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Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania

Advisor: Charline S. Russo

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Enhancing the Pace and Process of Change: Realizing Outcomes Through Leadership Empathy

Abstract

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Keywords

Pace And Process Of Change, Empathy

Comments

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Advisor: Charline S. Russo

ENHANCING THE PACE AND PROCESS OF CHANGE:
REALIZING OUTCOMES THROUGH LEADERSHIP EMPATHY

by

Lea L. Rubini

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics,
College of Liberal and Professional Studies
in the School of Arts and Sciences
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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ENHANCING THE PACE AND PROCESS OF CHANGE:
REALIZING OUTCOMES THROUGH LEADERSHIP EMPATHY

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ABSTRACT

Empathy is a key component of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence. Based on the psychotherapy and neuroscience research of empathy, it has been determined to be a key element of successful change outcomes. Correlating psychotherapy outcomes through an empathic approach to organization change, it is believed empathy can provide leaders with a deeper understanding of follower needs and concerns – especially those which may not be easily identified. Furthermore, an empathic approach results in individuals feeling understood and cared for, which can offer a multitude of benefits for leaders and followers in organizations undergoing change. Empathic leadership is a critical component to behavioral change that can be thoughtfully applied to the organizational setting to enable successful change outcomes. A Leader's Empathic Sourcebook is a result of this study.

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The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

- Lao Tzu

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, I arrived with great excitement at my first day of work with a new employer. The excitement stemmed from my passion for the organization's work and for the opportunity to learn from the individual who would be my boss. I sensed my new boss's passion and commitment to developing others during the interview process. I believed that I would learn a great deal from his deep functional expertise. As I arrived for my first day, I was briefly greeted by an individual who I was meeting for the first time. During our introduction, she informed me in passing that I would not be working for the individual with whom I interviewed as much had changed since my interview process. She told me not to worry as my "new boss is awesome!". Later that day, I had the chance to briefly meet with my new boss and I could sense that she, too, was quite skilled in her profession.

The organization's work had remained unchanged, my role would remain unchanged, and the new boss seemed quite good. So why did I feel so despondent at the end of my first day? Based on my years of experience since that day, the answer is now more evident: lack of empathy. Empathy is defined by Buchko, Buchko and Somogyi (2013) as the ability to "...relate to employees and sense what is going on in the employees' world and the emotions employees are experiencing..." (p. 32). During my first day, it appeared that no one considered how the situation might be viewed from my perspective. From their

point of view this change was not significant and therefore not a topic to spend much time on. However, my perspective was very different. I was dismayed by the matter of fact approach of informing me I would have a new boss. In that first hour, I questioned my decision to join the company and quickly thought through my alternatives should I decide to leave the company rather than stay. It was not the change itself that strongly affected me; it was those leading me through the change that had the profound effect. My personal experiences dealing with change coupled with my years of experience as a change practitioner lead me to believe that empathy can be a key element of successful change leadership.

Significant research has been done on the linkage between empathy and successfully motivating and guiding others. However, the exploration of empathy as a key enabler in successfully leading change is limited. The goal of this capstone study is to explore the current gap by providing insight on the critical role of empathy in successfully leading others facing change, determining where the use of empathy is most effective in the change process, and providing guidance on how a leader's empathy expertise can be developed to successfully lead change. It is assumed that insights on empathy will fill a critical gap that exists in change management guidance today.

Chapter two is a robust review of popular, academic and peer reviewed literature relevant to the change process, empathy's role in motivating others, the leadership outcomes achieved by using empathy, and how empathy is developed. Specifically, literature on the change and transition process,

empathic leadership, emotional intelligence, transformational leadership, and neuroscience research related to empathy are discussed.

In 2011, Pavlovic and Krahnke studied the outcomes of neuroscience research on empathy and determined that "...empathy dissolves the barrier between self and others..." (p. 133). They suggested that as a result, "...[individuals] become connected in a shared reality" (Pavlovic & Krahnke, 2011, p. 133) leading to "...enhance[d] outcomes for others" (Pavlovic & Krahnke, 2011, p. 133). Further exploration of neuroscience's findings will provide useful insight on why and how empathy works in order to deepen understanding on how to use empathy when leading change, and considerations for the development of empathy.

The second area of literature explored is that of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is defined as "...a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems" ("Transformational Leadership", n.d., p. 1). Anderson and McColl-Kennedy (2002) proposed that transformational leadership "...creat[es] changes in values, goals and aspirations..." (p. 547) "...by employ[ing] emotions to persuade...followers to engage in positive thinking in terms of developing both a positive vision and new ideas" (as cited by Anderson & McColl-Kennedy, 2002, p. 548). The outcomes achieved by using emotions, as a component of transformational leadership, can be translated into understanding of how empathy can be leveraged by a leader to support others going through change.

Emotional intelligence, or “the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically” (“Emotional Intelligence”, n.d.) is also explored in Chapter two. In *Beyond Change Management: How to Achieve Breakthrough Results through Conscious Change Leadership* (Anderson & Anderson, 2010), the authors offered a connection between emotional intelligence, empathy and leading change by noting “...conscious change leaders often possess greater emotional intelligence...[providing] them insight into how others feel and builds empathy to consider people’s feelings in how they lead” (p. 100). Emotional intelligence offers guidance on the leadership outcomes achieved by being empathic. A key assumption is that such outcomes can be applied not only to general leadership, but that of leading change as well as noted by Anderson and Anderson (2010).

Literature on the change and transition process is also discussed in Chapter one. A leader’s ability to be empathetic by “...relat[ing] to employees and sense what is going on in the employee’s world and the emotions employees are experiencing...” (Buchko, Buchko & Somogyi, 2013, p. 32) can provide beneficial insight on how to support an individual through a change. Bridges (2004) noted the importance of the individual when transitioning through change and commented that “...We have to let go of the old...before we can pick up the new...not just outwardly, but inwardly” (Bridges, 2009, p. 11). All change requires transition, or the movement from one ‘place’ to another; whether it is

from using a current technology to a new technology, or from using an old process to a new process.

Given most leaders work within a number of constraints, including that of time, insight on the change process, an individual's transition through change, and the times during which empathy can be most impactful during that process are explored in the literature review. Connecting the process of change with an understanding of transitions lend insight on when and how the use of empathy can be most effective in helping an individual navigate change.

Chapter three is an analysis of the literature reviewed in Chapter two to identify the potential connection between empathy and successfully leading others through change. The perspectives offered assume the role empathy plays in one being deemed a 'successful leader' can be applied to the topic of successfully leading change. Shrader (2007) noted that leaders who are successful in today's world "accept change and uncertainty..." (p. 96). As such, a leader must continually lead through change to remain competitive in an ever-changing market place. It has been offered that "...empathy is suggested to be the greatest contributor...to motivate individuals to cooperate, to share resources and to help others" (as cited by Krahnke & Pavlovich, 2011, p. 131). Such outcomes are accomplished by a leader's ability to "...relate to employees and sense what is going on in the employee's world and the emotions employees are experiencing..." (Buchko, Buchko & Somogyi, 2013, p. 32). Therefore, it is

assumed that insights on the role empathy plays in successful leadership can be applied to the space of successful change leadership.

Chapter four offers a recommendation on how empathy can be developed, inclusive of an Empathic Sourcebook to guide leaders on when and how to use empathy effectively during the process of change. In today's business world, change is constant. However, "...more than 70% of change initiatives fail..." (Rick, 2014, para. 1). One recommendation to avoid failure during change "...is not to change people at all, but to empower them...with facilitation and support from managers, and tolerance and compassion from leaders..." (Rick, 2013, para. 5). This recommendation signals the importance of empathy in successfully leading change, as empathy enables a leader to have "...a better understanding of what the employee is like, as well as his/her/ general reactions, emotions..." (Krahnke & Pavlovich, 2011, p. 35-36) in order to determine how to appropriately support and guide an individual through a change. The outcomes achieved through a leader's use of empathy, and the individual needs at each stage in the change and transition process, will be linked to provide a recommendation on when and how empathy can be most beneficial to the change process.

Chapter five discusses considerations for further research and the author's reflections on the study. Leaders are often responsible for guiding others on what to do and how to do it to achieve an intended outcome or set of results. In our ever-changing world, their role in guiding others is more critical

than ever. Shrader (2007) best articulated the current environment as one that he "...liken[s]...to a liquid environment – fluid, continually changing form..." (p. 96). Such an environment not only needs, but requires leaders to support and guide others through change to keep pace. Given the high rate of failure for change initiatives to date, how a leader supports and guides others through a change goes beyond following a 'traditional' change process. A key to success may reside in how a leader interacts and engages with their organization at the individual level during the change and transition process.

The goal of this study is to identify and develop recommendations that will prove useful to change practitioners and leaders focused on quickly and effectively helping others move through change. Specifically, the situation where the leader must engage and re-recruit a new hire being informed of a new boss on their first day is a case in point.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Change

Given the speed and pace of change in today's environment, "...change...is seen as the prime responsibility of those who lead organizations..." (as cited by Burnes, 2011, p. 445). However, "...managing people and organizations during times of tumultuous change is one of the most difficult tasks a leader faces" (Bridges, 1986, p. x) as "...things can and do change quickly, but...people do not – even...under strong pressure to do so" (Bridges, 1986, p. 24). One reason may be that people do not want to leave their comfort zone (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005; Murphy, 2016).

A leader needs to understand what is hindering an individual from leaving their comfort zone as "Resistance is a little-recognized yet critically important reason why change fails. It is persistent behavior that seeks to maintain the status quo to avoid change" (Ponti, 2011, p. 43). To successfully lead change one must "...develop the new leadership and facilitative skills to work with people and organizations at deeper levels...at the levels of mindsets and assumptions not just behaviors" (Pritchard, 2010, p. 47). As human beings "...we are "hardwired" to protect those deep mindsets and assumptions...at almost any cost" (as cited by Pritchard, 2010, p. 47). The leader's goal is to "...seek first to understand..." (Covey, 2016, p. 58).

Guidance on how to successfully lead change is abundant. A Google search of the term 'change management framework' returned over 12 million search results (Google.com, n.d.). However, many of the frameworks or processes offered overlook the human element of change and focus simply on the tactical aspect (for example, communicating and training). Gupta and Mathew (2015) noted "...leadership is what you do with people, not to them" (p. 76). An effective leader engages each person's direct commitment for, and connection to, the 'new' ('new' refers to anything in an organization that is different from the current way of being or doing). In successful change efforts people's

...commitment goes beyond just positive attitudes toward the change to include the intention to support it as well as a willingness to work on behalf of its successful implementation...change commitment represents a psychological alignment with, or attachment to, the change... (Caldwell, Fedor, Herold & Liu, 2008, p. 347).

Abrell-Vogel and Rowold (2014) echoed these sentiments and contended one's "...affective commitment to change represents an emotional bond to the change initiative...to support its goals and intentions" (p. 903).

However, a gap remains in many of the current change frameworks; they address the tactical side while failing to address the emotional or psychological side of change. Caldwell, et al. (2008) highlighted "there is...an entire practitioner literature that focuses...on what leaders should do when they are faced with a particular change episode...but they do not link these change-specific leader behaviors to broader theories or constructs of leadership" (p.

346). Rao (2015) argued “leaders...must appreciate the reasons for employees’ feelings and fears and move accordingly...allay[ing] their fears and build[ing] trust and confidence” (p. 36) during change.

The importance of addressing individual emotional reactions to change is a critical success factor. Davey (1996) stated one’s hesitancy to embrace change resides in the fact “all transitions involve loss...We lose an old way of being” (para 1). During transition and change

...what people are resisting is not the change that you spent so much energy on and that is so essential to the organization’s future. What they are resisting is having to let go of things that they have always done or situations that they have depended upon for years (Bridges, 2009, p. 159).

Bunker and Wakefield (2005) attributed one’s hesitancy to let go of the current way of doing things “...because what they have to leave behind was comfortable and it worked” (p. 11). “It is a natural reaction for people and teams to resist change” (McKnight, 2006, p. 56) as “people are not merely logical beings; they are full of feeling too...That is why apparently small things can take on enormous importance as individuals and their organization struggle to make the new beginning [or change]” (Bridges, 2009, p. 71).

Approaches to Managing Change

Cherry-picking an appropriate change framework can prove challenging with the innumerable number from which to choose coupled with the fact most fail to address the emotional side of change. Most change frameworks aim to address the fact that “...something that used to happen in one way starts happening in

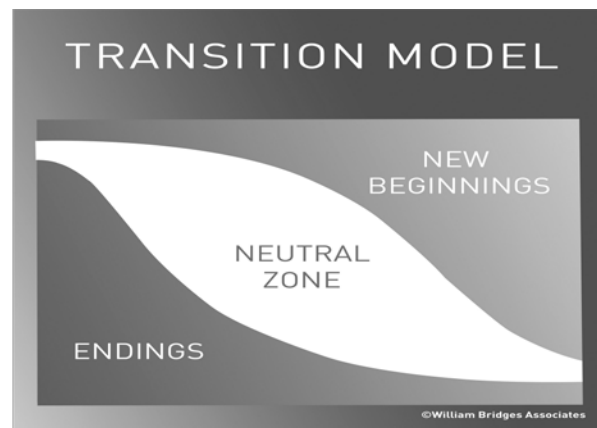
another” (Bridges, 2009, p. 4), while failing to address the psychological aspect that recognizes “...different types of people are concerned about different aspects of the change...” (Bridges, 1986, p. 33). Regrettably many leaders utilize the framework or process touted as ‘the best’ by popular publications at a point in time believing it will magically make the process of change easy and successful. The result is a leader with distorted expectations on the simplicity of change as well as resulting outcomes that do not match the desired ‘new’. This is easily evidenced by the abundance of literature on the high degree of failed change initiatives. Hill, Lorinkova, Seo, Taylor, Tesluk and Zhang (2012) reinforced such findings noting “Although many factors undoubtedly contribute to failed organizational change efforts, scholars and practitioners increasingly point to the important role of the “human element” (p. 122).

In 1986, Bridges offered a new perspective for the management of change by calling attention to the point that a mental transition must occur for a change to be adopted by an individual. Transition was defined by Bridges (2009) as a “...psychological...three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about” (p. 3). Bunker and Wakefield (2005) also stressed the importance of addressing “transition [as it] represents the psychological and emotional adaption to change...adaptation is essentially a process of letting go of the old way and accepting the new way” (p. 11). Leadership must support individuals through the transition to be successful. A “...leader’s responsibility is

to live through this process of transition with others...and to lead in a way that helps bring people through transition so that they can adapt and contribute in the long term (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005, p. 14).

Bridges (1986, 2009) offered a framework to articulate the phases one experiences during transition as shown in Figure 1. Three key phases occur in Bridges' Transition Framework (2009) including "...(1) an ending, followed by (2) a period of confusion and distress, leading to (3) a new beginning..." (p. 8). More specifically, the three phases in the Transition Framework (2009) are referred to as *Ending, Losing, Letting Go, The Neutral Zone, and The New Beginning*.

Figure 1.



www.wmbridges.com

During the first phase of Bridges' Transition Framework (2009) – *Ending, Losing, Letting Go* – individuals are "...letting go of the old ways and the old identity [they]... had" (p. 4). In essence, "every transition begins with an ending. We have to let go of the old thing before we can pick up the new one — not just

outwardly, but inwardly...” (Bridges, 2009, p. 11). Leaders must be mindful during this phase that the “...picture in people’s heads is the reality...the mental image of how and why things are the way they are...” (Bridges, 2009, p. 64). Understanding a follower’s view of the current reality can provide information on what the individual believes they will need to cast away as part of a change.

To successfully traverse the *Ending, Losing, Letting Go* phase, Bridges (2009) suggested that leaders should focus on clearly articulating the change, give due consideration to secondary changes that may impact the individual, and identify individuals who will need to let go of an old way of doing things (p. 25). A variety of losses are experienced during transition, including: disengagement, disidentification and disenchantment (Bridges, 1986). Bridges (1986) defined “...*disengagement*...[as] a break, an “unplugging,” a separation of the person from the subjective world he or she took for granted...[for example:] status and role...” (p. 27-28). The second type of loss, disidentification, is defined as “...[a break from] the sense of one’s identity in the former situation...[for example:] traditional identities of engineers, accounts...” (Bridges, 1986, p. 28). The third type of loss is “...*disenchantment*...[a break from the current] reality [that] gives meaning both to people’s experience and to their way of responding to that experience...Things don’t make sense any more...” (Bridges, 1986, p. 28). Devanna and Tichy (1986) noted similar forms of loss during change, but also noted “...disorientation [that occurs] while learning new behaviors” (p. 28).

Eaton (2009) proffered the "...highest probability of an individual accepting and participating in a change program is when he or she...perceives that by being involved there is a low personal risk, which could be reputational risk, risk to career prospects or unacceptable disruption to such personal aspects of one's life..." (p. 38). The aspects noted by Eaton (2009) speak to addressing the variety of losses proffered by Bridges (1986). Bridges (1986) contended individuals could assist others in navigating various forms of loss by "...foresee[ing] the impact of disengagement and...find[ing] ways of countering its debilitating effects" (p. 28); including providing individuals with "...assistance in redefining themselves and their future directions" (p. 28) and providing space to "...allow the hurt [of loss] to be expressed...no matter how this expression may affect the organization's leaders..." (p. 28).

As individuals successfully traverse the *Ending, Losing, Letting Go* phase (Bridges, 2009) they move into *The Neutral Zone* phase (Bridges, 2009). This phase is "...an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully operational" (p. 5) and lends itself to much uncertainty as the 'new' reality has not completely come to fruition. Individuals must let go of what they knew well - a place of comfort - only to be left in a no-man's-land where doubt and uncertainty are left to blossom. Leaders successfully navigate this phase by addressing both psychological needs and logical aspects of change and transition. Heath and Heath (2010) cited the analogy of an Elephant and a Rider to articulate the

importance of a balanced leadership approach to change. During change and transition

...our emotional side is an Elephant and our rational side is its Rider. Perched atop the Elephant, the Rider holds the reins and seems to be the leader. But the Rider's control is precarious because the Rider is so small relative to the Elephant...Changes often fail because the Rider simply can't keep the Elephant on the road long enough to reach the destination (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 7).

Matter-of-factly speaking "...an unmotivated Elephant can doom a change effort..." (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 15); therefore, "to make progress toward a goal...requires the energy and drive of the Elephant" (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 8). A leader must keep both in mind because "...resistance cannot be overcome either by rationale logic or by force" (Freedman, 1997, p. 54). During change, the "...leadership task is to connect to the personal and the emotional fallout of change so that you can help individuals in the organization let go, deal with the discomfort, rebuild, and learn" (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005, p. 11).

Experience has led me to believe that the most successful leaders navigate *The Neutral Zone* (Bridges, 2009) by openly recognizing the fact that uncertainty exists, addressing the uncertainty experienced at an individual level, and providing information on when clarity will become available. Leaders should continually ask themselves the following question: "Am I recognizing that different types of people are concerned about different aspects of the change – or am I just saying what I would want to hear?" (Bridges, 1986, p. 33). Leaders must fend off their natural propensity to believe others will see things in the way they

do (Bridges, 2009, p. 60) in order to successfully support their followers through transition.

The final phase of Bridges' Transition Framework (2009) is *The New Beginning*. During this phase, individuals are "...coming out of the transition and making a new beginning" (Bridges, 2009, p. 5). This is the 'eureka' phase for a leader – people have not only let go of the old way of doing things, but they have fully embraced the 'new' and view it as the norm. Although every leader strives to achieve the 'new' state, I believe only those who recognize the emotional aspect of change, and appropriately support individuals with this aspect, truly achieve it.

Irrespective of the type of change, some individuals move effortlessly to *The New Beginning* phase (Bridges, 2009) where "...new understandings, new values, new attitudes, and – most of all – new identities" (Bridges, 2009, p. 58) become a reality whereas others endeavor to avoid it. Understanding why this dichotomy exists may lend insight on how to best support individuals through transition.

Rao (2015) suggested there are three types of individuals present in the change process: "...actors, spectators and speed-breakers. Actors have a positive attitude with lots of energy to implement the plans of the change leaders. Spectators are undecided about the change. They have reservations, apprehensions and queries. Speed-breakers constantly protest about change" (p. 36).

Reactions to Change

During change, a leader's role is "...focusing on employee reactions—including resistance and acceptance" (Wittig, 2012, p. 23). A leader's understanding of each follower, including understanding the category into which they fall, provides the leader with important insight to help support the follower through the transition. During change, "Both the organization and people in it carry assumptions, biases, a history into change efforts" (Williams, 2014, paragraph 7). When such considerations are overlooked or ignored, an organization typically "...fail[s] fundamentally because...[change]...is conceived as an outside-in process...rather than an inside-out process which focuses on change within individuals" (Williams, 2014, paragraph 1). Leaders must be mindful that "...beginnings are...scary...[and] they require a new commitment...that people become the new kind of person that the new situation demands" (Bridges, 2009, p. 58). To successfully lead change, leaders must "...develop the new leadership and facilitative skills to work with people and organizations at deeper levels...at the levels of mindsets and assumptions not just behaviors" (Pritchard, 2010, p. 47). Bridges' sentiments reiterate the importance of the delicate balance between the 'Elephant and Rider' (as cited by Heath & Heath, 2010) in a change journey.

Each person is unique with distinct perspectives that affect the way they will view a situation or a change. Boga and Ensari (2009) offered "to counterweight...aversion to change, leaders ought to involve them and

encourage active participation in the intervention process, instead of allowing employees to commiserate with each other about potential vulnerability and alienation during the course of organizational transformations” (p. 239). To accomplish this, a leader must keep in mind that they “...won’t get peoples commitment unless [s/he] understands them...” (Bridges, 2009, p. 26).

Furthermore, Bridges (2009) argued “Only when you get into people’s shoes and feel what they are feeling can you help them manage their transition” (p. 59).

In my experience, the direct engagement and focus suggested by Boga and Ensari (2009) helps individuals to redirect their energy from worry and loss to preparing for what lies ahead. This approach also builds on the point mentioned earlier that a leader’s goal “...is not to change people at all, but to empower them...with facilitation and support from managers, and tolerance and compassion...” (Rick, 2013, para. 5).

Overview of Empathy

The importance of understanding and addressing the psychological and emotional needs of followers to successfully lead change is a theme to this point in the literature discussed to this point. Emotional Intelligence (EI or EQ) and Transformational Leadership will be explored for a deeper understanding of how the psychological and emotional needs of individuals can be addressed by a leader. Mary Ann Lawlor, CEO of Drake Business Schools at the time of the quote, spoke to importance of empathy in leadership: “I think of the organization as a kind of mystical body...where the actions of each member of the body

affects every other member. You need the ability to empathize if you want to lead...you need the ability to understand how your actions are going to affect others” (Devanna & Tichy, 1986, p. 32).

Empathy has been defined (Anders & Leiberg, 2006; Lamm & Singer, 2009; Pedersen, 2008; Rogers, 1975) in a myriad of ways with nuances that make it difficult to create a memorable distinction between each. Lamm and Singer (2009) argued “...there are almost as many definitions of *empathy* as there are researchers in the field” (p. 82). Maibom (2014) took an even stronger stance arguing “‘Empathy’ is a much used term with little fixed meaning” (p. 880). Brüne, Gonzalez-Liencre and Shamay-Tsory (2013) offered a simple yet comprehensive definition for empathy: “...the ability to form an embodied representation of another’s emotional state, while at the same time being aware of the causal mechanism that induced the emotional state in the other” (p. 1538). Their definition speaks to not only understanding the feelings of another but having insight on what led to the feelings being experienced.

Anders and Leiberg (2006) argued empathy incorporates the concept of perspective taking noting “Empathy is a multifaceted construct including low-level mechanisms like emotional contagion as well as high-level processes like perspective-taking” (p. 419). It is interesting to note, however, that emotional contagion is viewed by others as “...another process that is related to but distinct from empathy” (as cited by Lamm & Singer, 2009, p. 84). Irrespective of emotional contagion’s role in empathy, Buckingham and Clifton (2001) supported

perspective taking as an aspect of empathy noting it is the ability to "...see the world through their eyes and share their perspective..." (p. 97).

Empathy has also been defined as understanding the feelings of another (Calloway-Thomas, 2010) and, in some cases, responding effectively to those feelings (Anders & Leiberg, 2006; Lown, 2016). Calloway-Thomas (2010) offered "Empathy helps us to understand people whose values, views, and behavior are different from our own" (p. 5). Anders and Leiberg (2006) slightly expanded on the view offered by Calloway-Thomas (2010) asserting "In most general terms, empathy refers to the ability to accurately perceive and understand another person's emotions and to react appropriately" (p. 419).

The definitions of empathy do not end with those offered to this point. Several authors (Berntson, Cacioppo, Decety & Norman, 2012; Clarke, Lykins & Marks, 2015) have asserted empathy is merely an affective response to another individual whereby you unconsciously understand how another is feeling. Berntson, et al. (2012) suggested that "Empathy is an integrated affective response stemming from the perception of another's emotional state or condition, similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel in a given situation" (p. 40).

Yet others (Gladstein, 1983; Krahnke & Pavlovich, 2011) have contended empathy is not merely affective, but rather it includes cognitive and affective components. Pavlovich and Krahnke (2011) noted "...recent studies in neuroscience substantiate that empathy is more than an affective quality as it

emerges both cognitively and frequently unconsciously” (p. 132). Gladstein (1983) suggests the cognitive component of empathy is “...intellectually taking the role or perspective of another person” (p. 468) whereas the affective component of empathy enables “...feeling the same way as another person does” (p. 468). Decety and Ickes (2016), similar to Pavlovich and Krahnke (2011), proposed the cognitive component of empathy, specifically, occurs unconsciously (p. 33).

While a few (Gladstein, 1983; Krahnke & Pavlovich, 2011) agree empathy has cognitive and affective components, it has been argued “...perspective-taking...is [the] cognitive capacity to spontaneously consider the world from another’s viewpoint, and empathy...is the affective capacity to emotionally connect with others and experience sympathy and concern for others” (Carpenter, Galinsky, Gilin, & Maddux, 2013, p. 3). This view appears to be in the minority.

While there is not one clear definition of empathy, there appears to be clear agreement in the viewpoint that empathy is not the same as sympathy. Stebnicki (2008) noted “...empathy is often misunderstood; it becomes confused with sympathy” (p. 31). Lamm and Singer (2009) highlighted there is a

...crucial distinction between the term empathy and those like sympathy, empathic concern, and compassion...empathy denotes that the observer’s emotions reflect affective sharing (“feeling with” the other person) while compassion, sympathy, empathic concern denote that the observer’s emotions are inherently other oriented (“feeling for” the other person) (p. 84).

For the purposes of this Capstone Study one definition of empathy must be identified to provide readers with a consistent point of reference on what is meant by empathy. Rogers' (1975) definition of empathy coupled with Skinner and Spurgeon's (2005) empathetic components will be utilized to create a



comprehensive definition. Rogers (1975) defined empathy to help deepen understanding of how it could be utilized in support of psychotherapy outcomes. Rogers (1975) defined empathy as "...being sensitive, moment

to moment, to the changing felt meanings [of another] person...communicating your sensings of his/her world ...checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive" (p. 4). Skinner and Spurgeon (2005) helped enhance this definition by purporting empathy involves "...four distinct but related individual dispositions [including:]...empathetic concern (EC), perspective taking (PT), personal distress (PD) and empathetic matching (EM)" (p. 1).

Rogers (1975) contended "...research evidence keeps piling up, and it points strongly to the conclusion that a high degree of empathy in a relationship is possibly the most potent and certainly one of the most potent factors in bringing about change..." (p. 3) and offered empathy was "...extremely important both for the understanding of personality dynamics and for effective changes in personality behavior" (p. 2). McMullen, Steckley and Watson (2014) seem to

support Rogers (1975) view and contended "...therapists' empathic behaviours [*sic*] towards their clients can affect how clients treat themselves and contribute to positive outcomes in psychotherapy" (p. 287).

Rogers (2007) claimed empathy could support psychological change in another if the following factors were present:

1. Two persons are in psychological contact.
2. The first, whom we shall term the client, is in the state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.
3. The second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship.
4. The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client.
5. The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavors to communicate this experience to the client.
6. The communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved (p. 241).

Empathy also plays an important role in our day to day interactions by "...enabl[ing] people to suspend judgment and to comprehend paradigmatic differences to foster more enlightened relationships" (Krahnke & Pavlovich, 2011, p. 133). The "...ability to share others' feelings ultimately results in a better understanding of the present and future mental states and actions of the people

around us...” (Lamm & Singer, 2009, p. 81). Brüne, et al. (2013) contended empathy enabled such outcomes by allowing one to mentally create “...an embodied representation of another’s emotional state, while at the same time...[becoming] aware of the causal mechanism that induced the emotional state in the other” (p. 1538). Therefore, a correlation between empathy and successfully leading change can be assumed. Empathy allows one to gain a deeper understanding of another in order to help facilitate behavioral change (Rogers, 1975; Rogers, 2007) by addressing each person’s perspectives and emotions (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005; Caldwell, et al., 2008; Bridges, 2009; Heath & Heath, 2010; Hill et al., 2012; Wittig, 2012; Williams, 2014).

More recent literature focuses on the implications of empathy in leadership and the outcomes that can be achieved. In 2016, Gentry, Sadri and Weber (2016) stated

leaders today need to be more person-focused...to lead people, collaborate with others, be able to cross organizational and cultural boundaries and need to create shared direction, alignment, and commitment between social groups with very different histories, perspectives, values, and cultures (p. 2).

Gates (1995) argued “...empathy [is]...most important for understanding the need and values of others” (p. 104).

A leader’s understanding and appreciation of the unique attributes of their followers enable success in a dynamic and ever-changing world. Roscoe (2015) corroborated this perspective and purported “...a leader is...expected to adapt their style to circumstance and people, and an empathetic stance is increasingly

seen as the most effective” (paragraph 2). Furthermore, “empathetic leaders understand employees as individuals, and in return...[they create] a more cohesive team...” (Roscoe, 2015, paragraph 3). Choi (2006) noted “...the more empathetic to followers a leader is, the more trust the leader gains from followers, and consequently, the greater also is the need for affiliation with their leader that is developed among the followers” (p. 31). A leader’s empathic ability allows them to more deeply understand their followers in support of overall success.

It is suggested that empathy, or perspective taking, is a basic element of the leader and follower relationship. “Growing evidence suggests that we will respond to others as leaders if their displays of empathy first make us feel understood and valued as individuals” (Humphrey, Kellett & Sleeth, 2006, p. 150). It is contended “...what moves us to action is emotion. The goals that guide us, that shape our perception and memory, are rooted in strong feelings” (Goleman, 1998, p. 23). Therefore, empathy is a core building block to the leader-follower connection. Goleman (1998) noted “... we scan everything that happens to us moment to moment through our emotional memories to see if it resembles anything that made us angry, sad, or happy in the past” (p. 21). Consequently, if a leader comes to understand the emotional memories or perspectives of a follower, they can adjust their style to connect to a positive emotional memory with an aim for positive outcomes.

Empathic Leadership

Leaders who are empathic "...are primed to consider to what extent their decisions and behaviors affect the well-being of others..." (Dietz & Kleinlogel, 2014, p. 464). The end result is a leader who can determine the most effective and supportive leadership style. Griffin, Mason and Parker (2012) as well as Bunker and Wakefield (2005) supported this position. For example, Bunker and Wakefield (2005) suggested "empathetic leaders are able to put themselves in other people's shoes, consider individual limitations, set aside preconceived notions, and value people..." (p. 43). Griffin, Mason and Parker (2012) cited that understanding the perspectives of followers allows a leader to determine appropriate modifications to their leadership style to best connect with and motivate those they lead (p. 177). In general, an "...empathetic leader can foster an engaged and empowered workforce...in a rapidly changing world..." (Roscoe, 2015, paragraph 10).

When a leader effectively uses empathy to modify their leadership style, several outcomes have been observed. Understanding the outcomes derived from empathy is of great value for "Today leaders are expected to guide, motivate, inspire, listen, persuade, and create significance. Hence dealing with emotions is a crucial part of a leaders' success" (Gupta & Mathew, 2015, p. 75).

Bunker and Wakefield (2005) argued empathic leaders:

- listen with an honest intent to understand
- set aside preconceived notions
- value people as well as results
- give honest and direct feedback in a genuine manner

- are kind but not soft
- make allowances for difficult situations
- value diversity and appreciate different perspectives
- understand the emotional impact of demands
- consider individual limitations and barriers
- communicate openly
- use analogies and stories to make points (p. 47).

“Outstanding leaders differ from less effective leaders in their higher consideration of and sensitivity to the needs of their followers” (Humphrey, Kellett & Sleeth, 2002, p. 527). A study involving almost 200 participants of an IT division of a healthcare company found “...high performing employees were more motivated to adapt their communication and were more skilled at communicating empathy...than lower performing employees” (Payne, 2005, p. 72). In addition, it was determined “high performers were more skilled at adapting communication...empathizing...and managing interactions...” (Payne, 2005, p. 71). Such insights offer validity for a connection between empathy and strong leadership outcomes.

Lamm and Singer (2009) noted that the “...ability to share others’ feelings ultimately results in a better understanding of the present and future mental states and actions of the people around us...” (p. 81). The ability to determine the future actions of others has been purported by several others (Gregory, Gregory & Moates, 2011; Lamm & Singer, 2009; Brüne, et al., 2013). It is suggested that “...understanding a follower’s perspective should allow the leader an appropriate starting point from which to begin to influence the perspective of the follower” (Gregory, Gregory & Moates, 2011, p. 814). Based on these

insights, empathy can provide a leader with immediate insight on a follower's current perspective and emotional state to effectively engage and interact with them. Longer term, this same insight can help a leader foretell how a follower may react to a situation or change.

The development of trust and credibility has been proffered as an outcome of being empathic when leading others. Maxwell (1998) argued "You develop credibility with people when you connect with them and show that you genuinely want to help them" (p. 102). To more specifically understand the relationship between empathy and trust, Humphrey, Kellet and Sleeth (2006) conducted a study with graduate and undergraduate students in a southeastern United States university.

Leveraging a hypothetical situation, participant groups had to agree on a community service project (Humphrey, Kellet & Sleeth, 2006). To understand the relationship between empathy and trust in the study, data was generated from participant feedback, leadership feedback, the Wonderlick Personnel test, and the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profiles scale. The study found "...it is important for a leader to understand others' feelings and to be able to impart a sense of self-worth and value by communicating a recognition, an understanding, and a consideration of their emotions" (p. 157) to drive effective outcomes.

These findings corroborate that effective empathy involves not only understanding another's emotions, but being able to communicate them back to the individual as well (p. 4) as originally asserted by Rogers in 1975. Bunker and

Wakefield (2005) similarly noted the "...ability to be empathetic encourages loyalty and trust – even understanding of and support for difficult decisions" (p. 43).

A separate study conducted by Agote, Aramburu and Lines (2016) explored empathy's enablement of trust, as a component of Authentic Leadership, when leading change (p. 43). Over 50 Human Resource Managers, who had undergone change at a variety of Spanish-based companies, participated in the study. The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire by Avolio, Gardner and Walumbwa (p. 44) was the tool of measurement in the study. Agote, et al. (2016) ascertained from the study's results "...trust does not seem to contribute to an explanation of positive emotions..." (p. 51), rather "...highly trusted leaders are considered to be follower oriented and expected to take into account how followers are affected by change(s)..." (p. 40). This finding inferred trust was created when a leader understands the feelings of their followers and takes leadership actions with that understanding in mind.

The findings from the studies of Humphrey, Kelleth & Sleeth (2006) and Agote, et al. (2016), coupled with the perspectives of Rogers (1975) and Bunker and Wakefield (2005), help explain how understanding another's feelings, and articulating this understanding, enables the development of trust. Humphrey, Kelleth and Sleeth (2006) noted "It is not enough to simply "be emotional" and to express feelings. Instead, it is important for a leader to understand others' feelings and to be able to impart a sense of self-worth and value by

communicating a recognition, an understanding, and a consideration of their emotions” (p. 157).

The use of empathy in leadership has also been proffered to positively affect the motivation and performance of others as a direct consequence of feeling cared for (Gupta & Mathew, 2015; Humphrey, Kellet & Sleeth, 2006). “Recent research has demonstrated that leaders’ influence on group members’ emotions can substantially affect job attitudes and performance” (Humphrey, Kellett, Sleeth, 2006, p. 147). A study conducted by Skinner and Spurgeon (2005) suggested the same.

The study conducted by Skinner and Spurgeon (2005) involved more than 90 managers and 450 direct reports in a Western Australian Health Department. The study’s aim was to determine followers’ perceptions of a leader’s performance based on “...four distinct but related [empathic] individual dispositions...empathic concern (EC), perspective taking (PT), personal distress (PD) and empathic matching (EM)” (p. 1). Skinner and Spurgeon (2005) found empathy matching (EM) “...was significantly correlated with organizational commitment and extra effort and satisfaction” (p. 5). Additionally, “extra effort was the most empathy-linked outcome...followers who perceive their managers as possessing a range of empathic traits may well be prepared to work beyond their normal expectations and put in extra effort” (p. 9). These findings further validate the relationship between empathy and performance outcomes.

Another study (Gentry, et al., 2011) involving participants from several countries also found a positive relationship between empathy and employee motivation, specifically "...the relationship between empathy and motivation was positive across five countries (United States, Bangladesh, Greece, Portugal, South Africa)..." (p. 821). However, the relationship was determined to be insignificant in China and Hong Kong (p. 821). While these findings validate positive outcomes which are derived through a leader's use of empathy, it raises the question of cultural context on empathic outcomes.

Empathy has been determined to benefit the leader as well. Performance ratings (Gentry, et al., 2011, 2016) and mental well-being (Berntson, et al., 2012) have found to be positively impacted for a leader when they use an empathic approach with followers. For example, two different studies by Gentry, et al. (2011, 2016) found empathic leaders received better performance ratings from their boss.

In the first study (Gentry, et al., 2011) the performance of over 6,700 leaders from the United States and Canada was analyzed using a 5-point Likert-type scale, the BENCHMARKS® survey for empathic emotion, and direct report feedback on empathic emotion using a 5-point Likert-type scale. The findings determined "The more target-leaders display behaviors of empathic emotion as rated by their subordinates, the higher their performance ratings from their boss" (p. 825).

In their second study, Gentry, et al. (2016) engaged a more diverse research population of 6,700 managers located in 38 different countries. The measure of empathic emotion was determined using the Center for Creative Leadership's Benchmarks® 360-degree tool (p. 3). Irrespective of the diverse study population, it was again determined "...empathic emotion as rated from the leader's subordinates positively predicts job performance ratings from the leader's boss" (p. 4).

Lastly, an empathic leadership approach has also been purported to "...reduce distress and...improve physical and psychological well being" (Berntson, et al., 2012, p. 44) of the leader. Bunker and Wakefield (2005) contended a leader's open communication approach also provides such benefits.

While empathy can lead to positive outcomes when leading others, it has been argued that a lack of empathy can have equally impactful consequences. Researchers (Parry & Smollan, 2011) studying individuals from various New Zealand-based organizations undergoing change to decipher the impact of emotional consideration (as a component of emotional intelligence) on change initiative outcomes (p. 445) found when individuals "...perceived that their leaders genuinely responded to their emotions, they invariably felt a degree of psychological support and tended to adopt more positive attitudes towards change" (p. 448). On the contrary, "Employees who felt that their emotions were ignored or had been hidden experienced even more negative emotions, and become more resistant to change" (p. 452).

Due to the stress of leading change, leaders may avoid the more challenging, and less tangible aspects (e.g. dealing with emotions), of the change due to the stress of dealing with such. However, Bunker and Wakefield (2005) noted the importance of dealing with the softer aspects of change as “overdoing toughness while underdoing empathy creates...an environment of alienation and fear...people lose commitment and focus, so results are often lost as well” (p. 44).

Empathic Component of Emotional Intelligence

Empathy has been closely linked to leadership through Emotional Intelligence (abbreviated as EI or EQ). As noted by Humphrey (2002) noted “Empathy is shown to be an important variable that is central to both emotional intelligence and leadership emergence” (p. 493).

Like empathy, “A number of different researchers define EI in a number of different ways” (McCleskey, 2014, p. 77). Goleman (1998) argued EI is comprised of five specific aspects: self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating others, showing empathy, and staying connected. These five aspects were similarly cited by Megerian and Sosik (2016) with a slight nuance; referring to staying connected as relationship management. Gupta and Mathew (2015) explained EI as “...undersatnding [*sic*] and accepting emotions as assets as they convey something” (p. 77). Others have instead explained “...emotional intelligence...[as] a set of non-cognitive attributes, encompassing components

from personal traits such as empathy, optimism, adaptability, warmth, and motivation...” (Nelson, Tang & Yin, 2010, p. 904).

In 2014 McCleskey conducted a review of literature on EI and argued “EI and its related competencies may possess the kind of predictive validity for leadership effectiveness that has often eluded researchers in the past” (p. 87).

The findings offered by McCleskey (2014) noted:

...EI rests on three basic fundamental premises: our emotions play in important role in our daily lives; people vary in their ability to perceive, understand, use, and manage these emotions; and these variances affect individual capability in a variety of contexts, including organizational leadership (p. 88).

Gupta and Mathew (2015) argued “Emotional Intelligence helps leaders make better decisions and gain the full commitment and energy of those they lead” (p. 77). Specifically,

Emotionally intelligent leaders use empathy to connect to the emotions of the people they lead. These leaders empathize and also express the emotions that the individual or group is experiencing. The team thus feels understood and cared for by the leader (Gupta & Mathew, 2015, p. 77).

Parry and Smollan (2011) seem to share the views of Gupta and Mathew (2015) noting “Leaders with high EI should be able to detect follower emotions” (p. 441).

It has been cited (Nelson, Tang & Yin, 2010) that “many studies have found positive effects of emotional intelligence on leadership effectiveness...” (p. 900). Furthermore, “Recent research has demonstrated that leaders’ influence on group members’ emotions can substantially affect job attitudes and performance” (Humphrey, Kellett & Sleeth, 2006, p. 147). Anderson and Anderson (2010) stated

Conscious change leaders often possess greater emotional intelligence. They are often more in touch with their feelings and have more understanding of what triggers them. This gives them insight into how others feel and builds empathy to consider people's feelings in how they lead...[and] better able to design change strategies that minimize resistance in stakeholders (p. 100).

Parry and Smollan (2011) offered "Change leaders with high EI could support follows by acknowledging their emotional reactions and by helping them to understand and manage the challenges of change" (p. 436). This thinking aligns with Bridges' (2009) notion that addressing one's needs during a transition to the 'new' leads to better outcomes.

Two studies (Parry & Smollan, 2011; Anderson & McColl-Kennedy, 2002) found evidence that leaders with strong empathic abilities, or perspective taking abilities, have a profound impact on change outcomes. The study by Parry and Smollan (2011) looked to determine the impact of EI on followers' view of the change process and change outcomes achieved (p. 436) through interviews with 24 individuals at New Zealand based organizations who had undergone change. For the purpose of the study, the following cited definition of EI was utilized:

"...four levels of ascending abilities: perception, appraisal and expression of emotion; emotional facilitation of thinking; understanding and analyzing emotions and employing emotional knowledge; and reflective regulation of emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (p. 436).

It is interesting to note several aspects of this definition align with the definition of empathy purported by Rogers (1975, 2007).

Parry and Smollan (2011) found followers undergoing change "...appreciated when their leaders understood how they felt about the change

and found that this form of support gave them strength in coping with emotional demands of change processes and outcomes” (p. 447). It was also noted that when those same followers “...perceived that their leaders genuinely responded to their emotions, they invariably felt a degree of psychological support and tended to adopt more positive attitudes towards change” (p. 448). The aspects denoted by Parry and Smollan (2011) to have a positive impact directly correlate with the outcomes achieved via empathy as defined by Rogers (1975, 2007). The positive impact of a leader understanding the emotions of their followers, and expressing that understanding, was shown in this study to successfully support an individual’s transition during change.

A separate study (Anderson & McColl-Kennedy, 2002) involving more than 100 participants of a global pharmaceutical salesforce in Australia aimed to determine how a follower’s feelings of frustration or optimism were directly influenced by the leader (p. 546). The study gathered insight on each participant’s leader using a survey to measure the leader’s individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and idealized influence (p. 551)¹. Through an analysis of the data researchers affirmed “...employee perceptions of...personal attention...can positively influence the employee in two key areas: directly increasing optimism and indirectly increasing

¹ The aspect of individualized consideration in the study referred to the leader’s ability to understand and respond to the follower’s needs; this matches with Rogers (1975) articulation of empathy, noting that it involves “...checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive” (p. 4).

performance” (p. 555).

The findings of Parry and Smollan (2011) and Anderson and McColl-Kennedy (2002) demonstrated that a leader’s understanding of the follower allows them to show individual consideration, and as a result, created an optimistic outlook in followers.

Reflecting on the EI studies discussed, it is important to note that in most instances each study explored the impact of the various EI components collectively. However, by diving into each study’s specific results against the EI components, it was evident the empathic component (or individual consideration) was most impactful when leading change.

Empathic Component of Transformational Leadership

Building on Rogers’ (1975) explanation of how empathy can be used to affect change, individual consideration has specifically been contended to afford a leader with the ability to develop more impactful change strategies (Anderson & Anderson, 2010, p. 100) to minimize resistance and maximize change outcomes. Esaki, Harvey and Middleton (2015) noted “...*individual consideration* occurs when leaders pay special attention to employees’ needs...; they provide needed empathy, compassion, support, and guidance...” (p. 156). Anderson and Anderson (2010) argued leaders who “...are considerate of the internal states of others: what they think, how they feel, their values, desires, cares, and motivations” (p. 100) are the most successful change leaders.

The empathic component of transformational leadership, individualized

support, is argued to have a positive effect on change outcomes (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Transformational leadership is defined as "...a longer term relationship established between the leader and followers, built up over many interactions and having a more organizational or strategic orientation" (Caldwell, et al., 2008, p. 348). Akin to EI, transformational leadership is comprised of several components, including one related to empathy – individualized support (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014, p. 903). Individualized support in the leadership context has been explained as understanding, and responding to, the needs and emotions of followers (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; as cited by Parry & Smollan, 2011). This explanation ties closely with the definition of individual consideration offered by Esaki, et al. (2015) as well as Rogers' (1975) definition of empathy. Furthermore, it has been noted that "transformational leaders...utilize empathy to understand follower needs and values" (Megerian & Sosik, 2016, p. 38).

A leader's ability to understand the needs and feelings of followers, and to appropriately address those needs, enables a leader to modify their leadership style to best connect with, and motivate, followers (Griffin, Mason & Parker, 2012, p. 177). Gregory, Gregory and Moates (2011) conducted a study to understand the role of perspective taking in transformational leadership. In their study involving over 100 manager and follower dyads, they found "...understanding the manner in which a subordinate sees the world is one factor that enables a leader to have a transformational effect on a follower" (p. 814). Building on this finding, Gregory, Gregory and Moates (2011) suggested

...understanding a follower's perspective should allow the leader an appropriate starting point from which to begin to influence the perspective of the follower. Attempting to influence the perspective of another individual without first understanding that individual's current perspective...seems problematic as it would be difficult to establish preliminary common ground (p. 814).

Although such a claim can seem logical, based on the study's findings, the researchers did not explore this exact notion. However, a more recent study conducted by Abrell-Vogel and Rowold (2014) explored this notion and provided further insight.

In Abrell-Vogel and Rowold's (2014) study, they explored the components of transformational leadership to identify those most related to change outcomes. In their study of 12 organizations and 38 teams based in Germany, it was ascertained

employees' perception of leaders' individualized support explain[ed] a significant amount of variance in employees' commitment to change...if leaders are perceived as respecting followers' individual needs and caring for their feelings, employees are more likely to build a rather positive bond to the change initiative (p. 913).

Furthermore, the researchers proclaimed "...only individualized support has a significant impact on followers' reaction in change...none of the other transformational leadership behaviors...were found to be related to employees' affective commitment to change..." (p. 913-914). These findings validate the proposal offered by Gregory, Gregory and Moates (2011) and point directly to the importance, and positive impact, of an empathic leadership stance when leading change.

While the findings discussed thus far denote a positive correlation between individualized support and leading change, a separate study by Caldwell, et al. (2008) argued counter. Their study of 300 employees from 30 US-based companies representing diverse industries found a lack of correlation between the two factors. Caldwell, et al. (2008) determined "...transformational leaders seem to get more "buy in" to an organizational change regardless of their specific behaviors...this may...be based on the trust that has been built up over time and over multiple change events" (p. 353). A similar view was offered by Agote, et al. (2016) who asserted "In a change context that is characterized by high levels of outcome uncertainty and ambiguity, trust is likely to be at the forefront of followers' concerns, and may act as a core determinant of how change recipients react emotionally" (p. 41).

While the findings of Abrell-Vogel and Rowold (2014) identified a correlation between individualized support and change outcomes, Caldwell, et al. (2008) argued trust was the driver of success. I remain skeptical of the findings by Caldwell, et al. (2008) as their study utilized an approach containing two different surveys; one half of respondents answered questions about the leader's transformational leadership style while the other half answered questions about the leader's change leadership behaviors. Although their discovery should not be disregarded based on this, I believe the weight given to such findings should be tempered by the fact the results are derived by comparing two different study populations with two distinct approaches for data generation.

Factors Affecting Empathic Abilities

Research discussed to this point provides intelligence on the outcomes of an empathic leadership approach. However, several important caveats have been raised in the literature as to factors affecting one's empathic ability. Decety and Lamm (2006) argued:

Background affective state, prior experience with a situation, and the ability to cope with the distress of others (which relies, among others, on emotional regulation capabilities) are just a few examples of various intrapersonal factors that can impact the experience of empathy (p. 1158).

Similar sentiments have been asserted by others as well (Anders & Leiberg, 2006; Lamm & Singer, 2009).

A leader can be prevented from sensing or understanding their follower's emotions or feelings (Berntson, et al., 2012; Bolger, Ochsner & Zaki, 2008; Bryant & Cox, 2006; Lamm & Singer, 2009) for a variety of reasons. "Empathy is not an all or none phenomenon, nor is it automatic or reflexive, as many social and contextual factors affect its induction and expression" (Berntson, et al., 2012, p. 45).

Parry and Smollan (2011) contended "...followers [may] consciously or subconsciously hide negative emotions about change from their leaders..." (p. 436), making it hard if not impossible for a leader to get a read on their follower's reaction to the change. Bryant and Cox (2006) argued this occurs often during times of change because "...employees feel pressured to manage emotional

displays during times of transition as displays of emotions may be mistaken by management...” (p. 119).

Bryant and Cox (2006) highlighted followers may manage the emotions they exhibit to ‘fit in’, thereby affecting a leader’s ability to be empathic. Specifically, the “...ongoing focus on ‘appropriateness’ and the management of emotions at work is inevitable as management will always encourage employees to display emotions and behaviours that meet organisational goals” (p. 116). In the case where a follower conceals their emotions the leader will be challenged to get a sense of how that individual is feeling. Bolger, et al. (2008) specifically asserted empathy is most effectively used when the individual one is trying to better understand is willing to express themselves (p. 401).

A two-phase study examining the impact of the level of emotion displayed on another’s empathic abilities (Bolger, et al., 2008) shed further insight on this limiting factor. In phase one, participants were videotaped while sharing personal stories involving negative and positive experiences. Participants “made continuous ratings of how positive or negative they had felt while speaking” (p. 400) and were measured on “...how much their emotional experience is visible to other people...” (p. 400) via the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ). The second phase involved a new group of participants who viewed an equal number of the positive and negative stories captured on videotape from phase one and

“...continuously rated how they thought the target was feeling during each video” (p. 400). In addition, they completed the Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale (BEES) survey to determine their perceived level of empathic ability.

The results from the study (Bolger, et al., 2008) ascertained “...targets’ expressivity generally predicted empathic accuracy, and also interacted with perceivers’ trait empathy in predicting empathic accuracy. Critically, perceivers’ trait affective empathy was unrelated to empathic accuracy when targets were low in expressivity...” (p. 402). More specifically, “...the expressivity (BEQ score) of targets was a significant predictor of perceivers’ empathic accuracy...” (p. 401). In summary, the level of visual cues impacted an individual’s ability to determine the feelings, emotions and unspoken perspectives of the other.

Leaders can also impact their own empathic abilities - either subconsciously or consciously. It has been argued that “If we become too distressed by empathizing with another person and are not capable of regulating our empathic response, we will rather try to alleviate our own distress than attend to the other person” (Anders & Leiberg, 2006, p. 423).

Highly stressful or uncomfortable situations, such as leading change where tough decisions are required, may cause a leader to inadvertently look



away from the feelings and emotions of their followers (Anders & Leiberg, 2006). This is because "...feelings of personal distress evoke egoistic motivation to relieve your own distress" (Batson, Early & Salvarani, 1997, p. 752). It was advocated the observer (or leader) "...must strike a balance between emotion and thought and between self and other. Otherwise, empathy becomes a trap, and we can feel as if we're being held hostage by the feelings of others" (Divecha & Stern, 2015, p. 32). Sandage and Worthington Jr. (2010) noted "empathy requires a capacity to care about others without being overwhelmed by emotional distress..." (p. 38).

In addition to the factors discussed thus far, a situation can also impact one's empathic ability. Lamm and Singer (2009) asserted

...empathy is a highly flexible phenomenon, and that vicarious responses are malleable with respect to a number of factors – such as contextual appraisal, the interpersonal relationship between empathizer and other, or the perspective adopted during observation of the other (p. 81).

For example, "...on a busy day we might not pay as much attention to the other people as we would on a relaxed day" (Brüne, et al., 2013, p. 1543) which in turn limits our ability to be empathic towards another. Anders and Leiberg (2006) offered similar noting

in most situations when we observe someone in an emotional state...To what extent contagion-like processes are employed and result in a "correct" representation depends on the current emotional state of the observer and the experience the observer has with the target's situation (p. 434).

It seems several contextual factors can affect a leader's ability to be empathic. And despite a leader's best efforts, such factors can unknowingly have an impact given their subconscious nature.

Expectations by one's manager or organization can also impact a leader's empathic ability. Empathy can be "...incredibly difficult for many leaders to get right. Often they have been taught to shut down their emotional connections or empathy in order to make the difficult decisions" (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005, p. 43). In a study (Holt & Marques, 2012) looking to determine the rank order importance of 10 leadership qualities, including empathy, participants consistently ranked empathy in the bottom three of importance (p. 98).

Participants reasoning for the low ranking "...were ...consolidated in the following



two major themes: 1. Respondents believe that empathy is inappropriate in business settings...2. Respondents have a lack of familiarity with empathy..." (p. 100). Such insight supports the perspectives of Bunker and Wakefield (2005) while

potentially explaining why there is limited understanding of empathy in organizations; in situations where empathy is not encouraged or supported, individuals are unlikely to focus on it or take initiative to understand it.

Level of authority or power has also been identified to impact a leader's empathic abilities. It was cited "Possessing power, by definition, makes people less dependent and, therefore, decreases their motivation to pay attention to

others...” (as cited by Galinsky, Magee, Rothman, Rus & Todd, 2014, p. 628). Furthermore, “...neuroscience research...found that a sense of power inhibits the prefrontal and the cortex cingulate cortex...the neural circuitry that helps us pay attention to others...impair[ing] our ability to take others’ perspectives” (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016, p. 33). Appreciating the subconscious nature of this factor may be paramount to determining how to best develop empathy in leadership.

Lastly, the desensitization to emotions over time (Lown, 2016; Dunning, Van Boven, Loewenstein & Nordgren, 2013) may also impact a leader’s ability to be empathic. It has been argued that individuals who “...have become desensitized to emotional situations may...underestimate the intensity of their initial reactions to those situations. This desensitization blindness in self-judgments may produce desensitization blindness in emotional perspective taking” (Dunning, et al., 2013, p. 143). For example, a leader who has led multiple reorganizations or downsizings may lose appreciation of the emotional toll it can take on others due to their desensitization with repeated exposure.

The variety of factors impacting one’s empathic ability can help explain why empathy is not consistently exhibited by all leaders. These insights also bring about the question as to how empathy can be encouraged despite such factors. However, I believe the approaches to mitigating several of the influencers offer useful insight on how to maximize one’s empathic abilities.

Scientific Underpinnings of Empathy

Science provides a better understanding of how empathy works and its influencing factors. Reiss (2010) noted “the neurobiology of empathy offers hope for those who...find comfort in what can be measured” (p. 1604). Furthermore, “the neurosciences offer a refreshing biological stance for education research in this area...[including] the modulation of brain networks involved in the processing of affective and motivational experiences” (Costa & Costa, 2016, p. 281).

Conflicting views exist on whether one must see another to be effectively empathic (Brüne, et al., 2013, p. 1541). Some argued empathy occurs through the ‘use’ of visual cues, and in some cases, verbal cues as well (Andréasson, Dimberg & Thunberg, 2011; Bolger, et al., 2008; Decety & Lamm, 2006; Englis & Lanzetta, 1989; Gentry, et al., 2016; Stebnicki, 2008; as cited by Sonnby-Borgström, 2002). Decety and Lamm (2006) believe “...sharing of feelings is not sufficient to elicit empathy” (p. 1146). However, others accept verbal cues as sufficient for an empathic response (Berntson, et al., 2012; Bowen, Collins & Winczewski, 2016). Neuroscientific research on empathy may shed fact-based light on this topic.

Recent neuroscientific studies of empathy (Brüne, et al., 2013; Lamm & Singer, 2009; Reiss, 2010) provided detailed insight on the role of visual cues in empathy while aiming to determine whether one’s empathic response is truly unconscious. Such clarity and understanding is of great value as Lamm and Singer (2009) commented “How ordinary the ability to empathize with other

appears to us often only becomes evident when things go wrong, as when we are misunderstood by someone else and by consequence our feelings get hurt” (p. 81). For one to be empathic – to see or not to see – is the question.

Neuroscientific research has asserted that empathy is the result of “...activation of shared representations in the observer...automatically and without conscious awareness” (Lamm & Singer, 2009, p. 88) in “...the dorsal and genual regions of the anterior cingulate cortex...” (Reiss, 2010, p. 1604). Furthermore, it has been asserted “...activation of medial prefrontal areas (dorsal and ventral alike), left temporal regions, and right inferior parietal cortex ...[enables] inhibition of the self-perspective” (Anders & Leiberg, 2006, p. 430). These various brain regions, working together, enable one to have insight on the emotional state of another.

The importance of specific brain regions in one’s empathic ability has become further understood by looking at those who have suffered brain damage. When one’s ability to experience emotion is affected by brain trauma, their ability to sense emotions in another is affected as well (as cited by Bolger, et al., 2008, p. 399). For example, “...brain-damaged patients whose experience of disgust or fear is diminished...[have] difficulty perceiving those emotions in others” (as cited by Bolger, et al., 2008, p. 399). Another example is “patients with lesions in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (VMPFC) display deficits in cognitive empathy...while patients with lesions in the inferior frontal gyrus (IFG) cortex show impaired emotional empathy and emotion recognition” (as cited by Brüne,

et al., 2013, p. 1545). These unfortunate examples provide us with further insight on the importance of specific brain regions in one's empathic ability.

Individuals with certain psychological disorders also have inhibited empathic abilities (Berntson, et al., 2012; Brüne, et al., 2013). "There are people who possess specific personality traits which point to stunted emotional development and a general lack of empathy. A paradigmatic example is psychopathy..." (Berntson, et al., 2012, p. 43). Similarly, "patients with schizophrenia...have difficulties understanding the mental states of others, and fail to feel affected by others' emotions" (Brüne, et al., 2013, p. 1544).

The neuroscientific study of empathy has provided insight on another important factor for empathy – the role of oxytocin (OT) (Berntson, et al., 2012; Brüne, et al., 2013; Decety, 2011). Berntson, et al. (2012) noted "...it has become apparent that oxytocin is involved in a myriad of social processes, including empathy and concern..." (p. 45). Decety (2011) offered similar noting "Oxytocin, a peptide that is both a hormone and neurotransmitter, has broad influences on social and emotional processing throughout the body and brain" (p. 118). Specifically, "several studies in humans have found OT to increase empathy..." (Brüne, et al., 2013, p. 1543).

However, "...the effect of OT on empathy seems to depend on individual differences in past experiences and current contextual factors" (Brüne, et al., 2013, p. 1545). These findings once again indicate a variety of factors may

affect one's empathic ability (Anders & Leiberger, 2006; Berntson, et al., 2012; Brüne, et al., 2013; Bunker & Wakefield, 2005; Lamm & Singer, 2009).

Early childhood interactions have also been identified as a key determinate of one's empathic ability. It has been proposed "contextual factors such as early experiences with primary care-givers (attachment)...are capable of modulating empathy" (Brüne, et al., 2013, p. 1537). Englis and Lanzetta (1989) offered

for example, the parent may express pleasure prior to holding and cuddling the infant (a positive emotional experience), thus pairing the display of pleasure with a pleasurable experience for the child...these early experiences provide the basis for the acquisition of empathic emotional reactions (p. 545).

However, others contended early childhood experiences affect only one aspect of empathy – initial and unconscious empathy (Brüne, et al., 2013, p. 1543). The second aspect, conscious empathy, is claimed to be dependent on surrounding factors at that point in time (Brüne, et al., 2013, p. 1543). We are again reminded that current factors can affect one's empathic ability or view (Anders & Leiberger, 2006; Berntson, et al., 2012; Brüne, et al., 2013; Bunker & Wakefield, 2005; Lamm & Singer, 2009).

Studies by Sonnby-Borgström (2002) and Lamm and Singer (2009) help explain how several of these factors may impact one's empathic ability. The study by Sonnby-Borgström (2002) aimed to determine "...how facial mimicry behavior in "face-to-face interaction situations" is related to individual differences in emotional empathy at different levels of information processing" (p. 434). In

this study 21 individuals, of whom 50% were female, completed the Questionnaire Measure of Emotional Empathy (QMEE) to determine their level of empathic ability. To understand each participant's processing of visual cues, their reactions to pictures of different facial expressions were measured via electromyography (EMG) and their own written account.

This study concluded that regardless of a participant's empathic level (or ability), images viewed for an extremely short period did not enable empathy. However, when facial expressions were viewed for more than an extremely short period of time (17 – 30/40 ms), individuals high in empathy had an empathic response (Sonnby-Borgström, 2002, p. 439). For those participants low in empathy an interesting, and unexpected, finding was noted; they expressed "...inverted reaction tendencies...[for example] "smiling" when exposed to an angry face" (p. 439). To make sense of such findings, Sonnby-Borgström (2002) cited "...facial expressions and emotional reactions are thought to be learned early in life, so that by adulthood the expressions modified in this way occur automatically, without conscious thought" (p. 439). These findings highlight the importance of visual cues in enabling empathy, as well as the impact of early childhood experiences on one's empathic reaction.

A study reviewed by Lamm and Singer (2009) explored how visual cues and context may impact one's empathic ability. It was hypothesized visual cues would be a key ingredient to an individual's understanding of other's emotions (p. 89). Participants were asked to view pictures of individuals in pain; in certain

instances, they were asked to look at the photo and in other cases they were asked to view the photo by intentionally distracted from viewing the specific body part that was injured. The empathic reactions of participants were determined using functional magnetic resonance imaging of the brain.

Lamm & Singer (2009) noted that portions of the brain that normally react when focused on the other's reaction or emotions were not activated (p. 89) when they were distracted from looking at the specific injury. They ascertained "...contextual appraisal of a situation rather than its sensory input alone determines the empathizer's neural and behavioral response" (p.89). It has been specifically contended "A principle source of information is the behavior of the actor, in particular the facial and bodily expression of the emotion being experienced" (Englis & Lanzetta, 1989, p. 543). Such findings validated the contention that visual cues of another plays an important role in empathy (Andréasson, et al., 2011; Englis & Lanzetta, 1989).

In addition to the views that empathy can be impacted by activation of specific brain regions, OT levels and visual cues, others have argued gender plays a key role (Clarke, et al., 2015; Divecha & Stern 2015). As many can attest, gender stereotypes can come into play when speaking about being considerate and understanding of others – 'women are so sensitive, unlike men', 'men don't understand feelings' and the like. Recent studies of empathy from a neuroscientific lens help shed fact-based light on this topic.

Clarke, et al. (2015) proposed that a variance in self-reported empathy ratings occur between women and men as a result of societal views - it is more appropriate for a female, than a male, to be empathic (p. 4). Furthermore, Clarke, et al. (2015) cited "...difference[s] in self-reported empathy may not be due to biological differences but to a greater willingness on the part of females to self-report empathic experience" (p 4). Divecha and Stern (2015) offered "men who have been encouraged to "stand up" to conflict may become overly dominant...[and] withdraw in the face of someone's strong feelings..." (p. 32) whereas "...women are brought up to believe that empathy, in and of itself, is always appropriate..." (p. 34).

Lamm and Singer (2009) reviewed several studies exploring the implications of various factors on empathy, including gender. In a study measuring participant reaction when viewing a game simulation where a participant felt 'loyalty' to one team over another (p. 90) it was ascertained "...men, but not women, showed an absence of such empathy-related activity when seeing an unfair and disliked player in pain" (p. 90-91). Specifically, "...in men, a desire for revenge won over empathic motivation when they were confronted with someone experiencing pain who they believed deserved to be punished" (p. 91).

Such findings provide evidence that context can have an impact on one's empathic reaction; however, it seems to be more applicable in men than women.

This finding may be related to the hypothesis of Divecha and Stern (2015) that gender stereotypes inform male and female empathic reactions.

Clarke, et al. (2005) conducted a study to test their claims, specifically exploring the impact of social gender stereotypes on self-reported measures of empathy (p. 6). Over 300 participants, with 63% female representation, were involved in the study. Participant's level of empathy, and the impact of gender, was measured via on-line survey whereby participants reacted to a variety of scenarios where gender stereotypes were woven into each (p. 7). The study determined that "...depictions of normative emotional behavior for each gender may influence self-perceptions of empathy" (p. 11). This was ascertained by the data point that "...participants...[were] willing to alter their self-perceptions of empathic ability in order to more closely match the gender normative models presented..." (p. 12). While this brings clarity to how gender effects one's empathic ability, it points once again to the importance of context.

Given the variance in findings on the role of gender in empathy discussed to this point, we turn to a study by Englis and Lanzetta (1989) for further insight into this topic. The study explored the role of gender and context relative to one's empathic response. In the study, the emotional responses of 50 participants (24% females) were examined in positive and competitive situations using "...electromyographic (EMG) recordings from four facial muscle regions to measure the patterned facial activity associated with the emotional responses of

interest and also to provide some indication of the nature of the emotions observed” (p. 546).

The study’s (Englis & Lanzetta, 1989) results offered a new insight: one’s expectations of a situation, and the emotions outwardly expressed by the other, can influence an individual’s empathic reaction (p. 551). Individuals “...have in the past learned that the relationship between the emotional expressions of others and the emotional consequences for self are markedly different as a function of the cooperative or competitive nature of situations” (p. 551). Furthermore, it was determined context, irrespective of gender, was the key influencer of empathy because “...expectations of cooperation and competition led to empathetic and counterempathetic responses respectively, even though subjects’ experience with the coactor did not confirm their initial expectations” (p. 551). The study’s findings correlate with those of Clarke, et al. (2015) who ascertained context, but not gender, drives an individual’s empathic response.

The neuroscientific study of empathy provides rich insight on how empathy is activated and the variety of factors that can impact one’s empathic ability. The neurological underpinnings of empathy bring rise to another important consideration – can empathy be learned?

Can Empathy Be Learned?

Ochsner and Zaki (2012) noted “experience sharing is often tied to a mechanism known as ‘neural resonance’: perceivers’ tendency to engage overlapping neural systems when they experience a given internal state and

when they observe (or know that) targets (are) experiencing that same state...” (p. 675). Furthermore, “...such findings supported the assertion that these...are [both] fundamentally dissociable routes to empathy” (Ochsner & Zaki, 2012, p. 676).

Many agree that empathy can be developed (Buie, 1981; Clarke, 2006a; Clarke, 2006b; Gentry, et al., 2016; Skinner & Spurgeon, 2005; Rogers, 1975; VerticalNews.com, 2011). Neuroscientific research has “...confirm[ed] that empathy can be developed and enhanced through mindfulness training and practice” (Krahnke & Pavlovich, 2011, p. 134). Buie (1981) noted “...the empathic process requires ordinary sensory perception, and it is not an inborn irreducible capability separable from all other mental capacities” (p. 283).

A recent study (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016) exhibited evidence that perspective taking could be developed. In the research, part of the participant group was instructed to take the perspective of others while the other part was given no guidance to do so. The study’s results found the simple act of telling one to consider the perspectives of another led to meaningful outcomes. Specifically, “after being told to take the perspective of others, high-power people...ultimately made far better decisions than those who didn’t receive the perspective-taking instruction” (p. 35). It is important to note, however, that detailed information on the study approach and population were not provided. Therefore, it is not possible to know whether other variables may have impacted the findings discussed.

These findings confirmed an individual can activate empathy by simply imaging the state of another. Holt and Marques (2012) cited support for this belief highlighting “individuals can be taught to ask questions to enhance understanding that builds connections between people and helps them to perceive the emotions of others...” (p. 103). Therefore, it stands to reason guiding a person to consider the emotions of another may be an effective approach to increase one’s empathy; therefore, it can be ‘learned’. While many support the view empathy can be developed (Buie, 1981; Clarke, 2006a; Clarke, 2006b; Gentry, et al., 2016; Skinner & Spurgeon, 2005; Rogers, 1975; VerticalNews.com, 2011) several factors have been found to impact the effectiveness of empathy development; including gender (Bailey, Dunn, Kelley, Phillips & Riess, 2012; Lyles, et al., 1995), organizational level (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016) and psychological factors (Griffin, Mason & Parker, 2012).

Several individuals have purported empathy training has little to no impact for men (Bailey, et al., 2012; Lyles, et al., 1995). In a study (Bailey, et al., 2012) conducted to determine the impact of empathy training for physicians, it was ascertained the impact was “...very strong for women...and not significant for men...” (p. 1284). This determination was made through the study involving almost 100 residents and fellows (52% female representation) at a hospital and medical center in the US. Researchers also discovered in the study training did not increase empathic abilities outside the workplace, despite the increase in workplace empathy (p. 1284).

A similar correlation between gender and empathy development was found in another study (Lyles, et al., 1995). The researchers assessed the impact of a one-month intensive training program offered to 26 first-year residents affiliated with a US hospital. Aligned with the findings of Bailey, et al. (2012), the training was determined to be more impactful for women than men (p. 729).

The context surrounding one's learning experience is another factor that can influence outcomes. As noted in the *Factors Affecting Empathic Abilities* section of this chapter, many leaders "...have been taught to shut down their emotional connections or empathy in order to make the difficult decisions" (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005, p. 43). This context may cause a leader to be less receptive to embracing training on empathy.

The psychological characteristics of a participant were also found to influence the effectiveness of empathic training. In a study by Griffin, et al. (2012) exploring the effectiveness of training outcomes it was determined "...mean change scores were all positive...[but] there remained a relatively high level of variability in the change scores at the negative end of the distribution, suggesting that the training intervention had had a negative impact for some of the participants" (p. 184). The authors suggested that "...leaders who experienced more positive psychological reactions were...more likely to exhibit positive behavioral reactions...reveal[ing] the importance of considering leaders' psychological well-being when attempting to promote change in leadership

behavior” (p. 186). The researchers noted one should focus on “concepts such as the ideal self, a personal vision, and behaving in a manner that is consistent with one’s values...” to maximize positive learning outcomes (p. 187).

Although a variety of factors can inhibit the effectiveness of empathy training, a potential approach to neutralize such inhibitors has been identified. It has been cited “...when participants were paid for accurate responses on a test of empathy, previously observed gender differences on the same test disappeared” (Clarke, et al., 2015, p. 12). Such findings point to the positive implication of placing explicit importance on, and motivation to, learn empathy. Many leaders have not focused on empathy because they have been ‘groomed’ that it is not an appropriate or necessary behavior in leadership (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005; Holt & Marques, 2012). Setting empathic expectations, along with providing appropriate support mechanisms, may neutralize certain inhibitors of positive training outcomes.

Effective Learning Modalities for Empathy

The determination of an appropriate learning modality to increase one’s empathic ability is important as training has not been consistently determined to effect one’s empathic skills. Additionally, in general, training on general change management has been found to fall short. The 2013 Willis Towers Watson Change and Communication ROI Survey found that “...nearly nine out of 10 respondents (87%) train their managers to manage change. However, less than one-fourth of all respondents (22%) report their training is effective” (paragraph

4). The research discussed in this section involves approaches of formal training and development, self-reflective exercises, simulations and learning groups to identify those that have been found to be most effective.

To learn about the effect of classroom training on empathic abilities, we turn to a study conducted Bailey, et al. (2012). The study focused on the effect of empathy training in the daily work of almost 100 residents and fellows from a hospital and medical facility in the US (p. 1280). The training included three 60-minute sessions offered over a four-week period and specifically focused on: deepening understanding of the neurobiology behind empathy; increasing understanding of the role of emotions during patient-physician interactions; enhancing the ability to detect what patient was feeling through watching facial cues; and teaching appropriate reactions to different empathic states (p. 281). To measure the training's impact, actual patients completed a Consultation and Relational Empathy Measure (CARE) survey of their respective resident or fellow providing them with care pre- and post- training.

Bailey, et al.'s (2012) study determined empathy was increased by the training as participants shown a "...significant improvement in their ability to decode subtle facial expressions [along with]...a strong positive correlation between ability to learn subtle facial expressions of emotion and change in patient-rated empathy" (p. 1284). Bailey, et al.'s research also corroborated the findings by others that gender can impact empathic training outcomes (Lyles, et al., 1995). In the current study "...the training effect was very strong for

women...and not significant for men..." (p. 1284). An important caveat was noted by Bailey et al. for this study: "...Residents volunteered to participate, and therefore the sample may have been biased toward participants who were receptive to the training." (Bailey, et al., 2012, p. 1285). However, it appears that the training has an effect on empathy, irrespective of gender, based on this caveat.

Offering participants focused guidance, while allowing for self-discovery and learning via simulations, is another approach to training. Skinner and Spurgeon (2005) cited "a structured behavioral approach incorporating practice, observation, behavioral rehearsal and the use of video feedback has been used in transformational leadership training and could be clearly extended to empathy training..." (p. 10). The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (n.d.) noted "...learning to recognize [empathic]...insights is harder than you might think...our minds automatically filter out a lot of information without even realizing it" (n.d., p. not noted). A blended approach of guidance, self-discovery and simulations may prove impactful as Decety and Lamm (2006) claimed empathy development could occur by directing an individual to look for certain expressions and reactions in the other (p. 139) – addressing the watch-out noted by the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (n.d.).

In a case study involving the use of simulated experiences to enhance empathy (Bassett, Mennenga & Pasquariello, 2016) it was determined that simulation alone is not sufficient. In the case study, 127 students (a majority

female) were provided with a fictitious individual for which they had to provide care to over the length of the study. The researchers hypothesized repeated exposure to the fictitious individual would increase participants' empathic reaction as a result of the deeper personal context and insight gained. The finding that simulations alone were not effective does not come as a surprise as several key requirements for an impactful empathic learning modality proposed by Skinner and Spurgeon (2005) and Decety and Lamm (2006) were missing. For example, participants were not given specific guidance on how to be more empathic. Such findings also correlate with the argument that one must be encouraged to be empathic (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005) for such a reaction to occur.

Another study of a blended learning approach in the healthcare setting (VerticalNews.com, 2011) found this approach delivered strong outcomes. The study discussed by VerticalNews.com (2011) was conducted by Duke University with participants from a Veterans Medical Center in the US. Participants completed a computer-based learning experience based on “the current gold standard for teaching empathy skills...a multi-day course that involves short lectures and role-playing with actors to simulate clinical situations” (paragraph 7). The study found “doctors in the trained group...responded empathically twice as often as those who received no training. In addition, they were better at eliciting patient concerns...” (paragraph 11). Such findings offer additional support for a blended learning approach involving knowledge building, directive guidance and simulation experiences.

The study reviewed by Lyles et al. (1995) provided even further proof on the effectiveness of a blended learning approach. The approach was a one-month intensive training program offered to 26 first-year residents at a US based university (p. 729) involving a "...four-week block rotation that was experiential, skill-oriented, and guided by competency-based objectives..." (p. 730). In addition, the learning focused on areas specifically "...derived from those unique problems that the learner wanted to address" (p. 730).

The training program (Lyles et al., 1995) was found to deliver positive outcomes, but more so for women than men (p. 729). Regrettably, no further insight was offered on potential reasons for the variance in learning outcomes based on gender. However, they did highlight the caveat that "...positive findings in the present program may have been due in part to the fact that the training was designed to improve the same skills that have been shown to be associated with patient satisfaction..." (p. 731). Such a caveat would be valid from my perspective if the positive outcomes were found irrespective of gender. Given this is not the case, I wonder if the self-directed portion of the learning may have been the reason for the variation in results.

The use of simulations for increasing one's empathy were also studied by Stickley and Williams (2016). Their review of a variety of empathic learning approaches in the healthcare setting identified "...empathy is often taught in the context of behaviourally-based [*sic*] micro-skills of listening and responding. This is of value increasing interpersonal repertoire and provides a framework for

application in difficult situations” (p. 333). However, Stickley and Williams (2016) noted “...the potential for empathy developing in terms of a “learned skill” is limited...” (p. 333). They suggested the learning approach could be enhanced “...through the use of illness narratives and the involvement of patients and relatives, who bring reality to life in the classroom...” (p. 333) and offered “...students may be facilitated to become in touch with their innate capacities for empathy and experientially learn the value of this kind of understanding...” (p. 333).

From the studies reviewed, it appears simulation alone is not sufficient. Therefore, a hybrid approach of reflective learning and guided experiences may be more effective. It has been cited “research indicates that empathy development does not occur through theory and unplanned classroom experiences...” (Bassett, et al., 2016, p. 139). We will now explore the modality of experiential learning as it combines guided experiences with reflective learning.

Costa and Costa (2016) postulated “effective emotional education would require opportunities, self-reflection and feedback focused on the emotional process itself...[as well as] adequate debriefing encounters...” (p. 282). A study reviewed by Clarke (2006b) provides support for such an approach. In the learning approach (Clarke, 2006b), an “...emphasis was placed on discourse and sharing experiences or narratives as a means of enhancing the visibility of particular emotional abilities or enabling them to surface so that they become a

far more focal point for discussion and therefore learning” (p. 455). An “...analysis of the data suggests that dialogue and reflection may well be two of the chief mechanisms associated with the learning process...” (Clarke, 2006b, p. 455). Furthermore, it was proposed

...learning associated with emotional abilities may be of a far more tactic nature, so that approaches that maximize experiential learning and participation in workplace social structures may be particularly effective at facilitating the development of such abilities (Clarke, 2006b, p. 462).

Clarke (2006b) also highlighted the importance of context based on the findings of others “...argued that workplace learning approaches to developing emotional abilities may be far more effective than *[sic]* traditional training interventions which decontextualize emotional abilities from the situation in which they are enacted” (p. 450).

The insights from Clarke (2006b) provide useful considerations for identifying an effective learning modality for empathy. In addition, these insights connect to the learning guidance provided by Kuhnert and Russell (1992) who argued the use of constructive/developmental (CD) theory is most effective for empathic development. CD theory “...hypothesizes a range of life events (skill acquisition episodes)...condition [one’s] readiness for growth and stimulate change...” (p. 342); and as such, “...each stage of leader development should be distinguished by some shared “meaning making process”...” (p. 343). Furthermore, it is argued that an experiential approach coupled with reflection would be imperative as “it is *not* the skill acquisition episode itself that is important, but *how* that event is understood by individuals...” (p. 343). It appears the developmental approach

reviewed by Clarke (2006b) incorporated aspects of CD theory postulated to achieve successful outcomes for empathy training.

While a CD theory, or experiential learning approach, may seem like the ideal modality for empathic training, Kuhnert and Russell (1992) noted an important caveat for using CD theory; "...self-evaluation...is predicted to enhance performance *only* after some critical mass of knowledge has been acquired" (p. 339). The review conducted by Clarke (2006b) noted individuals had a strong baseline of knowledge on emotional consideration prior to participating in the learning approach. Therefore, this study may be an illustrative example of the caveat raised by Kuhnert and Russell (1992).

Guided experiential learning, coupled with classroom training, may be an ideal training modality based on the insights discussed to this point. A classroom training course can deepen one's understanding of empathy while the experiential learning aspect enables further discussion and exploration of empathy (Clarke, 2006b). When it comes to being empathic, "We can have no *direct* knowledge about the mental experience of another person. We only have inferences which are based upon an assumption that we locate within our own mind something that is analogous or homologous with that mental state of the other person..." (Buie, 1981, p. 292). Furthermore, individuals "...grasp another person's action as a rationally compelling one because we can grasp his thoughts as reasons for acting by putting ourselves in his shoes, by imagining the situation that he faces..." (Stueber, 2012, p. 59-60). Therefore, a blended

learning approach can provide individuals with specific experiences to expand the number of 'references' available while also addressing the importance of building a baseline of knowledge of the topic (Kuhnert & Russell, 1992).

The insights offered in this section provide clarity on the most effective training modalities to consider in support of building one's empathy. Clarke (2016a) cautioned "...many programs are sold based on positive testimonials and flimsy anecdotes, often eagerly consumed by organizations desperate to ensure their employees are not missing out on their piece of emotional pie" (p. 423-424). The insights from this section coupled with the considerations discussed in the section *Can Empathy be Learned?* offer guidance to ensure the approach taken delivers measurable outcomes.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A leader's ability to be empathic addresses several key factors that have been shown to have a profoundly positive impact on change outcomes (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Anderson & McColl-Kennedy, 2002; Hill, et al., 2012; Parry & Smollan, 2011). It has been found that "...only individualized support has a significant impact on followers' reaction to change" (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014, p. 913-914). Furthermore, a leader's lack of empathy was shown to be equally impactful by enhancing follower resistance to change (Parry & Smollan, 2011). The review of the literature for this Capstone indicates the outcomes achieved through empathic leadership are aligned with the psychological aspects argued by Bridges (2009) to be critical for successful transitions.

Several key insights on the connection between empathy and successful change outcomes, the factors effecting one's ability to be empathic and the considerations for the development of empathy have been identified in the literature discussed in Chapter two. This Chapter begins by summarizing key insights from the reviewed literature in Chapter two and provides a perspective on how empathy can be used to effectively address followers needs during each stage of transition to enhance change outcomes.

Considering the many empathy definitions identified in Chapter two, I believe empathy in the leadership context can best be defined as the ability to understand and appreciate a follower's perspective. Understanding of followers provides leaders with useful knowledge to help them develop their leadership skills to maximize their connection with, and motivation of, followers (as cited by Griffin, et al., 2016) during periods of transition.

Correlation Between Empathic Outcomes and Successful Transition

Anderson and Anderson (2010) argued leaders who "...are considerate of the internal states of others: what they think, how they feel, their values, desires, cares, and motivations" (p. 100) are the most successful change leaders. It has also been noted that during the change process "leaders...must appreciate the reasons for employees' feelings and fears and move accordingly...allay[ing] their fears and build[ing] trust and confidence" (Rao, 2015, p. 36). These insights acknowledge "...that we will respond to others as leaders if their displays of empathy first make us feel understood and valued as individuals" (Humphrey, et al., 2006, p. 150). In summary, a followers' trust in the leader, a leader's ability to provide meaningful communications for followers, and a leader's understanding of follower needs and perspectives are keys to successful change outcomes.

Despite the findings on the value of empathic leadership during change, the reality is many change frameworks fail to address the human aspect of change which empathy supports; missing the reality that "...different types of people are concerned about different aspects of the change..." (Bridges, 1986, p.

33). Rather, many frameworks provide a one-size fits all solution that focuses solely on the actions to take during change – such as implementation of sponsors or a guiding coalition. The lack of focus on the human side of change can be detrimental. “Although many factors undoubtedly contribute to failed organizational change efforts, scholars and practitioners increasingly point to the important role of the “human element” (Hill et al., 2012, p. 122). Bridges’ Transition Framework (2009) addresses the process side while also incorporating the psychological considerations required to successfully traverse transition during change.

An empathic leadership approach can enhance follower and leader interactions and outcomes (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Anderson & McColl-Kennedy, 2002; Hill, et al., 2012; Parry & Smollan, 2011) as well as address the same psychological factors proffered by Bridges (2009) as keys to successful transition. At the most basic level, a leader’s empathic approach during transition helps develop trust (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005). Additionally, empathic leaders offer enhanced to followers during transition by understanding followers’ views of the situation (Devanna & Tichy, 1986) and the accompanying feelings (Brüne, et al., 2013). The insights garnered through an empathic approach helps leaders further enhance their relationship with followers through the development of effective communications (Humphrey, Kellett & Sleeth, 2002) and even offers insight on how to ideally

modify their leadership approach to best match follower needs (as cited by Griffin, et al., 2016).

The psychological needs required to successfully traverse each phase of change in the Transition Framework (Bridges, 2009) provide unintentional keys as to where empathy can be most impactful to the transition process. The ability to match empathic leadership with change and transition outcomes can put the insights offered to this point into practice.

Effective Empathic Leadership During Each Phase of Transition

During the initial phase of transition, *Ending, Losing, Letting Go* (Bridges, 2009), it is important for a leader to respect that the "...picture in people's heads is the reality...the mental image of how and why things are the way they are..." (Bridges, 2009, p. 64). It is also the reality they will hold onto "...at almost any cost" (as cited by Pritchard, 2010, p. 47). Followers successfully navigate this phase by feeling understood and supported (Bridges, 2009). But what does 'understood' mean for a follower? Is feeling 'supported' included?

Parry and Smollan (2011) noted in their research that followers "...appreciated when their leaders understood how they felt about the change and found that this form of support gave them strength in coping with emotional demands of change processes and outcomes" (p. 447). A leader can help a follower feel 'understood' by deducing how followers perceive they will be affected by the change as well as by conveying this understanding back to the follower (Book, 1988; Gupta & Mathew, 2015; Humphrey, Kellett & Sleeth, 2006,

Rogers, 2007). It is through a leader's understanding of the follower's perspective of the situation that a leader can in turn offer support a follower will find meaningful.

The leadership tasks during the *Ending, Losing, Letting Go* (Bridges, 2009) phase are not easily accomplished, as their success is highly subject to each follower's perspective. Empathy can play a key role in elevating a leader's chances of successful follower transition in this phase as well. Specifically, empathy can help a leader to effectively understand and respond to the needs of others (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; as cited by Parry & Smollan, 2011). It can also increase optimism by focusing on each individual (Anderson & McColl-Kennedy, 2002; Parry & Smollan, 2011). Empathy can motivate others (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016), to affectively communicate (Berntson, et al., 2012) and to provide psychological support (Parry & Smollan, 2011). Moreover, empathy has been found to be critical in the development of trust (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005).

Upon entering *The Neutral Zone* phase (Bridges, 2009) of transition, followers' needs will transition as well. Followers begin to appreciate the emergency of change as they experience moments of confusion, frustration and disillusionment for things are no longer familiar. During the delicate moments when followers are challenged by the change, the change can easily stall or derail if leaders are unable to minimize follower concerns while maximizing their engagement. The "...leadership task is to...help individuals in the organization let go, deal with the discomfort, rebuild, and learn" (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005, p.

11). Akin to the leadership tasks in the first phase, this is a tall order for any leader as "...different types of people are concerned about different aspects of the change..." (Bridges, 1986, p. 33). Empathy can be a powerful leadership skill to accomplish this since it "...helps us to understand people whose values, views, and behavior are different from our own" (Calloway-Thomas, 2010, p. 5).

Alleviating follower challenges and concerns during this phase help avoid stalling, and even potential failure, of the change initiative. Leaders can do so by providing followers with clear guidance and by helping build their confidence through opportunities to gain the needed knowledge, skills and capabilities. A leader's ability to accomplish such tasks is of paramount importance to mitigate follower resistance which can be expressed by "...passively withdrawing from change initiatives and/or actively sabotaging them to make them fail" (Hill et al., 2012, p. 133).

Similar to the prior transition phase, an empathic leadership approach can provide multiple benefits to both the leader and the follower. Using an empathic leadership approach, the leader can continue to effectively understand, and respond to, the needs of others (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; as cited by Parry & Smollan, 2011). Such understanding also helps leaders consider and address points of resistance (Anderson & Anderson, 2010) and affectively communicate (Berntson, et al., 2012). Furthermore, the leader can build positive momentum for the change using empathy by identify ways in which to best motivate followers

(Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016) as they ready to move into *The New Beginning* phase (Bridges, 2009).

The New Beginning phase (Bridges, 2009) presents a difficulty level equal to that of the prior phase. During this phase, aspects of the change not previously considered or expected begin to emerge; in reality, things may operate differently than in concept. The unexpected nature of the things that arise can cause individuals to question the change, and even lose confidence in its feasibility. As the final phase of transition, *The New Beginning* phase (Bridges, 2009) can lead one to believe the change is complete; however, this is far from true. This phase must be managed as carefully as the prior phases to ensure followers complete the phase and fully adopt the change.

Proactively engaging followers to identify challenges before they arise, to help limit the unexpected, is a critical leadership task in *The New Beginning* phase (Bridges, 2009). Followers' confidence can be maintained when given a specific role in making the new work. The leadership task is to engage followers in identifying challenges early while encouraging them to be solution innovators. "The new way of doing things represents a gamble: there is always the possibility it won't work" (Bridges, 2009, p. 59). By proactively engaging followers to mitigate risk, and recognizing the ways in which things are working well, leaders can minimize follower's potential to lose confidence in the new.

The proactive engagement of followers during *The New Beginning* phase (Bridges, 2009) is both an art and a science. 'Artistically', the leader is finding

unique ways to leverage each follower's skills, strengths, and needs while 'scientifically' they are aligning different followers to each aspect of the 'new' to maximize chances for success. Based on my experience, the importance of matching follower needs with a 'new' aspect is usually overlooked because it can seem counterintuitive. A leader will typically assign those whose skills and abilities best match to the work. However, matching follower needs with an aspect of the 'new' can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. Individuals naturally desire to have their needs met and leaders naturally desire to see the change succeed; the unique matching of follower needs to a 'new' aspect can increase the overall chances for success, as both parties are invested in its success.

During *The New Beginning* phase (Bridges, 2009), empathy offers a leader with insights on needs that must be met for followers to fully embrace the 'new'. Akin to *The Neutral Zone* phase (Bridges, 2009), empathy helps a leader to effectively understand the needs of others (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; as cited by Parry & Smollan, 2011) and to motivate others (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016). Through an empathic leadership approach, the leader can effectively understand the current follower concerns and reservations to identify ways in which to address each. Overall, the care and concern expressed through an empathic leadership approach enhances the follower's commitment to the change (Hill, et al., 2012).

A leader's ability to be empathic during each phase of transition offers a multitude of benefits for followers. During change, a leader's role is "...helping the people...deal with their emotions...[and] to manage through the confusion and uncertainty as the organization adapts to the changes..." (Creery, 2012, para 11). I have personally found an empathic approach creates a stronger bond between the leader and their followers which can benefit both throughout the transition. The mutual respect and understanding created sets the tone for trust in the relationship, as well as creates space for followers to feel comfortable in expressing their concerns and thoughts without being asked. This strong bond and relationship can be leaned upon when things become extremely tough or there is an unexpected bump in the road – open communication will remain along with a willingness to give each other 'some slack' – because both know each has the best of intent. The stark reality is "...our old ways of planning for, designing and implementing change in a logical, linear fashion don't really work anymore" (Creery, 2012, para 2). I wonder, might empathy become the new change management 'bandwagon'? If so, it may open the doors for greater transparency and trust in everyday interactions that create space for new ideas to emerge.

Empathy: The New Bandwagon?

From the literature reviewed, it is evident empathic leadership can provide benefits during each phase of change and transition. However, with so many benefits one may wonder why every individual tasked with leading change is not utilizing empathy. Two key reasons for the underutilization of empathy in

leadership surfaced in the literature; many leaders have been groomed to believe empathy is not appropriate at work (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005; Holt & Marques, 2012) and other leaders have little to no understanding of empathy (Holt & Marques, 2012). The limited understanding of empathy by many may also be a result of the various factors that can impede one's ability to be empathic in the first place, including:

- factors surrounding the moment in time when one is attempting to be empathic (Anders & Leiberger, 2006; Berntson, et al., 2012; Brüne, et al., 2013; Bunker & Wakefield, 2005; Lamm & Singer, 2009),
- being distracted (Anders & Leiberger, 2006; Brüne, et al., 2013),
- the amount of visual cues offered by the follower (Andréasson, et al., 2011; Bolger, et al., 2008; Brüne, et al., 2013; Decety & Lamm, 2006; Englis & Lanzetta, 1989; Gentry, et al., 2016; Lamm & Singer, 2009; Reiss, 2010; Stebnicki, 2008; as cited by Sonnby-Borgström, 2002),
- and even specific brain region functioning (Berntson, et al., 2012; Brüne, et al., 2013).

With so many factors impacting a leader's empathic ability, it is easy to appreciate why empathy has not yet become the new 'bandwagon'. However, hope remains; understanding the factors impacting one's empathic ability provide a 'cheat sheet' of that which must be addressed to support leaders in taking an empathic approach.

Supporting and Developing Empathy

A leader's willingness to be, and to some degree their ability to be, empathic can be addressed through the most basic of management approaches - the 'carrot and stick'. It has been determined that an individual's level of empathy can be improved by establishing clear expectations ('the stick') for an empathic approach (Clarke, et al., 2005; Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016), by providing rewards and recognition ('the carrot') for exhibiting empathy (Clarke, et al., 2015) and by offering directive guidance on how to be empathic (Holt & Marques, 2012; Decety & Lamm, 2006). For example, Galinsky and Schweitzer (2016) noted the simple act of telling one to consider the perspectives of another led to meaningful empathic outcomes (p. 35).

While empathic outcomes in leadership can be achieved by establishing clear expectations (Clarke, et al., 2005; Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016) and providing the right encouragement (Clarke, et al., 2015), not everyone will automatically become empathic. As mentioned earlier, a variety of factors can impede one's empathic abilities. Clear expectations for empathic leadership without clear guidance on how to be empathic in leadership is an equation for failure. Many leaders may require information to build their knowledge of empathy given the limited understanding of empathy in the business setting (Holt & Marques, 2012). Bunker and Wakefield (2005) noted learning outcomes are maximized through an approach that builds baseline knowledge at the start.

Adult learning style and needs, as well as the context of the organization (Clarke, 2006b), are critical factors to consider when building the right approach

to deepen one's knowledge – irrespective of the topic. “Malcom Knowles...described the adult learning as a process of self-directed inquiry” (Russell, 2006, para 3) whereby “each adult brings to the learning experience preconceived thoughts and feelings...” (Russell, 2006, para 3). Engaging learner experiences, while keeping in mind the unique needs of adult learners, are important ingredients to successful learning outcomes. Specific to empathy, the adult learning process described by Knowles (Russell, 2006) is highly applicable. Research has shown a developmental approach incorporating clear guidance on how to be empathic (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016; Holt & Marques, 2012) coupled with reflecting learning opportunities (Clarke, 2006b; Kuhnert & Russell, 1992; Lyles et al., 1995; Skinner & Spurgeon, 2005) on empathic experiences is most impactful.

A developmental approach combining knowledge building with experiential learning and reflection has been found to be most impactful for building empathic abilities based on the literature explored. However, to maximize the outcomes of an empathic leadership approach, clear expectations of an empathic leadership approach must also be in place. A leader who is empathic with followers during change is better equipped “...to design change strategies that minimize resistance in stakeholders” (Anderson & Anderson, 2010, p. 100) due to their ability to minimize the number of follower concerns (Hill, et al., 2012). And while empathy can help a leader to minimize resistance and concerns (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Hill et al., 2012), it can also aid the leader in creating positive

energy by helping them determine the most appropriate way to motivate followers (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016).

Summary

Presented in Chapter Four, the *Leader's Empathic Sourcebook* is offered as a guidance for leaders on how to be effectively self-directed on empathy in support of their followers during change and transition. *A Leader's Empathic Sourcebook*, based on the outcomes achieved through an empathic leadership process, aligns to all phases of transition through change. The Sourcebook utilizes insights from the literature on where empathy can be most effective in the process of transition, the most effective developmental approaches, as well as recommendations to help mitigate factors impeding one's empathic ability while highlighting leadership success factors.

CHAPTER 4

A LEADER'S EMPATHIC SOURCEBOOK

Introduction

“...Today’s circumstances are constantly changing... – only leaders who can lead their organizations through repeated changes will succeed...” (Holt & Marques, 2012, p. 97). The *Leader’s Empathic Sourcebook* is included as a chapter of the Capstone as it is a result of the study and the cornerstone of the Capstone. The Sourcebook is designed in three sections, starting with an introduction to empathy to build a baseline knowledge for all leaders. The second section provides a brief overview of Bridges’ Transition Framework (2009) and summarizes, by phase, outcomes that can be achieved through an empathic approach. The third and final section provides questions for self-reflection and follower engagement to help one be effectively empathic during each transition phase. Tips on how to effectively leverage the different aspects of the guide are woven throughout for the leader’s reference.

A Tool for Enhancing Empathic Outcomes

The Sourcebook is a tool for providing individuals with self-directed guidance on how to be effectively empathic in support of successful change outcomes. The guidance offered aides one in understanding the unique perspectives and needs of followers to help determine the best change tactics to support individuals undergoing change. “...Outstanding leaders differ from less

effective leaders in their higher consideration of and sensitivity to the needs of their followers” (as cited by Humphrey, et al., 2002, p. 527). The Sourcebook developed guides leaders on how to effectively understand followers and their needs so they are primed to respond appropriately, irrespective of the type of change or complexity of the change.

Simply providing the *Leader’s Empathic Sourcebook* to a leader will not in itself lead to strong outcomes. The opportunity to reflect on learning experiences with others through learning support groups (Clarke, 2006b, Skinner & Spurgeon, 2005; Kuhnert & Russell, 1992, Lyles et al., 1995), clear expectations (Clarke, et al., 2005; Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016) on the need to lead empathically, and the right encouragement (Clarke, et al., 2015) are the other components of the success equation. By offering a supportive and comprehensive approach for empathic leadership behaviors during change, the change outcomes achieved can be maximized. Guidance on how to ensure a supportive change approach for the leadership sourcebook is offered following the *Leader’s Empathic Sourcebook*.

Maximizing Empathic Outcomes

The *Leader’s Empathic Sourcebook* is merely one part of the empathic leadership success equation when leading change. To maximize outcomes when using the Sourcebook, the following approach is recommended:

1. Establish clear expectations for leaders on the behaviors they must exhibit in support of the change, including empathy;

2. Implement, or align current performance, objectives to the expectations established in #1 with clear outcomes defined for each objective;
3. Hold small group (10 to 12 individuals) kick-off meetings to explain expectations, to provide leaders with the leadership guide in appendix A, to discuss how utilizing an empathic approach can offer benefits to leaders and followers, alike, and to create an opportunity for leaders to learn by sharing and reflecting on their past experiences with leading change;
4. Establish a rhythm of small group (10 to 12 individuals) connection points to allow leaders to share their on-going experiences in using the leadership guide in appendix A to encourage reflective learning, to allow leaders to express their own concerns and needs, and to create a consistent 'space' for leaders to gain support during the transition;
5. Recognize those leaders who are successfully taking an empathic approach to change by highlighting their experiences and outcomes (consider doing so during the small group meetings set in #4); and
6. Once the organization has progressed to *The New Beginning* phase (Bridges, 2009), but before change project support has ramped down, hold discussions with small groups (set in #4) to gain alignment on their continued needs, to understand how they want

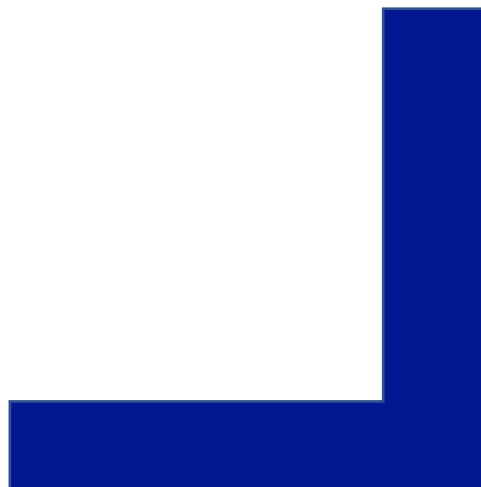
to stay connected, to conducted lessons learned, and to determine the appropriate time and way to disband the small groups established.

While the steps outlined can seem simple enough, I encourage readers to not underestimate the amount of time, planning, and consideration required for each. As much as leaders must utilize an empathic leadership approach during change, the individual offering up empathic leadership guidance, and the supporting Sourcebook must do the same – lead by example, ensuring the right support offered to those directly accountable for leading the organization through transition.



*A Leader's
Empathic Sourcebook*

By Lea L. Rubini



Overview

This sourcebook contains guidance for leaders on how to effectively use empathy during the process of change to enhance the outcomes and benefits of the change being implemented.

The sourcebook is presented in three sections, beginning with an introduction to empathy. The second section provides a brief overview of each phase of Bridges' Transition Framework (2009) and a summary of the outcomes that can be achieved, by phase, through an empathic leadership approach. The third and final section provides questions for a leader to use for self-reflection and follower engagement to express empathy and to garner empathic insights; tips on how to effectively leverage the questions are woven throughout for reference.

Introduction

Simply put, empathy is the ability for an individual to understand and appreciate the perspective of another. A leader's ability to understand the perspectives of their followers can provide tremendous benefits during the process of change as well as on a regular basis.

Specific to the process of change, a leader's ability to be empathic when leading their team or organization through change can provide useful intelligence to help one refine their leadership approach to maximize their connection with and motivation of (as cited by Griffin, et al., 2012) their team or organization during change. Leaders who "...are considerate of the internal states of others: what they think, how they feel, their values, desires, cares, and motivations" (Anderson & Anderson, 2010, p. 100) are the most successful change leaders. Empathy enables a leader better to understand and appreciate the internal state of their team or organization.

Outcomes Derived from Empathic Leadership During Change

A leader's ability to be empathic toward followers during change is a key enabler for successful outcomes. Rogers (1975) proffered "...we have in our hands, if we are able to take an empathic stance, a powerful force for change and growth" (p. 9). Given "...today's circumstances are constantly changing...only leaders who can lead their organizations through repeated changes will succeed..." (Holt & Marques, 2012, p. 97).

The graphic below denotes the outcomes that can be achieved during each phase of the Transition Framework (Bridges, 2009) through an empathic leadership approach.

Empathic Outcomes by Transition Phase¹		
Ending, Losing, Letting Go	The Neutral Zone	The New Beginning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively understand and respond to the needs of others (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; as cited by Parry & Smollan, 2011) Increase optimism via individual focus (Anderson & McColl-Kennedy, 2002) Motivate others (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016) Affectively communicate (Berntson, et al., 2012) Provide psychological support (Parry & Smollan, 2011) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively understand and respond to the needs of others (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; as cited by Parry & Smollan, 2011) Motivate others (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016) Develop affective communications (Berntson, et al., 2012) Address resistance (Anderson & Anderson, 2010) Increase optimism via individual focus (Anderson & McColl-Kennedy, 2002) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively understand the needs of others (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014; as cited by Parry & Smollan, 2011) Motivate others (Galinsky & Schweitzer, 2016)

¹ Bridges, 2009

Questions for Enhancing Empathic Leadership

An empathic leadership approach during each phase of the Transition Framework (Bridges, 2009) can lead to impactful change outcomes. This section provides self-reflection and follower discussion questions to help a leader achieve the empathic outcomes noted in the *Outcomes Derived from Empathic Leadership During Change* section.

By utilizing the questions provided, a leader will be provided with a deeper understanding of their team's or organization's needs and concerns. This insight can then be used to address those things that may hinder a successful transition to the envisioned future state.

The approach of using self-reflection and follower discussion questions is built on the finding that “individuals can be taught to ask questions to enhance understanding that builds connections between people and helps them to perceive the emotions of others...” (as cited by Holt & Marques, 2012, p. 103).

On-going dialogue to better understand followers' needs, concerns and feelings is a leadership imperative during change and transition as “...employees' reactions are consistently fluctuating and never stagnant. Employees' reactions to organizational change must be considered “in the moment”...” (Witting, 2012, p. 27).

The open and supportive dialogue created through this approach reinforces a leader's care and concern for the follower. This outward display of leader's care, concern and support is of paramount importance in times of change, as followers “...will respond to others as leaders if their displays of empathy first make [them]...feel understood and valued as individuals” (Humphrey, et al., 2006, p. 150).

Quick Tips: Turning Questions into Dialogue

- ◆ Take a follower out to lunch and ask a few of the questions during the course of conversation
- ◆ Communicate your understanding back to the individual to confirm your understanding (Humphrey, et al., 2006)
- ◆ Bring a small group of your leaders together, letting them know you need their insight, and discuss some of the questions collectively
- ◆ Look at your key calendar of events and find ways to use different questions at different points in time (versus asking them all at once)

Ending, Losing, Letting Go Phase¹

**Form of Loss
Followers May
Experience²**

Self-Reflection Question

<i>Disengagement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How will my direct followers' roles change? <input type="checkbox"/> For the change(s) to each follower's role, how much does the follower value each of those aspects? <input type="checkbox"/> Will the follower enjoy the new aspects of their role and find the same value in them? <input type="checkbox"/> Will a follower's level of authority change? If yes, to what degree? <input type="checkbox"/> How will others view the changes to the follower's role? <input type="checkbox"/> How will others view the changes to the follower's level of authority? <input type="checkbox"/> What benefits or status symbols enjoyed by a follower today will not exist after the change? <input type="checkbox"/> For the benefits or status symbols that will change, why are they important to the follower? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there benefits or status symbols the follower will receive after the change that will make the benefits or status lost feel less significant?
<i>Disidentification</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What work does the follower do today that motivates them? <input type="checkbox"/> Will any of the motivating aspects of the follower's job change? If so, how? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there new aspects to the work that will be exciting for the follower? Why?
<i>Disenchantment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Why is the follower excited to work for our company? <input type="checkbox"/> Will the focus of our company or work change in such a way that does not align with the follower's motivations? <input type="checkbox"/> Based on your experience with the follower, how do you believe they will react to the change? <input type="checkbox"/> Based on your experience with the follower, how open do you believe they will be to the 'new'?

Quick Tip: Identifying Trends

- ◆ Write down key words on your insights from each category – reflect on them over time – are they changing? Are they trending in the right direction?

¹ Bridges, 2009

² Bridges, 1986

The Neutral Zone Phase¹

Self-Reflection Questions

- How has each direct follower reacted to the change thus far?
- What supportive approaches have I taken with each follower that have worked well?
- What supportive approaches have I taken with each follower that did not seem to have an impact?
- Are there things going on in the personal life of any followers which may be compounding how they are feeling or reacting to the changes at work?
- Based on the questions followers have asked, what information or topics do they seem most concerned about?
- Based on my initial assessment, how different is the reality of how each change will impact each follower?
- What challenges lie ahead in this phase?
- What can I do to proactively engage my followers in helping to create solutions to the challenges in this phase?

Follower Engagement Questions

- Tell me about your last week.
- How are you feeling about the change(s) to date? *Why?*
- What questions or concerns about the change(s) remain for you?
- How can I best support you as we continue through the transition?
- I'd like to use your leadership as we face into any challenges that lie ahead. *Where do you believe you can add the most value?*
- What are your colleagues (no names please) saying about the change outside of formal meetings?
- What advice do you have for me as we continue forward in the transition?

Quick Tip: How Was Your Week?

- ◆ Rich insights can come from hearing about someone's week. Listen carefully to how they articulate things, what feelings you sense in their voice or see on their face.

¹ Bridges, 2009

The New Beginning Phase¹

Self-Reflection Questions

- Am I holding onto any old ways of doing things?
- How has each direct follower reacted to the change thus far?
- Are my expectations of the new behaviors and approaches to things reinforced through all aspects that touch our work (e.g. objectives, processes, rewards and recognition)?
- What I have done in the last week to recognize someone for embracing the 'new'?
- What I have done in the last week to reinforce the 'new'?
- What challenges are my followers are facing when trying to embrace the 'new'?
- How am I involving each follower in helping to address a challenge?
- Have I matched my followers against each challenge - based on both capabilities (to match strengths to needs) as well as where they may have the most concerns (as they will have a high interest in addressing the challenge)?

Follower Engagement Questions

- Tell me about your last week.
- How are you feeling about the change(s) to date? *Why?*
- What things about the 'new' do you believe aren't living up to the expectations I communicated at the start of the change journey?
- Are there any specific challenges you have seen or that you foresee us facing?
- Is there a specific challenge which you would be open to helping the team address?
- How can I best support you as we continue through the transition?
- What are your colleagues (no names please) saying about the change outside of formal meetings?
- What advice do you have for me as we continue forward?

¹ Bridges, 2009

Quick Tip: Your Past

- ◆ Are you saying/doing something - inadvertently telling people to hold onto the past?

A Leader's Empathic Sourcebook: References

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Summary

The Sourcebook offered in this Chapter leverages insights from the literature reviewed on the benefits of empathic leadership, on the needs of those undergoing change, and the support and developmental considerations of empathy. Utilizing the Sourcebook to enhance one's empathic approach to change, and leveraging the insights garnered to better support followers through transition "...help[s] individuals in the organization let go, deal with the discomfort, rebuild, and learn" (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005, p. 11). As Rogers (1975) proffered "...we have in our hands, if we are able to take an empathic stance, a powerful force for change and growth" (p. 9).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Synopsis

Change is a complex process. In the evolving business environment, change seems to come fast and furious, making a leader's ability to effectively manage change a key success factor. However, many change initiatives continue to fail with "...employee resistance [being]...one of the leading causes for the failure..." (as cited by Wittig, 2012, p. 23). And despite such understanding of why change initiatives continue to fail "...surprisingly little work has examined the direct role of employee emotions in determining their commitment to change, even though logical and indirect findings clearly suggested a linkage between these two variables" (Hill, et al., 2012, p. 122).

The findings of this Capstone shed light on the impactful role empathy can play in a leader's success when managing change. A leader's empathic approach helps provide an understanding of their followers' actions, reactions, concerns, and needs during change. This understanding can in turn be used by the leader to aid them in appropriately adjusting their style to best support followers in successfully navigating change. Empathy offers leaders a way to unlock the complexity of successful change outcomes through understanding.

Limitations

The findings discussed are the result of correlating insights from different bodies of literature. An opportunity remains to explore the findings offered through focused research, including research of the suggestions in the Sourcebook, to validate the recommendations offered. Specific to the Sourcebook, several testing opportunities exist including the determination of whether the guidance is sufficient to create empathic leadership, if the appropriate support components have been addressed, and the change in a leader's level of empathic proficiency over time. The proposed testing may also shed light on new ways for the Sourcebook to be used in support of successful change outcomes via empathy.

Conclusion and Reflections

Irrespective of the organizational change, a leader's understanding of their followers' perspectives, concerns and needs provides powerful insight – whether followers will be committed to the change, what followers require transitioning through the change, how followers can be most effectively supported during each step of transition – to “...accurately anticipate or at least recognize the emotional impact of decisions and actions” (Bunker & Wakefield, 2005, p. 43) as they lead the change.

While further research is suggested on the Sourcebook and the recommendations offered in Chapter four, leaders and change practitioners are provided with expanded insight on the variety of human factors impacting change

outcomes. Each organization and each change is unique, and as such, each requires a customized approach. Therefore, the insights offered in this paper should be tempered with insights on the organization and the surrounding context of the change.

Through my experience, I have come to appreciate that successful change management is driven by one's on-going understanding, and respect for, the myriad of factors involved in change. Successful change outcomes do not lie in doing one thing well or everything well, rather success lies in doing the needed things well. By appreciating and respecting the myriad of factors that will be touched by change, as well as understanding each follower's perspective and related needs, the critical factors of success can be identified. Leaders are the most powerful tool available in the change process if they understand the right factors to be addressed and use appropriate leadership approaches to engage, connect with and support followers through the change.

Leaders and change practitioners alike are encouraged to begin each change journey by critically assessing the organization and all related components through an empathic lens. I believe the rich insights garnered will set the organization up for successful change outcomes through an understanding of the factors most critical to address during the transition.

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