Enhancing Communication to Improve Team Performance at the Leader Level

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Capstone Action Project Report

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Abstract

This project explores how awareness and practice of authentic leadership behaviors can improve communication between members of a leadership team. This field-based research project examines the mitigating effects of self-awareness and improved information sharing on contentious relationships between colleagues. Using communication skill development exercises, members of an intact leadership team were tasked with more mindfully seeking out input from colleagues (consulting) and passing along information appropriately (informing), noticing and reflecting on the consequences of their behavior. Modest improvements in work relationships and a reduction in conflict were noted over a four-week period with the greatest change perceived at the individual level. The brevity of this program suggests there is potential for additional improvement in work relationships and overall performance with more opportunity for practice and reflection, but this possibility needs to be tested and sustainability of improvements measured.

Keywords: authentic leadership; self-awareness; communication; leadership development

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Executive Summary

Leaders are often directed to participate in development programs, whether classroom-based or on the job. This action learning project sought to provide development in the form of individual and team change through collaborative discussions and increased self-awareness. The development approach differed from traditional development in both design and delivery. The content was defined collaboratively with significant input from stakeholder-participants, as the group of leaders identified issues they wanted to work on as a team and considered ways to address those issues. Ultimately, the program was designed to be applied and practiced in everyday interactions rather than through a carve-out of time for classroom or online learning. Using interviews and collaborative discussions to clearly define the scope of the development program, this project invited stakeholders to articulate the greatest need for the team and sought to engage the leaders in their own development.

Stakeholder feedback indicated that they became more aware of their communication behaviors and impact on others through this program, suggesting potential for improved communication and working relationships by raising self-awareness. Following the collaborative design process, the stakeholders practiced consulting, informing, and listening skills over a four-week period. A majority reported increased awareness of how they communicate and a sense that they had changed personally due to the program. The executive sponsor for the project observed less conflict and tension within his leadership team overall by the end of the program. However, almost two-thirds of stakeholders felt that there was no change in the level of trust within the team over the course of the program. The stakeholders reported higher engagement because of their participation in the design of the development experience. Using collaboration to create such connections could allow organizations to draw on those most empowered by the experience to be drivers of additional change.

      While the program outcomes suggest that self-awareness is a means by which leaders can improve their interactions with one another, additional study would be useful to understand the long-term implications of this program design. This could include testing results from a lengthier program (e.g., 8 to 12 weeks rather than 4 weeks), measuring the sustainability of improvement in working relationships, and quantifying productivity changes over time. Further exploration of these methods would test the benefits of introspection and focus on communication behavior in improving working relationships.

Chapter I: Introduction

Identification of the Issue

My Capstone project examines how authentic leadership behaviors can improve communication within a leadership team in the Operations function of a medium-sized manufacturing organization. Authentic leadership is generally understood to include four attributes: understanding oneself and perception by others (self-awareness), acting based on personal values (internalized moral perspective), making decisions objectively and encouraging questioning (balanced processing), and sharing how actions are consistent with values (relational transparency). The project sponsor, to whom the Operations leaders report, described a need for behavioral change from members of his team so that they work together seamlessly and with less competition and destructive conflict.

While this team has proven on several occasions that they are able to come together when a crisis arises, they often operate in siloes and at cross-purposes on day-to-day projects and long-term goals, not sharing information and viewing one another as competitors for resources, attention, and rewards rather than as compatriots. The conflict tends to be passive-aggressive in nature and often operates below the surface because the organization highly values the appearance of getting along.

Importance of the Project

The Capstone project provided an opportunity for the stakeholders – members of the Operations leadership team – to consciously collaborate on a solution to the communication and decision making challenges they face. These stakeholders indicated in early discussions that they desired insight into how they are perceived by peers and were interested in improving their communication with one another in order to reach better decisions for the organization. The team's ability to work well together is particularly important given the continuing challenges of

the global economy which require these leaders to demonstrate agility and innovation while keeping operating costs low in order to deliver on high expectations.

Project Purpose

The targeted change for this project is to increase positive communication within the 12-person Operations leadership team using authentic leadership behaviors. The project sponsor worried that some leaders withhold information until an emergency occurs in order to activate their strengths. He also commented that each of these leaders typically makes up their mind on issues without seeking input from colleagues, coming to meetings eager to convince the others of the "right" answer. By the stakeholders' own admission, they do not listen well to one another or at least tend not to listen to understand alternative points of view. Consequently, they fail to appreciate the risk of non-collaboration and the potential added value generated from diversity of perspective. Through this collaborative team effort, each individual stakeholder agreed to invest time and effort to become a better communicator and team member.

Each of the leaders participating in this program received feedback from the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire that identified any gaps between self-perception and that of peers. This information can be used for reflection and coaching. The aggregate results from these assessments provided support for the work that the project sponsor had requested. A further practical outcome is that the leadership team learned a communication process and used common vernacular for discussing communication needs and expectations. The project was designed to provide a learning process and materials that can be replicated for use with others to facilitate further skill development in the organization.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

To better understand the interplay between authentic leadership attributes and team performance, my literature review examined the impact of authentic leader behaviors as studied by scholars and practitioners. My sources include academic and professional journals and business texts. Some blog posts and videos were also consulted for use in conveying concepts to the stakeholder group.

Beginning in late 2015, publications were searched online using university library databases to which I have access, namely the Claremont Lincoln University and Stanford Graduate School of Business Alumni databases. During that same time period, general Internet searches on authentic leadership relative to team performance, teaming at the executive level, trust, and communication were also conducted. Searches were completed for research addressing the impact of self-awareness on leader effectiveness and team performance as well. Many relevant sources were identified in the bibliographies of initial source documents leading to additional documentation.

An Internet search on "authentic leadership development" yielded a plethora of intervention-based training available in the marketplace purporting to help companies develop authentic leaders and assist individual leaders who wish to "find" their authenticity. Yet Northouse (2016, p. 208) states that "there is little evidence-based research on whether these prescriptions or how-to strategies" are effective. Still, there is a solid theoretical basis for considering the various impacts of authentic behavior using field research to test theories.

After reviewing the behaviors that are part of the authentic leadership construct, I looked more closely at the relationship of self-awareness and trust and how these particular aspects of authentic leadership might advance work relationships and performance through better

communication. My intent in examining the role of authenticity within an intact, integrated work

group seeks to go beyond Tuckman and Jensen's (2010) stages of team development – forming,

storming, norming, and performing – to specifically consider authentic leadership's impact on

the team's ability to improve their communication with one another.

Past Perspectives on Authentic Leadership

The study of authentic leadership is relatively young compared to other theories of

leadership. In 1982, Henderson and Hoy published findings on authenticity of leaders,

recognizing that prior social scientists had focused more on the impacts of inauthentic behavior

on organizations. They presented a perspective that authentic leaders accept responsibility for

defining the manner in which leadership manifests itself because of who they are rather than

allowing their position to define how they will lead (Henderson & Hoy, 1982). The authors went

on to develop a measure of authenticity based on statements that addressed, among other things,

leaders' tendency to be more relational versus operating "by the book," willingness to admit

mistakes and acknowledge not having all the answers, and acting in ways that were seen as

cooperative not manipulative. Though Henderson and Hoy's authenticity assessment was not

validated, the themes that it covered have influenced authentic leadership literature over the

ensuing (almost) 35 years.

It appears that a significant body of knowledge was not developed specifically on

authenticity for some time after Henderson & Hoy's work. Northhouse (2016, p. 195) states that

authentic leadership for many years was part of transformational leadership research but "never

fully articulated." Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009) recall early years of study of authentic

leadership flowing from discussions of transformational leadership behaviors that were not

necessarily authentic.   Other early researchers studying authentic leadership (Duignan &

Bhindi, 1997, Luthans & Avolio, 2003) focused more on positive psychology and servant

leadership, both of which share elements in common with authentic leadership. Of note to this project, Duignan and Bhindi (1997) found that authentic leaders earn the loyalty of others by building trusting relationships. Generally, the focus of past research appears to have been more on the challenges of unauthentic behavior and benefits of positivity rather than measuring the impact of authenticity, a subtle but important difference.

In 2003, retired CEO Bill George published a book titled *Authentic Leadership* that described characteristics of authentic leaders. George was concerned with an ethical gap he observed in corporate leadership after the failures of Enron, Worldcom, and other large corporations and felt it was necessary to highlight the organizational benefits of authentic leadership. In his book, George identified five dimensions of authenticity: purpose, values (what George called the leader's "True North"), relationships, self-discipline, and heart (2003, p. 18). He emphasized that developing and applying these characteristics could result in a positive organizational culture, inferring that better cultures produce better outcomes. More practical than theoretical, George's book brought the subject of authenticity in leadership out of the academic realm and garnered popular attention, leading to interest in authentic leadership development programs and further research into the impact of authentic leaders on their organizations and teams. Both academic and practitioner efforts, however, remained focused primarily on the ways authentic leaders influence their followers.

Current Perspectives on Authentic Leadership

Northouse (2016) reports that the current era of research into authentic leadership was "ignited" by publication in 2005 of a special issue of *Leadership Quarterly* that focused specifically on authentic leadership (including Avolio & Gardner, 2005, Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005, and Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). Similar to Bill George's text, the *Leadership Quarterly* edition was published, at least in part, in response to

concerns about poor leadership behaviors that lead to governance issues and destructive business practices in the United States. While the underlying arguments seem to be that authenticity leads to better performance, the focus remains largely on positive impacts on followers, not necessarily on group dynamics, though many of these influences may be extrapolated to broader team results.

Behaviors that define authentic leadership. Readings in the popular business press suggest that the term "authentic leadership" is widely used but not necessarily well understood in the business world. Leaders may excuse poor behavior through an "excessive need to be me" (Goldsmith, 2007, p. 96-98) when that is the antithesis of the authentic leadership model. Bamford, Wong, and Laschinger (2012), Cooper, Scandura, and Schriesheim (2005), Gardner, et al. (2005), Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens (2011), and Tate (2008) highlight the importance of self-awareness not for the sole purpose of being one's self, but to promote congruence between the leader's values, feelings, and thoughts and how that person behaves. As Ceri-Booms (2012) states, authentic leaders "have transparent intentions, recognize their own weaknesses, and achieve their authenticity by being aware of and accepting themselves" (p. 176). The goal of the authentic leader is to be effective in work relationships and interactions while still expressing the unique style and character that define the person's leadership (Gardner, et al., 2011).

Contrary to the view that one's self is fixed and unchanging, Ibarra (2015) emphasizes the importance of leaders evolving as the scope of their job grows. The author reminds readers that behaviors that were successful in the past may be too rigid as responsibilities expand. Such self-reflection and growth is important, yet consistency between thought and action even as the leader evolves is required. This reliable behavior telegraphs to others what the leader believes and how the leader can be trusted to act (Henderson & Hoy, 1982, Gardner, et al. 2005, Gardner,

et al. 2011). Further, authentic individuals align their actions with personal values and beliefs rather than being guided by what is expected by the social and cultural norms of the organization (Tate, 2008). They are transparent in their interactions with others. As such these leaders encourage a work climate that is respectful and where mutual trust between leader and followers helps followers to succeed (Emuwa, 2013).

By engaging in what the authentic leadership literature calls "balanced processing," leaders demonstrate an openness to objectively consider all relevant information (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004, Gardner, et al., 2005, 2011, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Zimmerman, 2014).   This behavior demonstrates an interest in new ideas as the leader seeks out alternative views and opinions before making decisions. While this does not mean the authentic leader seeks to be proven wrong, it does suggest a willingness to accept not always being the one with the answers.

Importance of self-awareness in leaders.   The Stanford Graduate School of Business' Advisory Council, which consists of 75 members who are private- and public-sector leaders around the world, has unanimously identified self-awareness as the "most important capability for leaders to develop" (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007). Leaders typically realize the attributes of authenticity, including self-awareness, over time as they are influenced by defining events in their careers and lives. Scholars agree that leaders should seek to understand why they do the things they do, but these authors view the ways that experiences shape leaders slightly differently. Some researchers (Avolio et al., 2004, Avolio & Gardner, 2005, Gardner, et al. 2005) have focused generally on introspection to understand how the experiences we have in life have influenced us as leaders while Ambler (2012) argues simply that adverse experiences to which we respond positively are most likely to lead to learning and growth. Whether narrowly attuned to the survival stories from negative moments in life or reflecting on how the totality of

life experiences has shaped the leader, learning from one's life story is key to becoming more self-aware (George, et al., 2007). Progress toward greater self-awareness on the part of the leader is seen as central to authentic leadership development.

Self-awareness helps leaders understand if their actions reinforce instead of challenge where a change is needed (Higgs & Rowland, 2010). It also allows leaders to see where their own behaviors, egos, and mindsets are contributing to what Higgs and Rowland refer to as "stuckness" of their team or organization. Like Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009), Higgs and Rowland determined that being personally vulnerable, open, and self-aware increases trust within the organization and "consequently encourages people to think differently and explore new possibilities." (2010, p. 376). This self-insight provides leaders with additional tools to respond to the demands of changing organizations.

According to Showry and Manasa (2014), a number of graduate schools of business, including Harvard, Stanford, Dartmouth, and the University of Chicago, have identified self-awareness as a key leadership capability that predicts effectiveness in managing others and success as a leader. In fact, self-awareness has been found to be more critical to leadership success than technical ability or intelligence. Leaders who are self-aware have a strong sense of identity and direction. Low self-awareness not only limits leaders but can "impede organizational performance" (Showry & Manasa, 2014, p. 23). Dierdorff & Rubin (2015) found that "teams with less self-aware individuals made worse decisions, engaged in less coordination, and showed less conflict management."

Importantly, just as noted above that trust is but one aspect of complex human interactions, Peus, Wesche, Streicher, Braun, and Frey (2012) observe that self-awareness, while a crucial aspect of authentic leadership development, is not adequate on its own to drive improved results. They suggest that many skills and behaviors contribute to a perception of

authenticity. Knowing more about one's self is useful, but how one acts ultimately demonstrates authenticity or lack thereof.

Impact of authenticity on trust.   Numerous academicians (Erdem, Ozen, & Nuray, 2003, Avolio, et al., 2004, Zhu, May & Avolio, 2004, Higgs & Rowland, 2010, Norman, Avolio, & Luthans, 2010, Simsarian Webber, 2002) have acknowledged the importance of trust as a critical aspect of team performance. As Duignan and Bhindi (1997) note, E.G. Bogue, author of *Leadership by Design* (1994), said that "Truth is the foundation for trust. And trust is the principal building and bonding force of all organizations."   When leaders behave more authentically, they are perceived as having more integrity and being more trustworthy (Mhatre, 2009).

Further, scholars have found a direct positive correlation between demonstrated self-awareness and increased trust within organizations (Norman, et al, 2010). Erdem, et al. (2003) interpret a rise in trust as a factor that reinforces team success. Simsarian Webber (2002) looked at the influence of the leader on team performance, specifically the leader's ability to facilitate the development of trust within the team by his or her (in)action. The perception of a leader as authentic creates a safe and trusting environment for followers because they feel more comfortable being themselves (Ozkan & Ceylan, 2016). Just as the presence of trust facilitates team performance, a lack of trust can contribute to a reluctance to delegate, share information, or empower others to act (Erdem, et al., 2003). Emuwa (2013), Henderson (1982), and Tate (2008) point out the benefits of increased trust and the resulting higher productivity and better outcomes for the organization, while Sinek (2014) indicates that leaders who put employees first create a feeling of safety. When employees feel safe, they work harder to create amazing results.

Norman, et al. (2010) built on the theoretical work of Gardner et al. (2005) that links authentic leadership behaviors and transparent communication with increased trust. They

defined transparent authentic leaders as individuals who seek others' input, disclose relevant

information for decision making, and reveal personal motives and thoughts that help others

understand the ethics behind words and actions. These types of actions have a direct positive

correlation to increased trust. On the flip-side, Mayer and Gavin (2005) empirically proved that

lack of trust caused employees to focus on self-protection instead of engaging in more productive

work. They concluded that trust is an important component for better performance.

Ceri-Booms (2012) also found that authentic leadership behavior increased trust, but a

focus on transactional leadership – defined as providing clear expectations of behaviors and

using rewards and discipline fairly to achieve those behaviors – accounted for 44% of trust in

leadership while a leader acting in ways that are perceived as transparent, honest, or fair

increased trust levels only slightly (1.1%) above perceptions of transactional leaders. While the

application of authenticity is generally understood to increase trust and improve work-related

attitudes, the connection in this study was less than expected and worth noting.

Impact of authenticity on positive organizational outcomes. Walumbwa, Avolio,

Gardner, and Wernsing (2008) determined that there was more to authentic leadership than

"being true to oneself" and sought to develop a tool for measuring behaviors and attitudes in the

workplace. The result of their research, the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ),

provided a validated measure of authentic leadership. The assessment goes beyond prior work

done on ethical and transformational leadership with the authors arguing that the ALQ provides

unique insights into the relationship of perceived authenticity to job performance and

satisfaction. The authors suggest that those who act authentically and encourage others to do the

same can achieve overall improvement in performance. The ALQ can serve as a useful measure

of perception, providing important feedback to the leader who seeks to become more authentic in

interactions with others.

George, et al. (2007) state that "the ultimate mark of an authentic leader" is sustained superior results, recognizing the value of authenticity for overall performance. Wang, Sui, Luthans, Wang and Wu (2014) also found that authentic leadership positively impacts performance. Their research focus on the quality of relationships between leaders and their followers. Thinking about relationships provides more insight into how leaders can influence followers to deliver stronger work performance. Just as many factors go into creating perceptions of trust, so too are work relationships complex and multi-faceted. Development of strong, positive relationships through the demonstration of authentic behaviors might also point to ways that colleagues can support and influence one another when working together on a team.

Future Perspectives on Authentic Leadership

One of the challenges of authentic leadership research has been the difficultly in quantifying valid measures. Most of the work in this area is field-based and theoretical. There is a validated, theoretical measure which helps to better explain the behaviors that represent authenticity and how they positively impact organizations (the ALQ), but more empirical data on this leadership model would be useful. The need is not just to measure the existence of authentic behavior, as the ALQ does, but also to gather data to determine what results are directly traceable to authentic behavior. In addition, the ALQ was developed primarily with respect to North American culture and values. Use and study in other cultures has been limited. There is a need to analyze measures of authenticity across a variety of cultures and situations (Avolio, et al., 2009) in order to apply this measure more broadly in a diverse, global environment.

Northouse (2016, p. 207) asks how a leader's values are related to leader self-awareness. While much of the research suggests that there is a moral component to authentic leadership, the connections have not been thoroughly studied to understand which values enhance authenticity. Freeman and Auster (2011) argue that authenticity drives moral behavior, but it is not necessarily

derived through self-awareness alone. They see the development of authentic leaders as a creative process that is ongoing and tied to organizational authenticity, another area prime for further research. The true impact of authenticity might be explored in conjunction with other leadership skills such as the practice of speaking less and listening more and exploring others' needs, both of which are important to being seen as an authentic leader (Peus, et al., 2012).

Influence of authentic leadership on team performance. Northouse (2016, p. 208) also mentions the need for more research on the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational outcomes. Though my project does not intend to specifically measure that relationship, I anticipate a connection between authentic behavior and improved communication leading to better team performance, an area that researchers are beginning to consider. In a 2014 chapter on authentic leadership research, Avolio, Walumbwa, and Zimmerman suggested that "team authentic leadership" should be considered as an area for future research. They observed that learning authentic leadership at a group level has the potential to reinforce individual practices and positively impact the organizational culture.

Researchers have begun to explore the influence of authenticity on team effectiveness and productivity. Politis (2013) has quantified the impact of authentic and servant leadership behaviors on team performance, measuring a 59% improvement in performance of teams where leaders exhibit these behaviors. Boies, Fiset, and Gill (2015) found that transformational leadership behaviors influence team outcomes by supporting trust in and communication with team members. A similar study comparing the effect of authentic leadership and transformational leadership suggests that authentic leadership behaviors correlated with group and organizational performance, showing greater influence over results relative to transformational leadership (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016). The authors acknowledge that more study is needed. Others (Avolio, et al., 2009, Peus, et al. 2012) suggest a

direct relationship between demonstrated authentic leader behaviors and better team

performance. While this is still a relatively undeveloped area of inquiry that remains to be

proven empirically, Peus, et al. (2012) determined that knowing one's self and acting

consistently with that insight lead to greater team effectiveness. Just as trust allows followers to

be vulnerable as they are guided by their leaders (Mayer & Gavin, 2005), so too it would seem

that self-awareness leading to behaviors that engender trust could strengthen the performance of

a team of colleagues.

More broadly, authentic leadership has been shown to influence organizational culture.

Walumbwa, et al. (2008) cite the leader's role in increasing follower engagement. By applying

the principles of authentic leadership to interactions with colleagues and within teams, one might

assume similar positive organizational influences would occur. This could be particularly

impactful when the members of a leadership team demonstrate authenticity with one another.

Further studies could be fruitful to determine how authenticity influences results depending on

position level in the organization and the quality of peer-to-peer relationships.

Finally, it appears from the work of Norman, et al. (2010) that positive leadership

behaviors have a stronger impact on trust than communication transparency. More research into

these aspects of authentic leadership could be helpful to understand how best to develop leaders

who will drive stronger performance through the teams they lead and on which they serve.

Summary

Evidence that authentic leadership behaviors positively impact trust, communication, and

performance was found through the literature review. Weighing this information and the specific

challenges raised by the stakeholder group in collaborative discussions, the design of the project

shifted to address self-awareness and practice of improved balanced processing. In particular, the

stakeholders desired a better understanding of how their communication behaviors impact one

another. More consciously consulting colleagues before making decisions and appropriately

informing others after decisions are made were actions the stakeholders wished to develop;

therefore, these skills were practiced as part of this study. The methodology outlined in Chapter

III attempted to answer the research question:

How can an organization increase leader awareness, using consulting and informing behaviors,

to impact trust and communication with an intact work team?

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction to Implementation

Gill Coleman characterizes action research as exploring opportunities for change on three levels: personal (individual change), organizational (how the team can change together), and on a broader level beyond the target stakeholder group (what this means for others) (Ashridge Executive Education video, 2014). Coleman also explains the "practical, participative, and progressive" steps of action research which seem to be less about research and more about the change that is effected in the program participants. Through action research, this Capstone project undertakes aspects of individual and organizational change within the Operations function of a medical device manufacturing company that may contribute to broader changes across the organization.

The Capstone project began with individual interviews of each member of the leadership team and the project sponsor, followed by collaborative meetings with the entire stakeholder group. An overview of the change process is provided in Figure 1. Discussions with stakeholders and the project sponsor brought out the need for improved insight into how leader actions impact others, as well as the perceived benefit of more open communication and more productive conflict management skills within the team. The project sponsor had observed interpersonal and communication issues between members of his leadership team over several years. He had previously addressed these issues through ad hoc individual coaching that he provided with limited success. This project represented the first formal intervention with the team as a whole.

Often the top leaders in an organization are referred to as a team but function more as a working group, maintaining individual accountability and no responsibility for a shared work product (Katzenbach & Smith, 1994, Katzenbach, 1997). That is not the case in this instance.
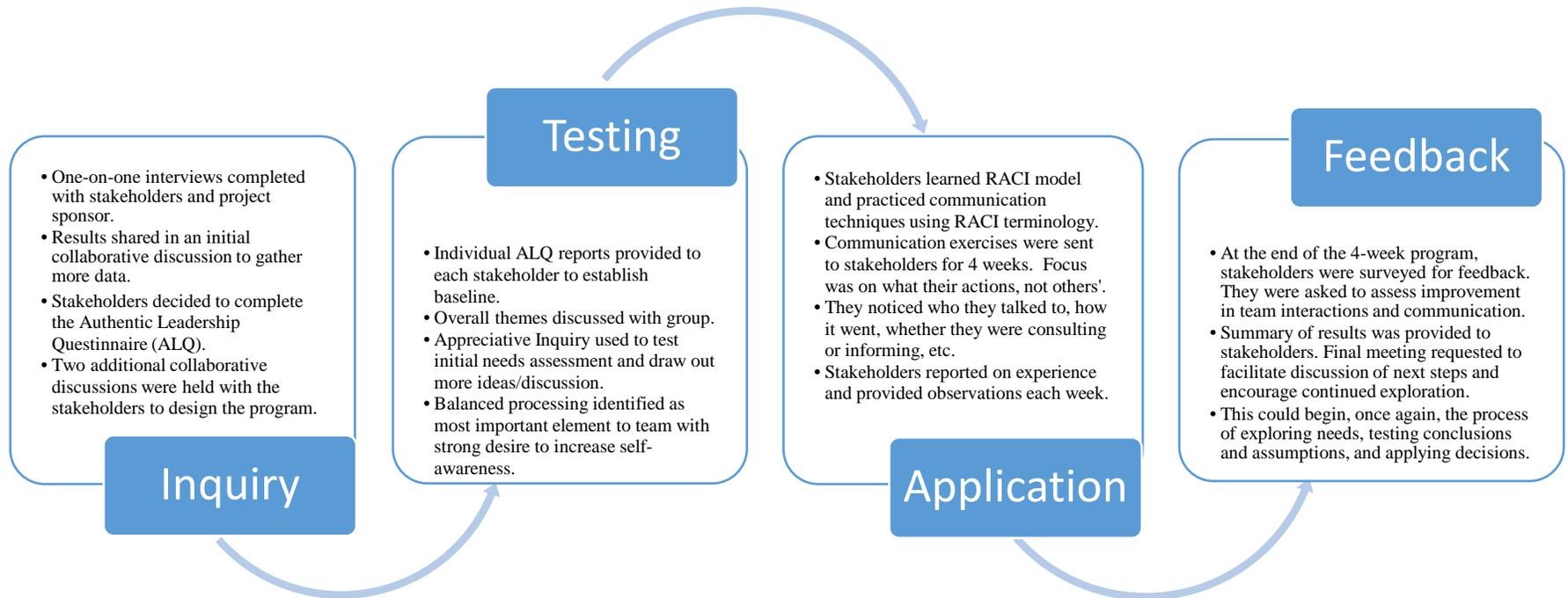
Testing

- Individual ALQ reports provided to each stakeholder to establish baseline.
- Overall themes discussed with group.
- Appreciative Inquiry used to test initial needs assessment and draw out more ideas/discussion.
- Balanced processing identified as most important element to team with strong desire to increase self-awareness.

Inquiry

- One-on-one interviews completed with stakeholders and project sponsor.
- Results shared in an initial collaborative discussion to gather more data.
- Stakeholders decided to complete the Authentic Leadership Questinnaire (ALQ).
- Two additional collaborative discussions were held with the stakeholders to design the program.

Feedback

- At the end of the 4-week program, stakeholders were surveyed for feedback. They were asked to assess improvement in team interactions and communication.
- Summary of results was provided to stakeholders. Final meeting requested to facilitate discussion of next steps and encourage continued exploration.
- This could begin, once again, the process of exploring needs, testing conclusions and assumptions, and applying decisions.

Application

- Stakeholders learned RACI model and practiced communication techniques using RACI terminology.
- Communication exercises were sent to stakeholders for 4 weeks. Focus was on what their actions, not others'.
- They noticed who they talked to, how it went, whether they were consulting or informing, etc.
- Stakeholders reported on experience and provided observations each week.

Figure 1: Overview of Change Process

This stakeholder group must coordinate closely and support one another in order for highly efficient manufacturing operations to run smoothly. Ideally they engage in regular, open dialogue with one another, resolving conflicts and collectively making decisions to solve challenges in the Operations function. Sometimes this occurs, but not often. Concern about lack of transparency and contentiousness in team communication was one of the reasons the project sponsor supported participation in this project.

The intent of this project was to elevate self-awareness so that these leaders consciously increased their authentic leadership behaviors. In conjunction with opportunities for introspection, the stakeholders requested a tangible model to practice communication and collaboration skills. Applying authentic leadership behaviors, they specifically wanted to more consciously invite divergent opinions and access relevant information in their decision making. They recognized that, if they were unable to change the manner in which they interacted, it would likely impact productivity and could have long-term negative consequences for the organization and each of them as individuals.

Characterization of the solution that forms the basis of this project was highly collaborative with the stakeholder group involved in the problem definition and design of the intervention. This chapter includes a review of stakeholder characteristics, findings of the needs assessment, design of the intervention, and evaluation of results.

Stakeholders

The stakeholders are an intact work group of twelve leaders in director and manager positions in the Operations function of a manufacturing organization. They work in a single location that is geographically separate and distinct from the company's headquarters and other business units of the organization. Participation was voluntary and confidential, though

aggregated assessment results and emerging themes from feedback were shared with the stakeholders to aid and guide collaborative discussions.

Demographically the stakeholder group is fairly homogenous. They are primarily white and male, with 75% Caucasian and only one female. There is more diversity in terms of age and education. Participants range in age from the mid-30s to the late-50s. All have more than 10 years of professional industry experience. All stakeholders have some education beyond high school, though only 50% hold Bachelor's or Masters degrees. All twelve currently have direct reports. These are relatively experienced managers. A majority (75%) of the stakeholders have been in supervisory positions more than 10 years.

The stakeholders were active and contributing architects in creating the learning experience that they carried out through this project. My initial goal was to help this group improve their performance as a team without compromising their individual values. As we talked in one-on-one and group settings, it was clear that they felt they would work better together if they understood how they were perceived. They wanted to learn and practice ways of communicating more effectively with one another. After an introduction to authentic leadership concepts, they expressed interest in using the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) to understand where gaps exist between their views of themselves and how others perceive them. Tjan (2012) says that individuals typically are not good at understanding how they are perceived. Inviting anonymous feedback in the form of a validated instrument that is confidential to the recipient created a safe environment for stakeholders to receive input and understand where differences may exist.

Needs Assessment

Authentic leadership was selected as the leadership model to apply to this development challenge because it is values-based and emphasizes knowledge of self and transparency in

interactions. Like transformational leadership, authentic leaders put the organization's interests ahead of personal interests; however, authentic leadership is less about inspiring followers and more about seeking input, sharing information, and being genuine in interactions. This requires knowledge of self on behalf of the leader and a willingness to put ego aside to work with colleagues and followers.

The stakeholders defined authentic leadership for their purposes as leadership one can trust because behaviors are consistent with words. In their view, authentic leaders seek input and consider alternatives, then act. They are open, honest, and understanding of their own personal limitations. They understand how they affect others. In discussing authenticity and transparency, the stakeholders expressed concern that they do not necessarily know how they are perceived by colleagues, stating that greater self-knowledge would aid them in their desire to be more authentic. Further, they uniformly expressed a need for more open communication with one another and a desire to practice better collaboration within the team, drawing on aspects of balanced processing.

Stakeholder perspectives. To better understand the perspectives of the stakeholder group, I held initial interviews with each of the twelve participants. These one-on-one meetings provided an opportunity to reinforce the voluntary and collaborative nature of the project and their role in it, as well as a chance to understand individual views on leadership and conflict management. The sponsoring organization does not have a formal leadership development function. Some of the leaders have come from other companies where they participated in periodic supervisory and leadership development programs. Those individuals expressed interest in having access to additional outside support for their personal and professional development and enthusiasm for participation in designing this project. Other members of the stakeholder group have spent most of their careers with the current employer and have had limited exposure

to formal leadership training. These leaders uniformly expressed interest in this program but also a concern that "nothing changes" after attending a class. I asked if they had considered ways of creating change that are not classroom-based. This seemed to pique their interest but they began the program with some skepticism.

One of the more senior members of the leadership team announced in the initial collaborative meeting that he was "too old to change", causing others to wonder aloud afterward if this influential individual would actively and genuinely participate. His comments provided me with an opportunity to apply appreciative inquiry techniques (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, Vogt, Brown, & Issacs, 2003, Innovation for Social Change, 2014), asking what improvements stakeholders had made in the past year and what they might have learned. After an energetic sharing of successes, including from this senior leader, I reminded the stakeholders that learning and improvement represent change and growth, attempting a less direct and non-threatening response to the "too old to change" comment. Appreciative inquiry was similarly useful on other occasions during collaborative discussions to draw out ideas and move the conversation away from complaints and toward generation of solutions.

Targeted improvements. Members of the Operations leadership team agreed that they need to work together in a more collaborative fashion to deliver on stretch goals that reduce cost and increase operating margins while also increasing factory throughput. These demands put pressure on the leaders and their teams to deliver results in a highly competitive marketplace. They stated that increased trust and improved communication is needed for better team performance. The team consistently meets objectives but they felt they could be more effective. There was "something" about the work environment that was not satisfying. The roots of that "something" might be the cliques and rivalries within Operations that result in blame and finger

pointing instead of consistently working together to solve problems. Several leaders, as well as

the project sponsor, mentioned this dynamic during one-on-one interviews.

Overall, the leaders defined "team" to include their direct reports but not one another

unless they are called on to respond to a significant issue. During crises, these leaders work well

together to resolve issues and find creative solutions. Otherwise, they see themselves as related

but separate functions reporting to the same executive more than one cohesive team. While this

manner of working together could continue without change based on a track record of acceptable

results, these issues had begun to impact morale and raised concerns about retaining high

performers within Operations if the leaders did not create a more positive work environment. An

increasingly competitive marketplace and the need to better manage costs also contributed to the

leaders' collective interest in increasing the performance of their team.

Three consistent themes for improvement were apparent from the interviews and the

subsequent group discussions with the stakeholders. The themes were:

- **Self-awareness**: Generally the stakeholders saw themselves as self-aware, yet
  wanted to know more about how they were viewed by or impact colleagues. A gap
  between self-perception and others' perceptions is not uncommon. Their stated
  openness to understanding and addressing this gap was encouraging; however, they
  did not seem to understand how their action or inaction affected their peers. The
  opportunity to increase their self-awareness was identified as one way to improve
  their interactions with one another, contributing to a more positive culture in the
  manufacturing facility.

- **Conflict management**: Stakeholders described themselves as good at managing
  conflict. Examples of "management" of conflict appeared to be focused on avoidance
  or command and control of teams (e.g., "get them in a room together and tell them to

cut it out"). Conflict was not necessarily seen as a means to constructively work

through issues in order to or get to better solutions. Several expressed a desire to

better use conflict situations to resolve issues productively. In talking with the project

sponsor, he observed that it would be important to differentiate between conflict

management and crisis management in discussions with the stakeholders. He

believed that the leaders were good at pulling together when serious issues occur but

wanted them to address problems with one another more proactively without waiting

until a crisis arose. During subsequent discussions with the stakeholders as a group,

they observed that they often do not get to the heart of issues in meetings, resulting in

unproductive sidebar conversations that cause decisions to be revisited. They also felt

that they were often focused on individual priorities, typically engaging with other

leaders only when they wanted or needed something from their colleagues. All felt

that it would be useful to practice more open communication and collaboration skills

in a facilitated setting to develop a habit of sharing information and working through

challenges together.

- **Communication**: Improved communication on long range goals, establishment of

  shared goals, and other aspects of communication were mentioned by all. This

  included seeking better understanding of goals in the execution of their duties and

  looking for guidance on what to share with direct reports. It seemed that the leaders

  wanted others to share information with them but were not necessarily reciprocating.

  This refers back to self-awareness because it highlighted the need for each of them to

  become more aware of what they could do rather than passively pointing to where

  others fall short.

Each of the 12 individuals expressed a desire to work better with their peers. They discussed their current performance as a function and came to consensus that they generally perform well, meeting or exceeding the organization's needs. At the same time, they believed they could do more to create a positive work environment for themselves and their employees. One senior director commented that Operations employees are "tired…just worn out" from responding to a series of fire drills. Other participants agreed wholeheartedly. This led to a fruitful discussion on what decision makers at headquarters do that creates crises for Operations and how the stakeholders' response to these unplanned and unexpected requests does more to define the culture in their location than the actions from headquarters. Essentially, we talked about the need to focus on what they can control and set the tone for the people in their function.

The "fire drill" discussion caused a shift in my thinking about what we were trying to accomplish. The stakeholders expressed a desire to create and nurture their own organizational culture. They wanted insight from each other on what they could do differently or better, and wanted to learn and practice skills that would help them more naturally increase communication with one another so that they were all on the same page and working together rather than at cross-purposes.

Many of the stakeholders asked for reading material prior to the first brainstorming session. Specifically, they expressed interest in understanding ways to think about leadership. Based on this request and with additional input from the project sponsor, I identified several articles and videos to advance the discussion on leadership and self-awareness (see Appendix A: Pre-Reading for Collaboration Meetings). These materials were intended to cause participants to consider their interactions prior to the meeting so that they were better equipped to discuss the project and articulate their needs.

How collaborative discussions compare with literature findings. Baron and Parent (2015) describe a process where participants engaged in a three-step model that acknowledged leadership issues, discovered new ways of addressing those issues, and tested new behaviors to determine if they would be more effective as a leadership team. Similarly, the stakeholders in this project expressed interest in increasing their self-awareness, particularly as it applied to gaps between self- and peer perception. Avolio (2010) suggests that leaders be taught to process and reflect, not just practice specific behaviors. Based on findings from the ALQ, the collaborative discussions informed my thinking on the design of exercises that presented stakeholders with opportunities for reflection, learning, and experimentation as they sought to improve their performance as a team.

Initial comments from the stakeholder group suggested that, even though they were not familiar with literature about authentic leadership, they inherently understood that improving their relationships and communication with one another was likely to positively impact their performance as a team. The subject of trust was specifically raised as a necessary element to improve working relationships. For the purposes of this project, trust is placed in someone when the stakeholders can depend on that individual to do what he or she said would be done, causing others to take risks with that person because they have integrity. Similar to academic studies on trust (Norman, et al. 2010), the stakeholders indicated that they were more likely to trust a colleague who was transparent about intentions, shared credit for shared work, and communicated openly. In other words, trust is bestowed on colleagues who demonstrate behaviors commonly associated with authentic leadership.

This project evolved as it coalesced around the stakeholders' stated desire to know themselves better and to improve their working relationships with one another. An overall understanding of the authentic leadership model and an understanding of how the practice of

authentic behaviors positively influences work relationships and outcomes provided the

foundation (see especially Avolio & Gardner, 2005, Gardner, et al., 2005, Avolio et al., 2009,

and Gardner et al., 2011). The ALQ (Avolio et al., 2007, Walumbwa et al., 2008) served as a

useful tool for capturing and providing feedback to participants in this project to begin by

increasing their awareness of how they are perceived by colleagues.

The stakeholders desired insight into their working relationships so that they could be

more effective as they worked together. Using self-awareness as a foundation to build trust and

practice communication and collaboration skills was intended to provide useful development for

each member of the Operations leadership team (Norman, et al., 2010, Higgs & Rowland, 2010).

Higgs and Rowland (2010) found that "leaders' self-awareness provides a significant basis for

equipping them to develop a capability to understand the systemic challenges and avoid the traps

that lead to 'stuckness', or even the creation of more significant problems" (p. 383).

 Trust has a direct relationship to positive organizational outcomes, and an increase in

trust is linked to demonstrated authentic leadership behaviors (Avolio, et al., 2004). These

connections between self-awareness, authentic behavior, and increasing levels of trust and

collaboration were anticipated to result in better consequences for this team. Further, improved

self-awareness has been shown to result in better capabilities for creating change (Higgs &

Rowland, 2010), indicating that the stakeholders might apply learnings from this experience to

transform how they interacted with one another in their pursuit of more positive relationships.

The methodologies by which this discovery, learning, and practice occurred are described

further in the section titled Creating the Intervention. Equipping these leaders with a clearer

understanding of themselves and their impact on others positioned them to achieve greater

interpersonal success. The discernment they gained was hypothesized to contribute to their

efforts to communicate and interact in a more supportive, holistic manner in order to deliver long term benefits to their organization.

Results of the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire. At the beginning of the Capstone project, the stakeholders completed the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio, Gardner, & Walumbwa, 2007, Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, & Wernsing, 2008) which the assessment vendor, Mind Garden, makes available for research use at no cost. Typically, the cost of the assessment and associated reporting ranges from $15 for an individual report to $75 for multi-rater feedback (Avolio, et al., 2007).   The ALQ includes a self-assessment and feedback from other stakeholders on sixteen items, with each assessed on frequency of occurrence along a five-point scale from "not at all" (or zero) to "frequently, if not always" (or 4). These sixteen items are used to determine perceived strength around the four measures of authentic leadership – transparency, moral/ethical congruence, balanced processing, and self-awareness. Drawing on the authentic leadership body of knowledge, I created and delivered to each leader a report with that individual's self-perception and peer feedback (see Appendix B: ALQ Sample Report).

In addition to completing the ALQ, stakeholders were also asked to rank, in order of importance, each of the sixteen measures to determine importance.   In reviewing the aggregate results with the stakeholder group, the team discussed the need to focus on improving balanced processing because the measures of balanced processing were highlighted in the ALQ when considering what they do well, what they most need to improve, and what they determined to be most important. The three measures of balanced processing in the ALQ (Avolio, et al. 2007) are:

- *"Listens carefully to different points of view before coming to conclusions."* The stakeholders ranked this item as the most important of the sixteen measures.

- *"Solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions."* This item received the lowest rating from both self-assessment and peer feedback. Though this measure

received a relatively low peer feedback rating, stakeholders indicated that their peers exhibit this behavior "sometimes," providing an opportunity to identify and build on the occasions when this occurs.

- *"Analyzes relevant data before coming to a decision."* This item received the highest rating from both self-assessment and peer feedback with most peers indicating that stakeholders do this "fairly often." There was some discussion of the meaning of "relevant" in this measure and a general consensus that relevance is in the eye of the beholder. The stakeholders concluded that it is likely, in the current environment, for data that is contrary to a leader's views to be disregarded.

After reviewing the themes from the ALQ with the stakeholders, I facilitated a discussion with them using appreciative inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, Vogt, Brown, & Issacs, 2003, Innovation for Social Change, 2014). Appreciative inquiry provides a framework for building on strengths that can be less intimidating to those in positions of power when used to reduce negative thinking and help them explore solutions. The intent was to move the stakeholders from thinking about "problems" to developing "solutions" by considering what they are already doing well so that they could begin to see what is possible.

I posed three questions to the stakeholders via email prior to the first group meeting. The first question asked each to plan to share something that went well at work in the past week. A roundtable review of these successes raised the energy level in the room and identified areas of existing strength so that the team could consider how to build on those capabilities. They then responded to a question on strengths and successes in dealing with challenges that had previously been raised. This was followed by an exploration of helpful ways in which they currently share information. Each of these inquiries was meant to highlight the foundation that already exists for building stronger connections with one another through better communication practices. I

returned to appreciative inquiry techniques throughout our discussion to explore and uncover strengths and define the desired intervention.

Creating the Intervention

Armed with information from the ALQ and inspired by rich discussion of solutions to move forward, the stakeholder group reviewed and agreed to logistical steps for the development program as well as a model to support learning and practice of communication skills. The aggregate ALQ responses helped the team focus on the need to develop and practice tangible communication skills. The change they sought was to be more aware of when and how they listen to and share information with one another.

Program design. The Operations leaders were accustomed to creating change using management tools including processes, systems, and "power tools" that force compliance (Denning, 2011). While they expressed interest in professional development and improving their interpersonal work relationships during one-on-one conversations, their collaborative discussions easily drifted to tangible, practical adjustments within their comfort zone. They preferred facts and data and suggested that leadership tools might be too "touchy feely." During collaborative discussions, they debated designing a process to deal with daily changes and emergencies (i.e., a check list of sorts) rather than learning skills to take their interactions to a higher level. Shifting from power and management tools to use of leadership tools is a significant change for this team. They desired to build leadership skills yet clung comfortably to process as a solution.

Finding the appropriate approach to ease the stakeholders into change was therefore important because of their tendency to quickly retreat to process and power. Higgs and Rowland (2010) describe the reality of change that requires leaders to "take the team more into pain rather than take them away from it" in order to reach a "transformed and healthier place, even though it may bring more discomfort on the journey to get there" (p. 383). My role was to help the

stakeholders become more comfortable with discomfort as they let go of control and learned to trust one another with information as part of their communication skill growth. Giving them a safe way to practice was key to a successful intervention.

With that in mind, I designed a program in response to stakeholder direction that was practical in nature, could be incorporated into their daily interactions (i.e., low impact on available time), and provided tangible skills to practice. After researching a number of different tools and approaches that would respond to the parameters of this program, I focused on responsibility charting. Past studies (Trey, 1996) have highlighted the benefits of responsibility charting to bring parties together to discuss projects rather than make assumptions about various roles, creating an environment for improved communication. I selected the RACI model for this intervention (Solomon, 2011, Morgan, 2008, Rigby, 2015, Smith & Erwin, n.d.). RACI is an acronym for **R**esponsible, **A**ccountable, **C**onsulted, and **I**nformed. The model is a system-level tool that moves away from attributing team problems to individual issues and instead examines what is taking place between people or functional groups. It combines elements of project planning and stakeholder analysis with a strong emphasis on communication (Solomon, 2011).

Used as a project management and role clarity tool, RACI can assist in describing communication patterns and highlighting where issues might occur, such as the challenges of having too many "A" or "R" individuals. In the RACI model, "consulted" identifies the individuals who should be communicated with before taking action. It is two-way communication. "Informed" represents who should be talked to after a decision is reached. It is one-way communication and good stakeholder management. This vernacular and the associated methodology was attractive because it provided a tangible method for the stakeholders to practice over the course of the month-long Capstone project. It also gave them a common

language for thinking about how to communicate with one another, who to include in communication, and when communication should occur.

Solomon (2011) states that RACI "creates a simple and neutral language that people can use to discuss their different perspectives" (p. 4). To test the RACI model with the stakeholders, I administered the Role Confusion Quiz (Solomon, 2011) which provides for "stop light" scoring with green representing scores between zero and six, yellow representing scores between 7 and 14, and red representing scores from 15 to 22. Stakeholders considered the statements relative to dysfunctions within their team and the potential applicability of the RACI model. The median score on the Role Confusion Quiz was 8.5. The mean score was 9.25 with responses ranging from 5 to 16, placing the group solidly within the "yellow" category.

Stakeholders completed the quiz and brought their responses to the last collaborative discussion where we reviewed the RACI model and how it might apply to their situation. They responded affirmatively that RACI met their criteria for a tangible process to assist them with development of better communication skills. Given the stakeholders' preference for process and their stated desire to avoid "touchy feely" exercises, use of RACI packaged soft skill development within a framework that was practical, efficient, and effective. With implementation, the stakeholders practiced the "consulting" and "informing" communication skills referenced by RACI.

Weekly exercises. The development program launched after review of the RACI model. Beginning the following Monday, I sent weekly email reminders that addressed consulting and informing behaviors, each with recommended action and opportunity for reflection (see Appendix C: Weekly Exercises). The content of these emails served as focal points of practice each week. The stakeholders used the concepts in the exercises during the week and reported via email at week's end on their interactions with one another and what they noticed themselves

doing in terms of consulting, informing, and listening behaviors. The idea was to help them experience progress through small wins in their day-to-day interactions (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). As Kelly and Amburgey (1991, p. 610) state, "a series of incremental changes may be more feasible and effective than a single major shift in a particular strategic direction." This project provided seemingly minor actions to shift the mindset and experience of the stakeholders.

After a month of weekly exercises, feedback was collected from each of the participants to qualitatively measure the success of the program. Stakeholders received a survey link via email, which allowed them to access the questions (see Appendix D: End-of-Program Survey) online via SurveyMonkey. They were asked to complete the survey within one week of the end of the development program. Stakeholders were also given an option of completing the ALQ a second time to measure whether increased focus on consulting and informing had changed their own or peer perceptions of authentic leadership behaviors.

Results

The goal of this change effort was to raise stakeholder awareness of their individual communication behaviors and, as a result, improve working relationships through better communication and increased trust. Higgs and Rowland (2010) found that successful leaders involved in change "noticed their impulses, were aware of their struggles, and reflected on what they could have done differently." This project focused on self-awareness and practice of specific communication skills – namely consulting, informing, and listening – followed by reflection on weekly activities.

Eleven of the twelve stakeholders completed the end-of-program survey. The stakeholders were asked to rate the level of change they personally experienced because of the development program, as well as the level of change they observed within the leadership team. The rating scale ranged from 1 to 10 with 10 being the greatest amount of change. Personal

change of 5 or greater was indicated by 72.73% of stakeholders, though only 54.55% assessed

change within the team at the same level. While the team score suggests that a majority feel that

change occurred, it appears that the greater perceived shift occurred on a personal level for these

leaders.

90.91%	Increased engagement from collaboration.
90.91%	Increased awareness of communication behaviors.
63.63%	Changed view of colleagues.
54.55%	Working better together as a team.
54.55%	Communication skills improved.
36.36%	Trust levels are higher.

Figure 2: Summary of Outcomes from Program (% agreed/strongly agreed)

The intent of this program was to raise awareness of communication behaviors. The goal

was achieved based on survey feedback from the stakeholders. A majority also agreed or

strongly agreed that participating in the collaborative design of the program increased their

engagement. Outcomes identified through survey feedback are summarized in Figure 2 above.

A desired second order impact of the Capstone project was to improve working

relationships through better communication and increased trust. Overall, more than half of

respondents saw a slight improvement in team performance while the remainder felt that team

performance remained the same. More than half also agreed or strongly agreed that

communication skills had improved and they were working together better as a team because of

the experience. However, only one-third felt that trust levels were higher.

The project sponsor, who did not complete the survey, stated that he observed less

conflict with his team and commented that they were working together better because of the

program. "Evolutionary change…is gentle, incremental, decentralized, and over time produces a broad and lasting shift with less upheaval" (Meyerson, 2001). This program may have evolutionary results for the leadership team should they continue to apply what they have learned.

      Feedback on weekly exercises. Several findings arose from review of the weekly exercises and feedback. The RACI model was lauded by stakeholders as an easy tool to "get everyone on the same page." Stakeholders reported that they are applying it to everyday decisions and teaching others in the organization about the model because "we struggle with who to consult and who to inform." Use of RACI was mentioned by several stakeholders in the survey responses and the weekly feedback as a valuable tool. One person said, "I found using the RACI matrix very useful. It showed quickly where communication and input may otherwise have been overlooked and where resources may be overwhelmed." Another stated that "learning about RACI has increased my awareness to consult others and not just inform." One provided an example: "While developing troubleshooting teams, using the RACI model helped me identify other individuals that should be accountable in the process."

      In addition to the RACI model, the stakeholders found most useful the second weekly exercise where they were challenged to purposefully remain silent and listen in meetings. In naming this exercise, one stakeholder said, "Remaining silent during meetings and listening to others work through the issues… allowed me to hear and watch others break down problems and develop solutions. While it might be different than the path I would take, the outcome was close to surprisingly similar." Another mentioned that the exercise was "very challenging and beneficial." Using these tools and exercises, the stakeholders discovered things about themselves and their team that should aid in performance improvement:

- "I learned that I typically consult more with management and end users and that I tend to inform more when it comes to team. We truly have a great team and are open to making positive changes."

- "I need to listen more, and let others take the lead. Colleagues need to openly communicate issues and actions for items they are responsible and accountable for. People are inserting themselves believing they are accountable / responsible, but in many cases the role should be consult / inform."

Post-program ALQ results. In addition to responding to the post-program survey, two-thirds of the stakeholders opted to complete the ALQ a second time. The results of this assessment, which measures Self-Awareness, Transparency, Moral/Ethical Affect, and Balanced Processing (Avolio, et al., 2007), hint at change from the development program but more study is needed to understand if there is truly a correlation. Specifically, the gap between self-perception and peer perception widened slightly with respect to Transparency with stakeholders rating themselves higher and rating peers about the same compared to the pre-program ALQ scores. Similarly, a second measure, that of Balanced Processing, diverged between self- and peer perception. Stakeholders rated themselves roughly the same as on the pre-program assessment, but were less generous with colleagues after completing the development exercises.

The third difference between self- and peer perception was related to the measure of Self-Awareness. The gap between self- and peer ratings was narrowed from 0.15 on a 4.0 scale to 0.05 after completing the program. Directionally the responses differed from other aspects of authentic leadership, because stakeholders rated both themselves and their peers higher on these measures. Such responses suggest the focus brought to bear by this program was useful in raising their self-awareness and that they had observed this shift in others as well.

Next steps. The project sponsor and stakeholders have received a summary of the survey results along with my thanks for their participation in the project. Those who completed the ALQ a second time have also received updated assessment reports showing their pre- and post-program scores. As I did with the initial assessment reports, I have made myself available for questions should they have any. In addition, I recommended a final collaborative group discussion with the stakeholders. The purpose would be to discuss findings from the project and give the stakeholders a chance to reflect on their participation and its meaning for their team and organization.

The meeting, which has not yet been scheduled, would also allow them to consider next steps in a structured setting. Continued efforts after this program are outside the scope of the Capstone project, but a final meeting with the group will provide the stakeholders with an opportunity to celebrate their success thus far. It could also reinforce what they have learned through collaborating on and executing the program. Finally, a program-closing discussion would allow them to determine how they will build on their success to move forward and unleash their enthusiasm for the continued evolution of their organization.

Chapter IV: Conclusions

Introduction

Using authentic leadership as a foundation for learning, this Capstone project addressed the research question: *How can an organization increase leader awareness, using consulting and informing behaviors, to impact trust and communication with an intact work team?* The targeted change was to increase positive interactions within a 12-person Operations leadership team that tended to be competitive and conflict oriented with limited sharing of information. The program highlighted authentic leadership behaviors and specifically sought to involve the leaders in the design of their own development program through interviews and collaborative discussion to identify specific needs and areas of focus.

Initially, I had intended to explore the power of positive organizational politics within the authentic leadership framework, using authenticity to reduce overt negativity and conflict. After meeting with the project sponsor and conducting interviews with the stakeholders, a greater need for this team was identified through the collective wisdom in the room. They wanted to address their communication with one another, ideally through self-discovery. All stakeholders identified similar challenges, namely a tendency to compete to be "right" rather than seeking out alternative views, listening, or sharing information more widely. However, they uniformly felt that others were the problem. No one acknowledged how they were contributing to the situation. Understanding this element of their interactions highlighted the benefits of exploring the issue using authentic leadership as a foundation.

Researchers tend to classify authentic leadership based on four primary attributes. These are: seeking alternative information and points of view before making decisions (balanced processing), understanding self and others' perception of self (self-awareness), acting consistently with personal values (internalized moral perspective), and reflecting how actions

and values are congruent (relational transparency). Through collaborative discussion and review

of consistent themes from the interviews and ALQ results, the stakeholders identified balanced

processing as the most important element to improve their interactions, particularly a willingness

to listen to others' points of view and seek out information that may be contrary to planned

action. Surprised by the gaps between self-perception and colleague feedback that were apparent

on initial completion of the ALQ, they requested a process that would make them more aware of

their communication behavior and how it was contributing to the issues they had acknowledged.

Because of time constraints, the scope of this project narrowed to focus on self-awareness

of how communication behaviors impact colleagues. Bamford, et al. (2012), Cooper, et al.

(2005), Gardner, et al. (2005), Gardner, et al. (2011), and Tate (2008) highlight the importance of

self-awareness to promote consistency between the leader's thoughts, feelings, and values and

how that person behaves. The reliability of action that can emerge from self-awareness

contributes to greater trust between colleagues over time. This was also a stated goal of the

stakeholders as they considered how they wanted to spend their time on development.

Ultimately the stakeholders asked for a tangible process that could be used to make them

more aware of their communication behavior so that they might improve their interactions with

one another. The RACI model was identified (Solomon, 2011, Morgan, 2008, Rigby, 2015,

Smith & Erwin, n.d.) as the vehicle to drive improved communication. By encouraging listening

and teaching a model that incorporates the need for both two-way and one-way communication

within the authentic leadership framework, this project sought to increase trust and improve

working relationships as leaders became more aware of how, when, and with whom they

communicate.

Conclusions

The goal to raise awareness of communication behaviors was achieved with this project. Stakeholders reported being much more cognizant of how they were impacting others and the need to engage in more consultation and less directive communication. In addition to increasing awareness, the stakeholders and their sponsor desired an improvement in working relationships through better communication and increased trust. With just over one-third of stakeholders indicating that an increase in trust had occurred, there is still work to be done in this area. Though a majority did not perceive a significant shift in levels of trust, stakeholders and the project sponsor reported that tension and conflict had decreased in working relationships since the beginning of the program. Because self-awareness can cause individuals to focus first on their own behavior and how it impacts others, the stakeholders may have been practicing better engagement strategies even though they have had historically difficult interactions. Such would explain the reduction in conflict while accepting that time will be required to repair damaged trust.

Collaboratively designing a leadership program to address communication issues also resulted in self-discovery for the participants of the program. The stakeholders gained insight into how they were impacting one another through their communication or lack thereof. They were able to apply the model they learned to be more aware of communication and the need to define roles so that all parties have a shared understanding of expectations. Increased awareness of communication behaviors resulted in less apparent conflict and a greater appreciation of the need to actively seek out and listen to others' views, an important element of balanced processing.

Participation by the project sponsor and stakeholders in the design of this intervention and plan for change resulted in a stronger plan that was not dependent on me as the driver of change. The cooperative nature of the discussions created a sense of ownership and interest

among the stakeholders. The development program was not "my" solution but "our" solution, and that was a revelation for everyone involved. The stakeholders were not the only ones who experienced change. Awareness of my communication behaviors was heightened through facilitation of this program as I sought to model healthy and open dialogue for the stakeholders.

Several stakeholders commented on feeling empowered to take on the change and see what they could accomplish personally and professionally. This sense of ownership was important to assure that the changes achieved serve as a foundation on which the Operations leadership team can pursue further growth. It is my hope that the most engaged and enthusiastic members of the leadership team will act as catalysts for continued engagement and improved communications within the team.

Recommendations

Anyone interested in replicating this program should consider that the collaborative nature of the discussions was a primary driver in determining the focus and content of the weekly exercises. Participation from the stakeholders in the collaboration and ultimate execution of the program was impacted by their availability because of other work assignments, travel, and life-events. One of the learnings from this project is that a stakeholder engagement plan could be useful for planning ahead how to reach those who disengage periodically. Disengagement, even with the most well-intentioned and committed team, should not be a surprise given the busy world in which stakeholders live and work. I initially sought to work with a stakeholder group of six leaders, but the executive sponsor preferred to include a larger team. In retrospect, this was useful as some had to withdraw from participation periodically because of work-related demands, yet the size of the group allowed for a solid core of participation throughout the program.

Another recommendation would be to extend the time period for develop. Doing so would allow for a greater number of weekly exercises. In addition, holding more face to face meetings would be beneficial. Neither of these options were possible given the constraints on availability of stakeholders and deadlines for reporting, but doing so would create greater opportunity for practice and feedback. For example, those who submitted responses to the authentic leadership assessment for a second time tended to judge one another a bit more harshly after becoming more aware of the behaviors that define authenticity than they had at the beginning. Discussing these findings in a group setting would give stakeholders the opportunity to declare their intentions and develop greater understanding of one another. It is possible that stakeholder expectations were raised along with awareness and they were not yet seeing behavior from colleagues that reflected what they had learned. Having more time to engage in weekly exercises and to hold additional group discussions on the stakeholders' experiences with the exercises would be useful to better understand the meaning behind the numbers.

Limitations and Implications

Although this program produced encouraging initial results, it is important to recognize that the findings have some limitations. The stakeholders were a small group from one function within a single industry. It is possible that leaders in different industries and functions or with different educational backgrounds might have varying results. Additionally, most of the stakeholders had worked together for several years and, as such, had established patterns of interaction that take time and sustained effort to change. The long-term relationships between members of this leadership team and their established methods of interaction were not considered in selecting the stakeholders. This factor may have influenced the outcomes, particularly with respect to trust level variation, and should be considered in when gathering participants in the future.

In the post-program survey, two-thirds of stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that noticing communication behaviors had changed their view of colleagues. However, review of the post-program ALQ responses (from those who completed the ALQ a second time) revealed an increase in the gap between self-perception and colleagues' perception of transparency and balanced processing when compared to the ALQ responses prior to design and completion of the program. A "changed view of colleagues" could mean a negative change in views of one another after understanding authentic leadership more fully. It is also possible that increased awareness of communication behaviors heightened attention to these aspects of authentic leadership, and while there is a tendency to give one's self the benefit of the doubt based on intent and effort, others are typically judged on perception, not intention. The reason behind these shifts needs to be explored more deeply to fully understand the response. In addition, altering the survey statement to read "noticing communication behavior has changed my view of my colleagues for the better" (adding the underlined verbiage) would make future survey responses more clear.

Further, face-to-face discussions were limited in frequency and length because of stakeholder availability, and more than a month passed between the collaborative design phase of the program and launch of the weekly exercises because of the desire of the project sponsor to be present at the program launch. The passage of time also has the potential to influence feedback, as there are "challenges of recall associated with interviews in a retrospective framework" (Higgs & Rowland, 2010). This was mitigated somewhat by referring to the weekly email reports that stakeholders completed, but the length of time between initial design and execution is noted as a potential limitation. Should further use of this structure be pursued, launching the program within one or two weeks of design completion is preferable.

The short duration during which the stakeholders participated in weekly exercises is another limitation. Results are promising, yet additional exercises over a longer period would be useful to determine if a greater shift might be correlated to program duration. An extended program to practice consulting and informing reliably could also establish a pattern of behavior that would lead to greater trust over time. The project sponsor was positive about his observed reduction in tension and conflict among leaders of his team, yet he also commented that it is hard for the team to change because they have worked together for so long in a dysfunctional way that they must continue to apply the tools they learned if they are truly going to change their interactions. Supplemental research, extending the length of the exercises and including follow up assessment for some period after the end of the exercises could be useful to determine whether sustainable change occurred.

Despite these limitations, the possibilities raised by this Capstone effort suggest that bringing attention to informing and consulting behaviors raises self-awareness. This increase in awareness has had an immediate positive impact on leaders' interactions with one another. Consciously considering who needs to be consulted or informed before taking action seems to have opened lines of communication and moved colleagues toward more positive and productive working relations.

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Appendix A: Pre-Reading for Collaboration Meetings

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Appendix B: ALQ Sample Report

Authentic Leadership Questionnaire

Self-Assessment and Peer Feedback Report*

for

John D. Sample

August 5, 2016

Personal and Confidential

* The format of this report draws heavily on numerous commercially available assessment reports for boilerplate language. It was designed and intended for internal company use only and not for publication or duplication.

Introduction

Authentic leadership is generally defined as understanding yourself (*self-awareness*), behaving based on personal values (*internalized moral perspective*), making decisions objectively and encouraging questioning (*balanced processing*), and sharing how your actions are consistent with your values (*relational transparency*).* No one aspect is more important than another. Each of these influence an overall perception of authenticity and congruence between words and actions, contributing to trust and credibility.

You and your peers completed self-assessments and provided feedback on one another in each of these four areas. Ratings are on a scale from 0 to 4 representing frequency of occurrence where:

> 0 = Not at all
> 1 = Once in a while
> 2 = Sometimes
> 3 = Fairly often
> 4 = Frequently, if not always

Even the most insightful leader doesn't necessarily understand exactly how others perceive him or her. We are often more generous with ourselves than others. At other times, we may be harder on ourselves than our colleagues are. It is important to note that feedback from your co-workers represents how they perceive your behavior through their interactions with you. It is okay if you do not agree with this feedback. Gaps between how you see yourself and how you are perceived may reflect that your intentions are not necessarily clear to others. This is an opportunity to consider what you might do differently to increase your effectiveness in your working relationships or to recognize what you are doing well and continue to do it. In some cases, you may already be engaging in a behavior but colleagues do not experience that in their work with you. In such cases, making a conscious effort to be more open about what you are doing and why may be useful.

As you review this information, if you have any questions or would like to discuss what to do with your individual results, please contact me. (Name and email address provided.)

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* Walumbwa, F.O., Avolio, B.J., Gardner, W.L.,Wernsing, T.S. & Peterson, S.J. (2008). Authentic Leadership: development and validation of a theory-based measure. *Journal of Management, 34*, 89-126.

Relational Transparency

Relational transparency is being true to your values and expressing this to others. This involves the open sharing of information about your thoughts and feelings and sharing how your actions are consistent with your values. By being more transparent, your colleagues and followers come to know you better.

Examples of actions include:

- Encourages everyone to speak their mind.
- Admits mistakes when they are made.
- Says exactly what he or she means.

Ratings are on a scale from 0 to 4 with:

> 0 = Not at all
> 1 = Once in a while
> 2 = Sometimes
> 3 = Fairly often
> 4 = Frequently, if not always

Based on your responses, you rated yourself **3.19** and your colleagues rated you **2.74**. Scores of 2.0 or higher indicate that you are *sometimes* demonstrating these behaviors and can build on those successes.

0	1	2	3	4

Self assessment: ◆
Peer assessment: ◆
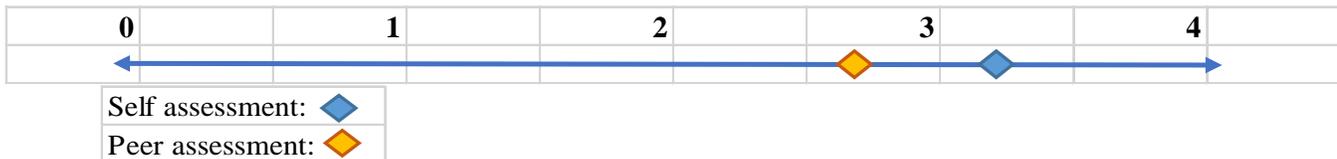
As you review this information, consider what you can build on that you are already doing well. Further, is there one thing you can take from this feedback that could increase your effectiveness?

Internalized Moral Perspective

Internalized moral perspective is self-regulation of behavior based on your personal values as opposed to those imposed by the group, organization or society. This is expressed in ethical decision making and behavior consistent with your values.

Examples of actions include:

- Demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions.
- Asks you to take positions that support your core values.

Ratings are on a scale from 0 to 4 with:

> 0 = Not at all
> 1 = Once in a while
> 2 = Sometimes
> 3 = Fairly often
> 4 = Frequently, if not always

Based on your responses, you rated yourself **3.50** and your colleagues rated you **2.82**. Scores of 2.0 or higher indicate that you are *sometimes* demonstrating these behaviors and can build on those successes.

0	1	2	3	4

Self assessment: ◆
Peer assessment: ◆

As you review this information, consider what you can build on that you are already doing well. Further, is there one thing you can take from this feedback that could increase your effectiveness?

Balanced Processing

Balanced processing represents objective evaluation of information before making a decision. It includes encouraging others to question or challenge your views, not so that you can convince them that you are right but so that you can understand why they may have a different perspective.

Examples of actions include:

- Listens carefully to different points of view before coming to conclusions.
- Solicits views that challenge his or her deeply held positions.

Ratings are on a scale from 0 to 4 with:

> 0 = Not at all
> 1 = Once in a while
> 2 = Sometimes
> 3 = Fairly often
> 4 = Frequently, if not always

Based on your responses, you rated yourself **3.00** and your colleagues rated you **2.61**. Scores of 2.0 or higher indicate that you are *sometimes* demonstrating these behaviors and can build on those successes.

0	1	2	3	4

Self assessment: ◆
Peer assessment: ◆
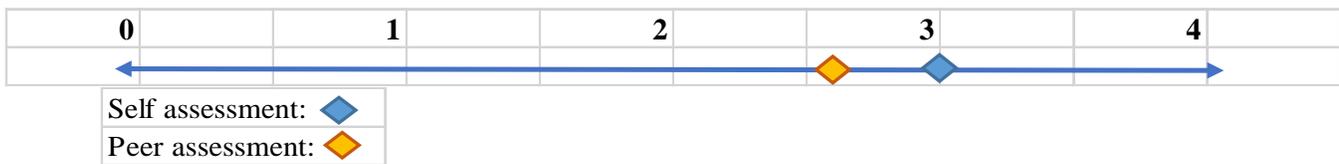
As you review this information, consider what you can build on that you are already doing well. Further, is there one thing you can take from this feedback that could increase your effectiveness?

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness represents an understanding of your strengths and weaknesses and the multi-faceted nature of the self. This includes developing insights into the self through exposure to others' views and being aware of your impact on others.

Examples of actions include:

- Seeks feedback to improve interactions with others.
- Shows he or she understands how specific actions impact others
- Knows when it is time to reevaluate his or her position on important issues

Ratings are on a scale from 0 to 4 with:

    0 = Not at all
    1 = Once in a while
    2 = Sometimes
    3 = Fairly often
    4 = Frequently, if not always

Based on your responses, you rated yourself **2.75** and your colleagues rated you **2.50**. Scores of 2.0 or higher indicate that you are *sometimes* demonstrating these behaviors and can build on those successes.

0	1	2	3	4

Self assessment: ◆
Peer assessment: ◆
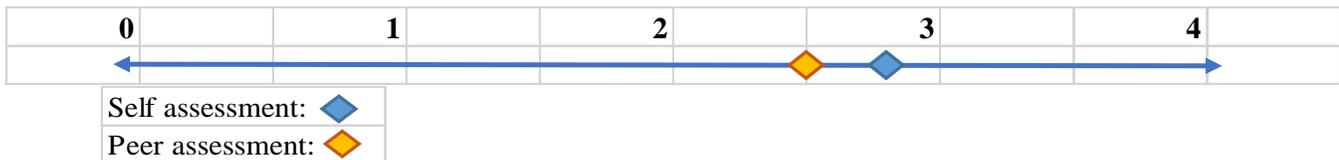
As you review this information, consider what you can build on that you are already doing well. Further, is there one thing you can take from this feedback that could increase your effectiveness?

Next Steps

We all have both strengths and areas for improvement when it comes to authentic leadership. If you are like most leaders, right now you are zeroing in on the areas where you scored lowest or had the widest gap between self- and peer assessment. I do the same; however, concentrating on our shortcomings can be unproductive and exhausting. Often it causes us to give up on making any changes before we even start.

First, note that none of your scores represent weakness, only opportunities to develop greater strength. Then, focus on the areas in which you were rated most highly. This will give you better perspective to deal with areas for improvement. Choose an area that seems well developed (look at your highest scores from colleagues) and think about how you can exercise those behaviors even more fully.

Where gaps exist between your self-assessment and that of your colleagues, think about what you can do to make your actions more transparent. Perhaps you are engaging in authentic behaviors but others don't experience that in their interactions with you. Maybe you haven't seen the value of certain behaviors so don't do them but others would benefit if you did. Consider talking with a trusted colleague or mentor for ideas about what you might do differently to continue to grow, using this information to guide your journey.

As you review this information, if you have any questions or would like to discuss your individual results, please contact me. I am happy to schedule a telephone call or a brief meeting.

Appendix C: Weekly Exercises

Exercises were sent via email each week on Monday morning with a question or reflection request sent on Friday morning. This is the actual verbiage used in the email messages.

Week 1
This is the first weekly exercise in your development program. You may recall from our discussion of RACI that the "C" and "I" stand for "consulting" and "informing," respectively. These are behaviors that occur either before a decision is made (seeking others' input or "consulting") or after (keeping stakeholders up to date or "informing"). Sometimes we pretend to consult but a decision has already been made and we are really informing. This week, notice how often you seek out input from colleagues before making a decision (consulting) and how frequently you pass along information appropriately after a decision is made (informing). Try to keep a rough count. Use the "consulting" and "informing" language with one another to make your intentions clear. On Friday, you'll be asked to report briefly on your findings and experience. Reflect on the consequences of your behavior (not others', but your own) with respect to communication.

FRIDAY Q: At the end of this first week of practice, which behavior – consulting or informing – do you tend to use more? Now that you are more aware of consulting and informing as specific means of communication, what do you notice about your interactions with colleagues? For example, do you tend to inform when you should be consulting or perhaps seem to consult even though a decision has already been made. What conclusions can you draw about the consequences of how you communicate with others?

Week 2
In *Beyond Measure**, author Margaret Heffernan says, "the more senior you are, the more important listening becomes. Once a leader speaks, most people stop listening to one another and start positioning themselves. But when the leader doesn't speak, then, just like a great choir, people have to listen to and respond to one another. That's how and when distinctive work emerges." (p. 36) You work with smart people. What if you let others try to solve issues instead of bringing the issues to you to solve? You may be the ultimate decision maker but let others take on a consulting ("C") role and provide their ideas and recommendations. This requires you to do more listening initially.

Try this experiment. In at least one meeting this week, don't say a word. This may sound simple, but it can be challenging because it is about power listening without the need to respond. Your body language and attention will show that you are actively engaged. Power listening requires courage and it's harder to do than you might think. It means you have to be open to what you hear and not react (p. 35). Power listening requires you to focus on content, not what you will say next. You may not need to say anything. Notice whether or not you succeed in your silence and how others react. How long are you able to go without speaking? Ten minutes? The entire meeting? Try this at more than one meeting. Did it get easier to listen rather than talk?

*Heffernan, M. (2015). *Beyond Measure: The big impact of small changes*. Simon & Schuster/
        TED Books. ISBN 9781476784908

FRIDAY Q: Were you successful in using silence to power listen this week? Power listening can become a consulting role ("C") for you as you allow others to make and implement decisions, providing input only when asked. If you tried it, how long were you able to go without speaking?   How did people react to your silence? Did they notice? How did power listening feel to you (e.g., easy, strange, energizing, silly, something else)?

Week 3
WD-40's "Democratic Principle of Accountability" is reflected in their Maniac Pledge which reads: "I am responsible for taking action, asking questions, getting answers, and making decisions. I won't wait for someone to tell me. If I need to know, I'm responsible for asking. I have no right to be offended that I didn't 'get this sooner.' If I'm doing something others should know about, I'm responsible for telling them" (www.wd40company.com/about/careers/our-tribal-culture/).

This principle is about <u>informing</u> activities, the "I" in RACI, where you are on the receiving end of information (being informed). Apply it to your work this week. Notice how often you wonder why someone didn't tell you something versus when you took responsibility for actively seeking information. As you are seeking information, be honest with yourself. Do you want to know in order to stay current with a project or topic or is it really because you have something to say about the topic (want to be consulted)?   Also notice how frequently you inform others of your decisions and activities.

FRIDAY Q: What did you notice about your responsibility for requesting and sharing information relative to the "Democratic Principle of Accountability"? In retrospect, were there people it might have been beneficial to consult ("C") instead of inform ("I")?

Week 4
This week's exercise is designed to strengthen your decision making. Balanced processing is about being open to new information and alternative points of view. Sometimes when we are most certain of a decision, we are at greatest risk because we close our minds to information that would help us make better choices or at least be more aware of the risks involved in the decision we are making. As you make decisions this week, ask yourself these questions:

- What else do I need to know to be more confident that this is the best decision?
- Who have I not consulted ("C")?
- Who is likely to disagree with my decision and what might I learn from listening to that person's point of view?

FRIDAY Q: When is it easy or difficult for you to listen to input from others? Once you reach a decision, are you able to consider reasons you may be making the wrong decision? When you talk to someone who disagrees with your decision, are you able to hear things that would make your decision stronger?

Appendix D: End-of-Program Survey

Thanks for participating in the Operations Leadership Team development program. Beginning with our collaborative discussions, completion of the ALQ feedback, and the input provided on the preference for a tangible process (RACI) to address communication challenges, the Ops leadership team has provided important insights and suggestions that guided the design of the pilot program. You have now completed a month of weekly exercises. Thinking about the entire experience – including initial one-on-one interviews, collaborative meetings, and the weekly exercises – please comment on the usefulness of this approach and how it might be improved.

1. Please indicate level of agreement (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree)
   - Collaborating on the design and direction of this program increased my level of interest.
   - I have become aware of communication behaviors (my own and/or others') that I didn't previously pay attention to.
   - My communication skills have improved because of this program.
   - Noticing communication behavior has changed my view of my colleagues.
   - We are working better together as a team because of this experience.
   - Trust levels are higher between members of the team since this program began.

2. After several weeks of noticing communication behavior, our team performance has

   - Improved significantly
   - Improved slightly
   - Stayed the same
   - Declined slightly
   - Declined significantly

3. One goal of this program was to achieve small, incremental changes which are typically more sustainable than sweeping change. Change can include learning new information, discovering a new skill, or connecting with colleagues in a different way. On a scale of 0-10 with 0 being "no change" and 10 being "total transformation", how would you rate the changes that <u>you personally</u> experienced during this program?

4. On a scale of 0-10 with 0 being "no change" and 10 being "total transformation", how would you rate the changes that <u>the leadership team overall</u> has experience during this program?

5. What practice or question from the weekly emails did you find the most useful for increasing your communication skills?

6. Please share an example of something you did because of this program (action) and what occurred (consequence). It doesn't have to be anything earth shattering, just think of how you put weekly emails into practice.

7. What did you discover about yourself through this program? What did you discover about your colleagues?

8. Based on your experience, what recommendations do you have or what changes would you make if you were to go through the program again?