadership styles and subsequent employee reactions within a service center setting, and within it are a number of themes relevant to this project because they directly or indirectly impact employee turnover. These themes provide the foundation for the revised leadership model presented later in this paper.

The shared characteristics an effective leader should exhibit while working in a call center setting are role clarity, empowerment, motivation, communication of vision, trust, relationships between the leader and the employee, approachability of the leader, contingent vs. non-contingent behavior, and monitoring. The complexity of effective leadership quickly becomes apparent due to the interconnectedness of these variables.

Role Clarity

The issues surrounding role clarity and role ambiguity within a service center are complex because role clarity is continually presented in the literature as a factor that has a great impact on job satisfaction, tenure and trust. For employees to have role clarity, they must know what is expected of them, how to access the resources to effectively complete the tasks assigned to them, who they report to and what the consequences will be if they do not meet those expectations; alternately, role ambiguity is the absence of one or more of those characteristics. Employees define their roles by those with whom they interact

in their jobs. Frontline employees interact across boundaries (within the organization and from outside), which complicates role expectations resulting in role ambiguity. "They are consequently likely to perceive differing sets of role expectations from their various role-senders" (Douthitt 10). The innate role ambiguity involved with the structure of service center work poses a particular leadership challenge because of how important the research has shown role clarity to be (11). Douthitt states that an increase in rate of change within the workplace can increase the likelihood that employees will experience role ambiguity (13). Unfortunately, service centers are environments prone to high levels of change because of high turnover rates and the departmental requirement to adapt with the organization. This environment poses another challenge to the leader in his or her efforts to clarify role expectations. Douthitt proposes that effective communication is key to reducing role ambiguity and that positive feedback can decrease role ambiguity (14).

If the employee does not know what is expected, he or she is not likely to meet the leader's expectations, which will result in tension and a reduction in job satisfaction for both the employee and the leader. "When the [service center employee] fails to understand what his superior expects of him, the superior is likely to express disapproval and apply negative reinforcements, which, in turn, will reduce the focal person's satisfaction" (Green 214). The clear communication of expectations resulting in role clarity also provides a source of motivation—the manner in which a leader communicates their expectations to their employees is important (Komaki "Beyond" 95). Clear communication should be done through "instructions, rules, training or goals" (92).

But the most interesting—and possibly counter-intuitive—statement regarding role clarity was made by Podsakoff. "Leaders who continually urge or exhort followers to search for new and better methods of doing things create ambiguity, conflict, or other forms of stress in the minds of those followers" (Podsakoff 135). Because much of the leadership theory argues for empowerment, the discord that Podsakoff presents in regard to role clarity begs that the role of empowerment be examined.

Empowerment

Empowerment would seem to be logical in many leadership settings, but there is some disagreement of its role in a service center. Douthitt examined the issue of empowerment and described it as such: "Leader empowering behaviors include delegating authority, supporting employee autonomy, sharing information and helping employees develop needed skills" (Douthitt 6). These empowering skills take a chance that a service center employee will not follow company policies and procedures, but doing so can drastically improve an employee's job satisfaction. Douthitt adds, "When leaders support autonomy in their subordinates, the subordinates will perceive lower levels of role ambiguity" (28). However, it is crucial that the leader communicate clear behavioral expectations along with empowerment, otherwise role ambiguity will result. Ultimately, Douthitt makes a connection to transformational leadership and how it creates vision for the group, which will be further examined in Section IV.

Bowen also suggests that empowerment may not be as crucial in a service center environment as in other sectors of the work-force. Empowering employees can lead them to break the rules to provide satisfied customers, which can be positive in some environments, like sales, but in other settings breaking rules can wreak havoc (33). This

type of empowerment may be detrimental in a service center, especially a medical service center that does scheduling, because their customers are both the patients and the providers, and satisfying the patient may negatively impact the provider. Because of this, strict rules are in place to guide the employees in their work. A leader must be cautious that empowerment could ultimately lead to poor customer service if the role expectations are not clearly defined.

It also was argued that employee control or empowerment is contingent upon the employee's perception of being able to have an impact in their work environment, and determine that employees' actions are driven by their perceptions of their ability to affect positive change (Greenberger 405). This argument suggests that empowering employees can, in fact, affect their behaviors, but that they must feel that they have power to make change in order to do so.

The ability of a leader to communicate vision and subsequently motivate their employees is not a simple task. However, the effects of communicating vision to aid in empowering employees and providing group cohesiveness are shown throughout the research. While empowerment can provide increased job satisfaction, it does not necessarily motivate employees. This paradox can be a particularly difficult task in a service center where the work can be very monotonous with a low rate of compensation. It is challenging to motivate employees when they receive low rates of pay for repetitive work; it is not simple to connect that work to a large organization goal such as, for example, serving the community through great patient care.

Communication of vision is a key component of transformational leadership (Northouse 132). It is through the communication of higher level goals to employees that

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motivation can begin to occur, which can be a particularly daunting task when the focus is on performance, as is the tendency in a call center. However, the effort to show employees why their work is important to the larger picture remains worthy of a leader's effort.

While communication of vision is important, motivation is not restricted to big-picture ideas. "The motivational functions of the leader consist of increasing personal pay-offs to subordinates 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 324). A leader needs to motivate employees by making their goals attainable and providing tangible pay-offs for them as well. Leaders, therefore, need to engage in creative planning to offer incentives to meet expectations. The obstacles for a leader in making these goals a reality are their own multiple time demands and the nature of the work in a service center that requires employees to be available to customers/patients on the phones throughout the day.

Trust

Convincing employees of the benefits of participating in a motivated manner will not work without developing trust with the employees. Podsakoff states that, "effective leaders are ones that earn the trust of their followers" (109). Some leaders feel that their roles as leaders are to serve their followers in order to empower them, but a service center is not an appropriate milieu in which to exhibit this type of leadership. While it can be argued that intellectual stimulation, when accompanied by clear role expectations, is an important part of empowerment, Podsakoff argues that it does not increase trust (135).

Trust is such a key element not only for a positive work environment, but also overall job satisfaction.

Fairness

What aids in the development of trust is the perception of fairness and justice by the employee. Douthitt suggests that "leader behaviors are proposed to influence service performance through their effect on role and justice perceptions" (7). This goal of increasing trust can be accomplished by decreasing role ambiguity. "Leader behaviors associated with higher levels of role ambiguity will also be perceived as less fair because they provide employees with insufficient information about what they are expected to do or how they successfully accomplish their goals" (8). It becomes increasingly clear that role clarity should be a main focus of leader behavior because so many other behavioral factors (job performance, job satisfaction, turnover intent) are reliant upon it. Insufficient role messages may be perceived by the employee as unfair (22). Yet, fairness is paramount as it influences trust in leaders, attachment to the group and commitment to the organization (30). And through role clarity and leader accountability and sharing of information (31), employee perception of fairness increases. In addition, leaders should also provide the opportunity to give input to employees in order to increase the perception of fairness (35). Combined with monitoring—which also plays a large role in employee perception of fairness—a greater idea of fairness can be imparted to employees. A leader should look at hard data in order to be fair with employees—however, the presentation of that data is dependent upon the development of a positive working relationship between the leader and employee through the exhibition of soft skills.

Approachability of the Leader

Douthitt discusses two behavioral dimensions of effective leaders: clarification of expectations and standards, and concern, support and friendliness toward subordinates (14). Clear expectations need to be communicated by someone the employee respects. Respect is developed through positive relationships, trust, and genuine concern. While it may seem intuitive, it is important for a leader to show genuine concern for the employee, friendliness while maintaining appropriate boundaries, and compassion toward the employee. Yet, this can prove to be quite difficult to achieve in a busy working environment when employees are expected to be available on the phones in a service center. Demonstrating concern when there is not inherently a lot of communication between the leader and employee, again, takes effort and creativity on the part of the leader. When a leader is trying to develop a positive working relationship, they need to connect with the employee on a personal level; they need to show that they are interested in the employee as a person. One way to accomplish this is through social interactions, which proves to be difficult when the employee is expected to be available on the phones throughout the day.

Employee/Leader relationship

Trust is the foundation for development of the employee/leader relationship. On this topic, the literature presented an alternate perspective; subordinates were found "to have a discernable impact on the subsequent behavior of managers" (Komaki and Citera 102). This idea brings another element to light: the interaction between leader and employee is a two-way street. Up until this point in the literature review, all employee/leader interactions seemed to be completely leader driven, but it appears to be

more complicated than that. Leaders are influenced by their employees' actions, as well as by hard data, goals, and vision.

The convolution of the manager/employee relationship is also affected by another factor: approachability of the leader. Creating a positive, yet effective, working relationship requires open communication. House states that leaders needs to, "plan, organize, direct and control," yet be approachable and friendly (House 321). This should be achievable by creating a safe working environment where open communication occurs freely. It seems, though, that this may not be as simple when other factors, such as feedback and monitoring are taken into consideration. The role of a leader is to provide feedback to the employee about his or her behavior. If there are performance management issues to address, a leader must establish herself as an authoritative figure in order to correct problems in the employee's performance or behavior. It is difficult for leaders to establish themselves as both authoritative figures and people the employee can go to with problems and find a sympathetic ear. One tack that may be effective is consistency and fairness. If employees see their leader as fair and compassionate, but having clear expectations that an employee will be held accountable, this relationship is possible. An example of this occurred in my workplace when I needed to address an employee's performance. In this instance, I clearly defined the expectations, asked if she felt she needed additional training to make this happen and followed-up regularly. The performance issue has been resolved. However, the employee mentioned that the process was more manageable because I had made a conscious effort to get to know her as a person and that she felt that there was genuine care and approachability by the leadership.

Without this, the process would likely have been more stressful and may not have ended as successfully.

Contingent versus Non-Contingent Behavior

Leader behaviors typically fall under one of two categories: contingent and non-contingent behaviors. Contingent behavior is perceived as fair while non-contingent behavior increases empowerment. An employee's desire for control is dependent upon how obtainable he perceives that control to be, which is contingent upon supervisory behaviors (Greenberger 407). A mix of contingent and non-contingent supervisory behaviors gives an employee a feeling of control and "enhance [an] employee's feelings of competence" (414). This contingent behavior makes people feel reassured, which Greenberger suggests is a basic human need (414). There is a need for balance between transactional and transformational leadership.

By far the most controversial topic related to leadership in a service center, however, is that of monitoring. Douthitt readily recognizes the disagreement that exists in the field. Regardless of whether it has a positive or negative effect upon the employee, the leader must be aware of the message that monitoring sends to the employee. The argument is that monitoring should reduce role ambiguity when accompanied by clear expectations. Douthitt argues that monitoring can be useful when followed up with recognition and feedback. "When empowering behaviors are accompanied by structuring behaviors such as monitoring may be perceived as more informational than controlling" (28). Additionally, Douthitt argues that if leaders do not use clarification behaviors, increased monitoring decreases perceived fairness (74). This interconnectedness of leadership concepts becomes apparent yet again. If a service center agent sees that their

leader is monitoring their work and does not give feedback, it is possible the employee with perceive this leader behavior as an attempt to find error in his or her work. However, if the monitoring is followed by both positive and negative feedback, it is more likely that the employee will perceive this leader behavior as an attempt to help the employee improve his or her performance.

Monitoring

Effective managers spend more time monitoring and giving feedback than less effective managers. Komaki states that "it was thought that effective managers would not necessarily deliver more positive or fewer negative consequences than marginally effective managers. Instead it was considered more important that consequences be delivered contingently and frequently" (Komaki "Toward" 271). In another work by the same author, she states that, "effective managers go further than simply providing antecedents and go on to: (1) gather relevant information about performance (monitor) and (b) let subordinates know how they are doing (provide consequences)" (Komaki "Beyond" 92). Komaki and Citera argue that providing clear role expectations is not enough to be an effective manager. They ultimately reported that "support was found for the proposed idea that performance monitoring sets into motion a series of reciprocal performance-related events" (103). Monitoring provides data to give appropriate feedback to employees in a service center setting.

On the other side of this issue, Batt argues that, "pervasive use of electronic monitoring creates dissatisfaction and stress among employees, providing incentives for workers to quit" (Batt 589). Batt states that monitoring, especially when done excessively, puts stress on employees and decreases job satisfaction. While there is much

evidence to support the positive effects of monitoring, Batt presents the alternate point of view stating that monitoring can be harmful. A leader should consider this point of view when determining whether or not to use monitoring in their work environment. If monitoring is viewed as scrutinizing the employees work rather than trying to find opportunities for improvement, it is not surprising that the employee may not care for being monitored.

While there is much argument on the impact and effectiveness of monitoring, the prior qualities including developing a positive relationship with the employee, being approachable, and cultivating a sense of trust in the leader creates an environment in which monitoring can be a useful tool as long as it is quickly followed-up with feedback. The feedback will reduce role ambiguity that can be associated with monitoring and provides an opportunity for discussion surrounding performance. If approached in a positive manner, the leader can present monitoring as an opportunity for growth, rather than punishment. The employee needs to know that the leader is fair and caring, but also have clear perceptions of their job expectations. When monitoring occurs, the leader needs to approach it in a way that leads the employee to understand that it is not being used to "catch" the employee to discipline, but rather to provide opportunities for growth.

IV. Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Whether explicitly stated or not, throughout the literature review it is implied that appropriate leadership behaviors in a call center setting fall under the Transactional Leadership model and to a lesser extent, the Transformational Leadership model. Transactional Leadership is defined as, the "bulk of leadership models, which focus on

the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers" (Northouse 132). This concept was originally developed by James MacGregor Burns, who defines leadership as "leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations...of both the leaders and followers" (Burns 19). This is a different perspective than just making a follower do what the leader wants or sees as necessary-there is a matter of inspiration. More specifically, Burns includes in the definition of Transactional Leadership an exchange of something valued during which the participants are viewed as people and the "bargainers have no enduring purpose that holds them together" (20). This leadership style is characterized by positive and negative reinforcement, which lends itself well to monitoring and reinforcing good behavior or performance and helps in disciplining or coaching employees that need improvement. Bernard Bass depicted these concepts well. Appendix A illustrates Bernard Bass' interpretation of the Transactional Leadership process.

Although generally applicable, this Leadership Style is rather simple and would not alone be sufficient in an environment where trust has shown to be crucial in maintaining a healthy work place.

To create a deeper relationship, another leadership style is necessary to invoke a shared vision among the group. Burns states,

> "The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (4).

The Transformational Leadership model certainly fills in some of the gaps left by Transactional Leadership by communicating vision and motivating employees to improve

themselves. However, it should be cautioned that transformational leadership could create role ambiguity if not communicated clearly. Appendix B shows Bass' visual representation of Transformational Leadership.

Each of these styles has pros and cons for service center application. Transactional Leadership is applicable to a service center setting because of the emphasis on reward, which lends itself to the quick and regulated nature of the call center. However, Transactional Leadership neglects to mention certain leadership behaviors that should be incorporated. Transactional Leadership is too rudimentary to create growth, but rather merely controls behaviors through a system of positive and negative reinforcement. These rewards and punishments effectively control behavior, but do not seem to promote a desire to stay in the position or commitment to a position itself on the part of the employee. Appendix C shows a first-hand account of how these leadership styles occur in practice. Transactional Leadership provides the positive feedback that can build the confidence necessary to move into a realm where Transformational Leadership can be effective.

Transformational Leadership has qualities that are beneficial to cause growth in a service center, but also runs the risk of increasing role ambiguity if not handled carefully. The work in service centers is typically regimented, as staff has a prescribed action for every situation. In a medical call center, for example there are many rules staff must follow to satisfy both the patient and the provider. If the medical service center provides the patient with an appointment when desired, but the provider needs a certain amount of time held for certain ailments, the service center agent must be kind and explain that they want to find the best possible appointment time while still following the provider's

instructions for appointment duration. With so many rules in place, leaders are trying to inspire employees to grow in their respective roles run the risk of empowering them to the point where they no longer following the rules. (Appendix C). Because empowerment has been shown to increase role ambiguity, a leader should use Transformational Leadership carefully.

Due to this risk, there may be a tendency for leaders to try *not* to implement Transformational Leadership tactics. However, I argue that without Transformational Leadership, and strictly adhering to a more Transactional Leadership model-leadership does not actually take place because change does not occur. For leadership to exist, there needs to be a common goal that is accepted by the group, and a leader must aid the group in making changes to improve. Without change or growth there can be no leadership, only management. This claim is not to demean the management role within a call center, because it is vital in supporting the employee. Rather, without a connection to the larger picture and to encourage employees to grow, pure management runs the risk that the department will be stagnant. A leader must therefore be clear about both role expectations and the connection of this to the larger picture. Without these common goals, the monotony of the work may cause many employees to become uninspired and bored with their jobs. How a leader communicates this larger vision and implements changes requires a multi-faceted effort. It is not enough to simply write the goal of the department in a visible place; it must be incorporated into conversations, staff-meetings, and departmental and individual goals in order to actually make any impact.

Neither the Transactional nor the Transformational leadership models successfully illustrate how leadership in a service center setting should be executed; they

both leave something to be desired. The blended leadership model proposed in the next section is specific to a service center and remedies the issue that neither Transactional nor Transformational Leadership completely fulfills the leadership needs in a Service Center.

V. Proposed Leadership Model

The blended leadership model presented in this paper aims to include some aspects, and omit others, from both Transactional and Transformational Leadership to form a new leadership model that is effective for the unique setting of a service center. Approximately 70% of the blended leadership model is made up of Transactional Leadership behaviors that elicit responses from employees through a reward and punishment system. These behaviors are supported by behaviors such as monitoring, giving feedback, clarifying expectations etc. The other 30% of the blended leadership model is developed out of the Transformational Leadership behaviors such as communication of vision and empowerment. Throughout this process the leader must continue to develop trust and maintain approachability to make her other efforts effective. A visual representation of this blended leadership model is shown below:

Figure A. Blended Leadership Model

Leader has a Vision for the Group (Transformational Leadership)
Leader Communicates Vision to the Group

Leader is compassionate and friendly toward employees, which develops trust

Leader clarifies role expectations

Leader provides exchanges (transactional leadership) to achieve desired outcome

Monitors employee performance and provides feedback

Sets clear goals with employee and meets regularly to check-in on progress

If performance needs improvement, begin coaching or formal discipline process

Recognizes employees' ability to excel and provides opportunities for growth

Leader should listen to employees' ideas for change and implement if appropriate

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The blended leadership model has a couple expectations of leader behaviors that must be demonstrated throughout the entire process. These two aspects are derived from the Transformational Leadership model.

The leader must have a vision for the group and then communicate it and encourage the group to subscribe to the vision. An example of this in a medical service center would be for the leader to want the group to provide excellent customer service to patients, yet have few errors in the schedules they are creating, improving the impression of the service center throughout the organization. The purpose and challenge of a group goal is to bring the employees' thought processes from an individual perspective to a group perspective. This goal can be realized by the leader improving the tools that the group has available to them, bettering the technology and developing task forces to include high-performing employees to help make these changes. Communicating this goal is the leader's role, but owning the vision is every person's responsibility. The leader can attempt to instill this ownership throughout the group, by constant reminders about the groups' goals and pointing out connections to the employees' work whenever possible.

The other aspect of leadership critical to this process is the leader showing compassion and friendliness toward her employees. This step is crucial to develop trust and a positive working relationship with the employees. However, developing trust can prove to be difficult within a service center because individual goals likely include being on the phones for the majority of the day. The leader should not distract the employee from his work and the development of trust can be time-consuming. However, showing

an active interest in the employee whenever possible and supporting him in his work should aid in building these relationships.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this leadership model, as is shown throughout the literature review, is for the leader to provide clear role expectations to the employee. Role clarity was shown to be one of the most important aspects of leadership in a service center because it impacts many other aspects of the employees' work.

To enforce the role expectations, the leader should provide exchanges to achieve the desired outcomes. This aspect of Transactional Leadership couples positive and negative reinforcement to reinforce the role expectations. For example, if an employee does his job correctly, there is recognition for his work. If the group performs well as a whole, there may be a reward for the group. If improvements need to be made, the leader must be clear about the expectations through either coaching or the formal discipline process. Coaching or discipline should always have a follow-up plan in place so that the employee is clear that it is his responsibility to make the necessary changes, but that the leader will support him in whatever way is deemed appropriate (if necessary). It is important for a leader to recognize and reward positive work and appropriately deal with negative outcomes in the work place.

The concept of monitoring was, perhaps, the most controversial throughout the literature. However, it is included in this leadership model, because of the positive impact that monitoring has when coupled with immediate feedback. If the employee/leader relationship is strong, the employee will be more likely to respect his leader, and accept the feedback from monitoring as an opportunity for growth rather than being scrutinized for mistakes. However, it is critical that the employee receives both

positive as well as negative feedback on his work so that he clearly understands the intent of the monitoring of his work. Without this feedback, the employee is more likely to misinterpret the intent of monitoring. For example, if an employee is approached by a leader and told that he is being monitored and then told what he is doing wrong, the natural response of the employee would be to feel trapped by the monitoring and become defensive, rather than seeing an opportunity for growth. However, if an employee is monitored and the leader gives the employee praise for the good work, following that information with areas where there could be some improvement, the employee is more likely to see that the leader cares about the employee's performance and wants him to be successful. In the latter example, monitoring would be more likely to have a positive impact, instigate dialogue about performance and give the employee and leader the opportunity to communicate.

As a leader progresses through this leadership model, the goal is to have instilled a desire for the employee to own and want to improve his work to aid in the group's vision. The leader should empower her employee to take charge of his work environment by sitting down with the employee and writing goals with him. If the employee writes his own goals, rather than having goals given to him, he likely will take ownership of these goals and be more likely to make a concerted effort to make those improvements. For example, a goal for a lower-performing employee might be to decrease his error rate. For a higher-performing employee, these goals might include developing improvements to the service center processes. After the goals are written, the leader must check in regularly with the employee to see how he is doing. This expectation holds the employee accountable and shows that the leader is taking an active interest in him.

The final step in this blended leadership model is for the leader to recognize employees' opportunities for growth. The leader must listen to employees' ideas for improvement and attempt to implement those ideas if they are appropriate. This step holds the leader accountable to keep the process moving.

This leadership model is cyclical in nature so that when the final step is completed, the leader begins again by clarifying the role expectations. The hope is that through this process the group will be clear about the role expectation and will be motivated to move forward both individually and as a group. The role expectations will change as the group moves forward toward his goals. Because of the differences in performance that inevitably exist due to employee engagement, motivation and skill, the leader may be at a different point in this leadership model with every single employee.

This leadership model asks a lot of the leader, but through organization and effort, it is possible to follow this leadership model with success. The key is to be clear, consistent and creative throughout the process, so that the employee understands what his role is and the leader can overcome the obstacles that exist due to the nature of the service center being non-conducive to easy communication between the leader and the employee. Additionally, the employee must be willing to exert effort to move forward both personally and as a group. To do this, employees must be competent in their job skills and willing to learn. When these characteristics are not present in an employee, the leader must coach him and do his best to develop these characteristics. If there is continued resistance on the part of the employee, the leader may need to consider moving that employee on from the department or encourage the employee to find another career that is more satisfying to him.

The reason the blended leadership model exists in this form is that some aspects of each leadership model were applicable to service center leadership, but neither was entirely appropriate. Transactional Leadership is more applicable due to the regulated nature of both the call center and the Transactional Leadership model, but it does not progress beyond the superficial reward system. There is a need to incorporate Transformational Leadership's concepts of empowerment because it is a crucial element to having employees own the group's goal. The incorporation of vision into a service center creates room for a sense of purpose for the group. Without this sense of purpose, there is little motivation to improve and likely less job satisfaction. Finally, the incorporation of the analysis provided in previous studies (presented in the literature review) allows current leaders to build off studied elements that are worthy of incorporating into their leadership style to help move the group forward.

VI. Connection to Turnover

The elements of positive leadership in a service center setting creates a positive working environment for employees to feel they can grow, but know that there are clear expectations for which they will be held responsible. In an environment where there is a friendly leader, a vision for the department, and clear job expectations the concept is that job satisfaction will increase causing "bad" turnover to decrease. The benefit of the blended leadership model is that, while it creates a healthy working environment, it also provides the opportunity through Transactional Leadership to eliminate employees that are not meeting the departmental expectations. Moving low-performing employees should benefit the organization, the department and the employee because when an employee does not fit well in a position he tends to bring the entire group down.

Sometimes all a low-performing employee needs is the opportunity to try something new to find something he can be more successful in. Moving a low-performing employee is also often met with gratitude by fellow co-workers. Implementing this proposed leadership model takes a considerable amount of effort and follow-up by the leader. In my experience, the change is slow, but is ultimately well received by the employees.

VII. Conclusion

One limitation of this research includes that this leadership model has not been tested except limitedly through my own work in service center leadership. Another limitation is that the research, while focused on service center, is based on a medical service center and has no testing in other types of service centers. Additionally, medical call centers are specialized, requiring specific attributes-such as empathy for the customer-that may be more strongly emphasized in the medical field than it would be in a sales service center. Finally, it is worthy to note that this is an ideal model type, a concept presented by Max Weber, and that real leaders will have varying degrees of success at implementation (Kin).

The blended leadership model offered here is based on current research focused on service centers and should be helpful in guiding those who are in this type of leadership role. Leadership is never clear or easy, but being aware of the importance of the characteristics that this analysis emphasized should make sense of the challenges that leaders in a service center face.

Without compassion, trust and a healthy working environment, a leader cannot hope to engage her employees in the group's vision; without collective goals, the group is not likely to make improvements nor find their work as rewarding as they could. It is

crucial for employees to be appreciated with high, clear expectations and see that their

work is more than just answering phones or scheduling appointments.
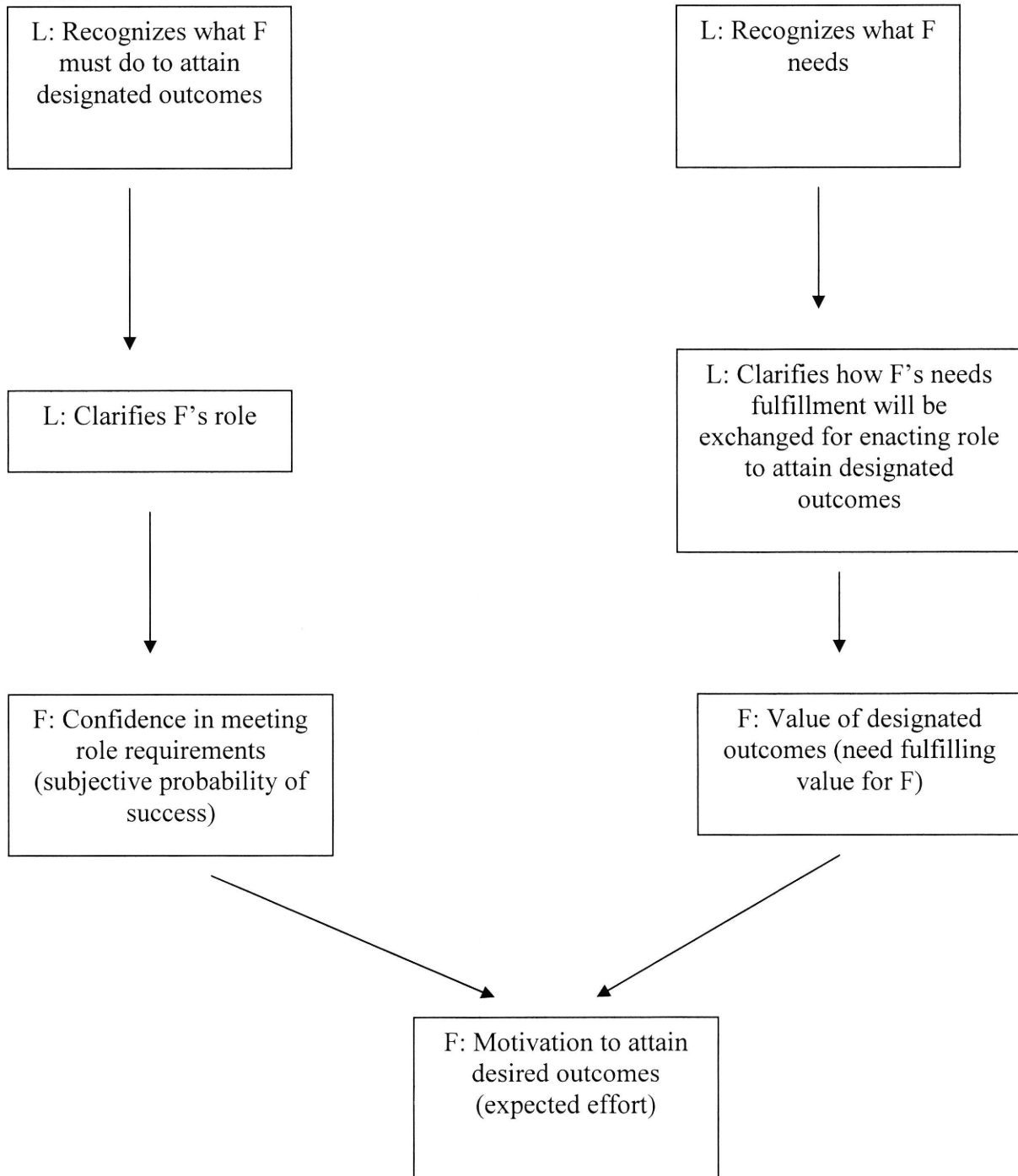
<p style="text-align:center">Works Cited</p>

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**Appendix A. Bass' Diagram of Burns' Concept of Transactional Leadership**

L= Leader F= Follower

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┌─────────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────────┐
│ L: Recognizes what F │              │ L: Recognizes what F │
│   must do to attain  │              │        needs         │
│ designated outcomes  │              │                      │
└─────────────────────┘              └─────────────────────┘
          │                                      │
          ▼                                      ▼
                                     ┌─────────────────────┐
┌─────────────────────┐              │ L: Clarifies how F's │
│  L: Clarifies F's    │              │    needs fulfillment │
│        role          │              │ will be exchanged for│
│                      │              │  enacting role to    │
└─────────────────────┘              │  attain designated   │
          │                          │      outcomes        │
          ▼                          └─────────────────────┘
                                                │
┌─────────────────────┐                         ▼
│ F: Confidence in     │              ┌─────────────────────┐
│  meeting role        │              │ F: Value of          │
│ requirements         │              │  designated outcomes │
│ (subjective          │              │  (need fulfilling    │
│ probability of       │              │     value for F)     │
│    success)          │              └─────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────┘
            ╲                            ╱
             ╲                          ╱
              ▼                        ▼
              ┌──────────────────────┐
              │ F: Motivation to     │
              │  attain desired      │
              │  outcomes (expected  │
              │       effort)        │
              └──────────────────────┘
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(Bass, 16)

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Appendix B. Bass' Diagram of Burns' Concept of Transformational Leadership

L= Leader F= Follower
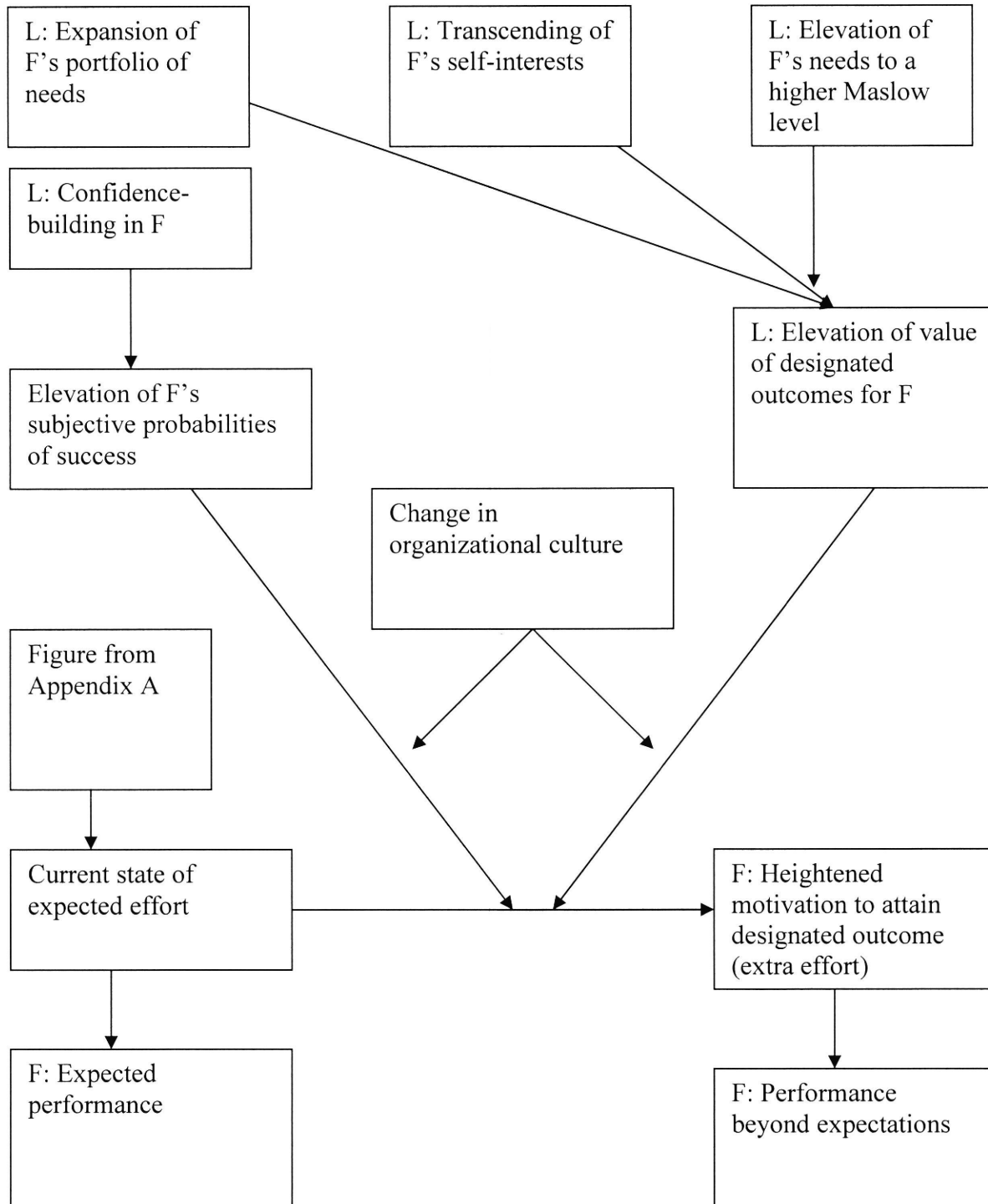
(Bass, 18)

Appendix C – A Personal Account of Service Center Leadership

I currently work in a Medical Service Center in a Supervisory role and have found that supporting a group of Service Center employees has a number of challenges. These challenges exist because of many of the qualities already mentioned in the literature including, role ambiguity, difficulty in developing relationship while maintaining control and supporting employees in their work.

The employees in the Service Center that I supervise answer patients' phone calls and deal with an array of patient's needs. They make appointments and create phone notes for the care team to help meet the patient's needs. This situation is complicated by the rules put in place to encompass each provider's individual practice behaviors. Also, certain symptoms need to be handled differently than others. For example, one deals with a sore throat differently than chest pain. Finally, there is a focus on quality and excellent customer service. The amount of information that these employees need to manage in their day-to-day work life is enormous, yet the work remains very monotonous. The job is challenging with low compensation, little recognition and a fair amount of pressure – there is no question why turnover rates are high in service center positions.

I approached leadership by first developing trust and relationships with the employees with whom I work. However, because of this development of relationships, I neglected to establish myself firmly as an authority figure and I now struggle to correct performance issues through coaching.

Additionally, I have found that it is incredibly difficult to be perceived as fair in a leadership role for the reason that all employees are *not* the same and require completely

different leadership to be successful. I have some star employees that need encouragement and support to grow. Others need help meeting goals that we have set forth and have some behavioral issues that need coaching. I doubt that I am perceived as fair when I am encouraging some employees to meet their potential, while coaching or disciplining others that are not meeting their goals. This perception may be accurate because my actions are not necessarily fair, but it would also be inappropriate and not create a positive working environment if I either treated the high-performing employees the same as those that have performance issues or, worse, did not deal with the performance issues at all. For example, if I met regularly with my high-performing employees to discuss their progress and performance rather than giving them the opportunity to excel with independent projects, I would create more work for myself and not empower the high-performing employees. If I did not deal with performance issues with low-performing employees, I would not be meeting my role expectations.

Leadership is a balancing act between developing trust and being fair; being effective and compassionate; empowering employees and being clear about expectations. I have begun using firmer statements when communicating with the employees, such as, "It is my expectation that..." These statements seem to be effective because the role expectations are clearly defined and yet I have developed seemingly good relationships and subsequently leader approachability and trust with the employees I oversee.

Overall, leadership requires a lot of effort and can be frustrating because change can be slow. However, the need for leadership was immediately evident by employees need for direction.

Going forward, I will be clearer about my expectations, offer rewards and positive feedback more quickly, be quicker to deal with behavior and performance issues and demonstrate clearly that I care about the employees I work with and the group as a whole. With time, my hope is that the employees will see me as predictable, supportive and encouraging with high expectations. Through consistent leadership behaviors, the employees will know what is expected and ultimately the group will move together toward their shared purpose.