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Information As Inspiration: A Truth For Professional Development

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

Advisor: Janet Greco

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Information As Inspiration: A Truth For Professional Development

Abstract
This capstone poses a very important set of basic organizational questions centered on why we do or do not openly share information when we are at work. Many lenses are used to view this topic: a leadership or followership perspective, information dissemination techniques, the accuracy and timeliness of those techniques, psychological deterrents to effective communication such as cognitive biases, and professional development’s direct correlation to the amount of information provided to an employee. This document begins with a pair of professional stories depicting these workplace dynamics and then moves into a research literature review, which explores how the availability of information in and of the workplace affects employees' professional performance and development. More specifically, leaders’ dissemination or withholding of information can also greatly influence the workplace. The research question becomes, what impact does leader dissemination of accurate and timely information have on follower effectiveness? The document interprets the literature and presents a series of short interviews with a small group of participants on the topic. The interviews validate or, at the very least, strongly suggest that the research question would be worth pursuing with a larger study.

Comments
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Advisor: Janet Greco
INFORMATION AS INSPIRATION:
A TRUTH FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By

Anthony Asciutto

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

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2017
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A TRUTH FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Approved by:

Janet Greco, Ph.D., Advisor

John Eldred, Reader
ABSTRACT

This capstone poses a very important set of basic organizational questions centered on why we do or do not openly share information when we are at work. Many lenses are used to view this topic: a leadership or followership perspective, information dissemination techniques, the accuracy and timeliness of those techniques, psychological deterrents to effective communication such as cognitive biases, and professional development’s direct correlation to the amount of information provided to an employee. This document begins with a pair of professional stories depicting these workplace dynamics and then moves into a research literature review, which explores how the availability of information in and of the workplace affects employees’ professional performance and development. More specifically, leaders’ dissemination or withholding of information can also greatly influence the workplace. The research question becomes, *what impact does leader dissemination of accurate and timely information have on follower effectiveness?* The document interprets the literature and presents a series of short interviews with a small group of participants on the topic. The interviews validate or, at the very least, strongly suggest that the research question would be worth pursuing with a larger study.
Many thanks to my capstone advisor and reader. Dr. Janet Greco was essential to the creative process of this document and in my professional development within the Organizational Dynamics Program at the University of Pennsylvania. John Eldred presented and animated many of the models presented in this document. His candor and guidance helped form this document long before the first keystroke.

Thanks to the participants of the interview study for lending their time, expertise, and intellect to the process.

I would also like to thank my children Olivia and Emily who challenge me every day to put this theory to task. Families are definitely organizations, too.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my wife, Victoria, for her love and support throughout this process. You have been with me through the highs and the lows, the deserts and the forests, the fog and the sunshine. From Fenway to Cambridge and everything in-between, I could think of no one better to share this experience.
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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Capstone Origin

This capstone began as a quest to answer the question, “Why don’t we tell the truth in the workplace?” Based on many first-hand observations in the workplace, I’ve grown frustrated by the constant ebb and flow of workplace politics in action. As I began to answer that question, make elevator pitches to my friends and colleagues, research, internalize and formulate, I recognized that the profession and confusion of truth and lies in the workplace is wholly problematic for a myriad of academic reasons.

First, “truth” can be nothing more than a relative evaluation of a situation based on a single or potentially limited point of view. Almost everyone can rationalize their own point of view, and, therefore, could justify almost anything as truth.

Second, withholding or concealing information – that is, perhaps, lack of “truth” – may be entirely appropriate for a wide variety of situations in the workplace. If everyone walked around all day and simply told the truth as they saw it, we’d live in a deafening world of aimless discussion. For example, not everyone needs to know if you like your boss or not. Not all of your coworkers should hear your opinions of the color scheme on the latest version of the software in which the company just invested millions of dollars. And your critiques of the office furniture or discontent with a PowerPoint slide arranged in tabular format aren’t exactly company-wide notable information. The point here is, it is likely appropriate to hide your “truth” in many cases for the sake of community.

Third, let’s be realistic. To imagine this capstone defining truth and lies in the workplace may be a leap too far for this academic exercise. Philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and therapists (among those with other professional skillsets) have been
dissecting the virtue of honesty for millennia. To think this pupil might crack the code of *veritas* might be a little steep of a claim.

Instead, I have refined my masters-level journey’s apex document to something much simpler and much more applicable to the Organizational Dynamics coursework. I’ve directed my strengths to something more in-line with what the capstone is designed to accomplish. Setting aside the definitional concepts of truth and deception, I’m concerned mostly with how leaders and followers interact through information flow in moments when action is required and the organization stands ready to act but there is no stimulus to start. I’m concerned with how that informational timeliness affects the ability of followers to be effective, yielding the research question: *What impact does leader dissemination of accurate and timely information have on follower effectiveness?*

I recall two stories from my professional career that illustrate the importance of the right information at the right time to produce a result. The first, as you’ll read, depicts how the right information can result in a progressive state of team performance. The second shows how leader-disseminated information can result in disruptive and potentially irreversible regression of the effectiveness of the team.

1.2 Story of Organizational Progress

I’ve had the privilege to lead a few different teams through required adaptation to meet changing customer and business demands. Upon initial investigation for one such team, I noticed systems of controls that didn’t deliver the desired product with all customer requirements. The seven-person team was designed to provide contracted mechanical maintenance support for a retail store chain in North America that spanned five time zones and networked more than 100 contractors to perform the maintenance at about 1000 sites.
Our team coordinated and managed the movements of the contractors with our on-site customers, the retail store management, and other contractor companies that were hired to support the chain in other capacities. As you might imagine, this task was not a simple one given the number of maintenance tasks and the number of people involved. Communication was key. Each contributor had a zone or area of responsibility. To keep the maintenance history and the status of all projects and issues, we maintained a computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) that captured all the issues by store, date, type, and the like.

Despite the meticulous records and a resilient workforce, I perceived a team blindness to instances where the established processes could fail. For example, as nothing was written about this anywhere, everyone had his or her own processes. Simple questions like “Why do we do this?” revealed opportunity with usual responses like “Well, I’m not sure…” or “…that’s the way we’ve always done it.” When a contributor was on vacation, his or her workload stagnated. No one would cross over into another territory to maintain progress unless the situation was dire enough to force action or a customer prompted it. I observed people neglect some of the key features of the CMMS such as the “next follow up date,” a field in the database that helped the coordinator chronologically prioritize which of the hundreds of issues needed emphasis. One of the contributors worked mostly on Post-It notes – literally all over the cubicle. If anyone needed to find out something about his/her work, he or she would likely be unable to find it. And almost none of that information papered all over the walls was captured electronically in the CMMS.

Generally, the team was on edge from the constant pace of work. I observed the team as reactive instead of proactive. One of the contributors did not want to be there any
longer. This one griped to the team often, and the rants were starting to impact the morale of those around him. There was even infighting about who would answer the phone when it rang. The most vulnerable aspect of the team, I felt, was the over-reliance on their manager. The workforce depended on me, the manager, to be the creator and arbiter of any decision that was uncomfortable or could potentially cost the team money. As was frequently the case, I was in operational or company-level meetings performing my assigned duties as a financial analyst of the account, hiring manager, strategic advisor to the account manager and the like. I would have to leave or stop those tasks to solve the next daily operational crisis. Most problems seemed to be somewhat trivial in nature. An example could be as simple as how to convince a contractor to drive to a service call when he might be 50 miles in the opposite direction.

Overall, there was lack of redundancy or flexibility when things didn’t exactly go to plan. Our individual contributors and our work progress would simply stop and wait for a prompted solution. In the environment in which we operated, this inflexibility cost time and time is money. The final stimulus for our change initiative came when I visited the corporate customer counterpart at his headquarters in the next state about a month into my tenure as manager. We sat for hours and talked about the account, his impressions of us, where we succeeded, how we failed, what his new or different expectations of me could be, and how he envisioned the future of the account. I left that meeting with a very depressing understanding of the customer’s perceptions of us: somehow, he thought I was incapable, we were terrible as a team, and he was already planning to find ways to replace us.

We needed a revolution, a plan for survival.
I drove the two hours back to my office and mulled over my options. *What should I do? How could we overcome that kind of scathing review from the corporate customer? How could I tell this group of coordinators that their already frantic workload was failing, and we’d have to do more to succeed? How could I develop those ways to succeed? What should we do? What can we do? Is it a losing battle? We need to work together. I can’t do it by myself. I can’t be making every hard decision. Seven ideas are always better than one. We’ll show him we can. We’re not replaced yet. They can do it. We can. Together.*

When I returned to our office, I walked directly into our conference room to begin working. Imagine a rectangular room with three walls, floor-to-ceiling, covered in white board material and the fourth wall with a large projector screen. I walked around the room and wrote nine statements, observations, and ideas around the room as a header. Each was a plainly stated and painfully obvious *truth* about our operation. I called my team in and read them off one-by-one. We stayed in that room for hours. We began a difficult but *honest* conversation. Feelings were hurt. Specific quotes and ideas from the customer’s mouth came from mine. It was real. It was visceral. We took only one break, but I could *feel* the team experiencing what I had only a few hours earlier. We acknowledged where the observations had validity, and then dissected the portions where it seemed to be perception problems. Each discussion point brought a new level of understanding of our team, our performance, and our product.

Once we ran through all the notes I took, we picked each other up and started writing ideas. How do we change the perception? How do we improve our performance? How can we put out a better product? We’d have to answer each of these problems – not with a memo or some colorfully beautiful PowerPoint graph for which our company was
known, although we would do that, too. But how would we enact real change for our account’s survival? Line by line, issue by issue, we developed a plan.

We, together, developed a range of corrective actions and ideas to steer the team toward a more results-oriented stance. We discovered it wasn’t about the people, it was about the processes. We projected the metrics and finances of our past and current operations on one wall while we brainstormed on the others. We came up with processes and controls, communication techniques and methods. We shared and collaborated. We even gave each other, including me, some difficult but necessary feedback about performance. We realized some issues could not be solved in that room. In one example, there were five other problems that had to solved first before we could enact real and measurable change in an aspect of our service. We all accepted the time-phased reality of our solutions and agreed to table the exceptions for a later session. For the first time since I joined the team, we all spoke constructively – even my usual griper. It was a beautiful thing.

There was one comment from that session that I’m not sure I’ll ever forget, “Ok, so we know about the problems now. We’ll never be able to fix all this. There’s not enough time in the day.” I agreed we’d lose all operational capability if we stopped to implement all changes immediately. But, from that moment forward, we had a campaign plan. We had a holistic perspective. We had context for everything we attempted. I took pictures of the whiteboard segments and captured them for the future. We chose the first few problems and implemented those solutions in the first month. I developed ways to monitor our progress and show the results of each change. And month by month, change by change, we tackled one solution a month for the next year or so. I sent frequent updates to the customer
on our progress, reflecting back to him his original comments and observations contrasted with change updates, metrics supporting success, and narratives from the field showing our progress.

I documented all our best practices in order to share them across the group. This 150-page document synthesized the great ideas we all knew collectively into one easy-to-use operations manual. We had a painful divorce from any adhesive paper devices, and from the practice of hanging them anywhere. We reformatted our e-mail templates to look more professional and ensure they captured applicable information for the customer. We revamped the way we processed paperwork and recorded data in the CMMS. It was a lot of work, but every contributor knew it was best for team survival. Individual methods of recording data were replaced with collectively designed and standardized contact sheets or process work flows that aided in predictable work order execution. We became a redundant system of interchangeable parts. This meant that anyone could step in for anyone else when they left the office. My griper exited the team for another opportunity, and we brought in some fresh talent from another section of the business. The new team member added to our momentum and brought with her new perspective. Those new views were integrated into the plan as we went.

I didn’t recall where then, but I had heard somewhere that the most effective way to lead was to give the power away, to empower. One of the best innovations during this change initiative was our development of a decision-making matrix. This device empowered each contributor to make decisions on a wide range of situations and provided them the financial tools to compute whether or not the decision was fiscally responsible. It included team- and account-level financial goals with which to drive operational decisions.
This method authorized a coordinator in the heat of the moment to effectively plot a course from $x$ to $y$ to yield $z$ without needing to stop and ask for guidance.

From a leadership perspective, although I thought I knew what I was doing, it also feels like an experiment when you’re in the middle of an organizational change. As with all experiments, you must follow the data. My experience of the moment revealed a curious dynamic playing out in front of me. The team started working for each other. We found our new working environment had fewer barriers and more specifically defined freedom. The workplace became more predictable and less chaotic. We could anticipate better. The work itself became as close to efficient as we could imagine. The CMMS, lit up with activity, started to work for us. I heard less griping and more collaboration about what was next, what was to come. I started fielding questions on deeper level business theory as an extension of the decision-making matrix. Some contributors developed more resilient relationships with their contractors, which allowed them to leverage those relationships in times of immediate need. They needed me less and each other’s advice more. The team was just that, a team. We had vision, task, and purpose. There were fewer specific points of failure and more organizational capability to succeed.

A year later, we had dropped our response time by about 70%. In other words, we went from an average work order age of 23 days to around 7 days. To our account manager’s surprise, we met our financial goals every quarter therein. And the qualitative responses we received from the customers in the serviced stores seemed to indicate we were succeeding in all aspects of customer service. We were fast, responsive, communicative, and followed through when we promised something. Our store-level customers trusted us.
But, what did I learn from that experience? What did I see work when the situation seemed difficult and something had to change? How did I help the situation and help those affected? How did we succeed? I think it’s because I told them the truth as I saw it. We started from a powerful platform: trust, purpose, growth, consistency, empowerment, teamwork, and thus professional development. We didn’t abandon our personal beliefs, but we celebrated them to synthesize a collaborative solution set. We set the mark on the wall and we achieved it. In my opinion, this is what leadership truly requires – open and honest expectation communication. Only from this kind of honesty and information sharing can the organizational actors grow individually. Cumulatively, the organization increases capacity as the actors enhance their professional aptitude.

1.3 Story of Organizational Regression

Another example of the power of workplace information sharing occurred during my tenure as a petroleum terminal manager-in-training. I was assigned to the terminal manager of an eight-million-barrel facility in the New York Harbor. The terminal manager role is designed to oversee all operations on the facility to include product delivery, safety of personnel, safeguarding the equipment, security of the installation, special projects or configurations of equipment, coordination of maintenance, and customer relations. We had just finished a year-long expansion project in which I acted as a liaison between the in-house terminal management and the out-of-state engineering project team. This role introduced me to all the key players in all the key roles involved when it came time to “go live” on the new tank system.

Then, on a cold and windy week in October 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit our terminal destroying much in its path. The storm damage and flooding compromised our equipment,
electrical systems, automation systems, pipeline segments and assets overnight. About 90% of our terminal was under water. We had prepared for the worst, but it took us four days of “de-watering” just to start the first barrels of product moving again. With teamwork, safety-driven procedures, and communication among departments, we became the first terminal in the New York Harbor to begin operations post-storm. JFK Airport was almost out of jet fuel, and we kept the birds flying with that first delivery.

Our terminal team spent months recovering from the storm. We operated, at first, with completely manual operations like a terminal from the 1950’s. This challenge included dusting off employees’ previous experience that was less relevant in today’s world of automated valves and pump systems. We had to re-train all our personnel to operate safely in this type of environment. All our site-specific procedures had to be re-written literally overnight to accommodate our regulatory burden of training, documentation, and execution of safe operations.

I assumed a newly developed role required of the 24-hour operations that could be loosely described as the evening terminal manager role, although no official title was ever granted. I would spend 12 hours a day for more than a hundred straight days coordinating and leading teams with a focus on rebuilding the infrastructure and guiding operations back to normal. Day in, day out, system by system, challenge by challenge. The protracted recovery process plainly and definitively illuminated who was equal to a challenge and who was less than operationally significant when the team needed leadership. Some stepped up, and others faded away as the days grew many.

To make this story much shorter than it seemed at the time, the winter passed and accolades were given to all involved. We received small rewards for our efforts and special
thanks from our customers. The new iPad was just released from Apple, and each recovery
contributor found one in a neatly wrapped box at a terminal-wide dinner a few months into
the recovery.

As the terminal became operational, the message from our leadership team began
to shift from “Great job!” to “Your services are no longer required.” I cannot fully explain
what happened next because I clearly was not in my superiors’ political inner circle. The
organization began to restructure with a secretive, top-down, and seemingly erratic months-
long organization change that isolated, forgot or marginalized most of the employees who
had performed and sacrificed greatly to get the terminal back on its feet. If there was a plan
for the chilling reorganization we were about to endure, no one explained it to any of the
employees. Every week or so we would hear of another shift in organizational alignment
or the movement of personnel around in key roles. As a result, the terminal began to suffer
perceptible culture shifts. Each announcement led to increasing and disruptive feelings that
employees would lose their jobs no matter how they performed.

Our vice president of operations began telling those around him very plainly and
openly whom he liked and whom he did not. In the opinion of most who endured the event,
his professional perceptions didn’t seem to match our collective assessment. These
moments of differing opinion or lack of believable representation became the catalyst for
massive amounts of turnover in personnel. Some people were moved and replaced by
favorites of senior leadership even though on-site personnel were, in my opinion, more
than capable. The discussions of competence became more public and heated. Some of us
were berated publicly for our efforts because we “weren’t fast enough” or “lacked industry
experience.” To the people on the ground breathing life back into the terminal, we were
following the safest, most prudent, and regulatory-minded courses of action. We weren’t taking chances. Some people began to leave the organization because the operational environment became so unstable it was beginning to affect their personal lives.

The vice president of operations removed and replaced personnel seemingly at random with very specific but inconsistent accusations of incompetence. In other words, he was redesigning the organization and not giving clear indication as to the reason, the scope, and direction. One example occurred during a regional leadership meeting of thirty or so of the key personnel from the five local terminals. My manager, who had worked with the organization for five years, was berated in a meeting when offering a divergent opinion. After a demeaning exchange, the superior asked my manager how long it takes to get 10 years’ experience as if his current judgment was not seasoned enough to offer opinions on issues. This was the same manager who spent four months on the dayshift opposite me, working every day, 12 hours a day, navigating through projects and issues, day after day, getting our terminal back up and running. He was also a decorated war hero, a former US Army Major who served multiple combat tours and knew how to lead under pressure. His leadership was one of the few reasons the terminal stood back up and began functioning again. This type of pointed and narrow public criticism seemed unnecessary, out-of-place, and most significantly completely disjointed from the reality we had all just collectively endured.

I believe there likely was a plan all along that our superiors withheld. The pieces of the puzzle the employees did see made no sense because we did not have the perspective of the overall plan with which to view each single event. I believe the terminal, its
employees, and our collective performance suffered from both the inadequate information dissemination and the intentional concealment of the strategy.

The accusations and un-empathetic treatment lasted for the rest of the time I spent with the organization. Within that year, it became a toxic environment for most subordinate leaders in the region. I never left the manager-in-training status even though I played a key role coordinating and orchestrating key actions that contributed to our expedient operational achievements.

Today, the terminal has mechanically recovered from that event. It is technologically better than ever. I hear from some of my then co-workers from time to time, and they tell me terminal life is almost back to normal. They confess it’s still different in that some of the culture and character of the organization has been lost. I can’t help thinking that the aftermath of the toxic covert change management strategy will remain for years to come.

1.4 Summary of Narratives

Information sharing, truth and transparency from leaders can invigorate a workforce to provide meaning or purpose for group objectives. Whereas in high-paced or the most menial tasks, the availability of the “right” information can effectively drive resources to solutions with expedience and minimal waste. Innovation and teamwork become the descendants of research and sharing. In this capstone, I’ll explore how a team’s positive output is much more likely to be successful if the players have all information.

As much as honesty could serve positive purposes, however, it can equally become organizationally destructive or divisive. Honesty done poorly can pierce the ego of the recipient or irreparably damage one’s perception. It can equally expose unintelligence or
ignorance on the part of the speaker. And how honest is too honest? Does everyone around you need to know every thought that crosses your mind, or have you only selected the most relevant of the thousands of thoughts you’ve created today? Most would agree they’ve met someone who is too often, too honest. It’s entirely appropriate to consider the element of judgment, style or competence of leaders when sculpting the reality of the workplace with facts and relevant information for subordinates.

These two stories of information sharing illustrate my point. The right information delivered with candor at the right time can define an organization for good. But, like a double-edged sword, the wrong information at the wrong time delivered in the wrong way can equally define an organization for ill. The first story showed how arming an organization with the “right” information can design organizational success. As I examined here, the second illustrated how the ill-communicating or withholding of information can destroy it.

I suggest the two real-world accounts display many essential organizational development characteristics: the essential qualities of leadership, the value of information dissemination, the impact of the accuracy and timeliness of that information, individual bias perspective, the importance of followership, and the resultant poise under pressure for followers once empowered with knowledge. We’ll examine each of these aspects next and pose some important questions that will be evaluated in the literature review in the next chapter.

Leadership in my view of its simplest terms is the knowledge or recognition of the need for change and the practice of fostering organizational conditions that support the realization of that change. Leadership is not always easy. As in the first story, I can tell you
first-hand it was not easy to drive back from my client’s office, deliberating the whole way how to handle the politically sensitive situation. It was even harder to stand in front of the group and tell them we needed to get a lot better. Those type of gut-check moments can define organizations. The second story showed how quickly a leader can turn a highly functioning operational environment toxic by injecting inconsistent, inadequate or incorrect information. How can a leader be like the former and not the latter? What is effective leadership? What kind of leadership can foster positive followership?

Information dissemination seems incredibly important in both situations. The techniques seemed different in the two stories. The first story of a returning and dejected manager carrying the bad news to his team seemed to display how bad situations can get better with information sharing through the clear depiction of perspective. The second situation of the VP slowly and methodically imparting his disruptive message on the team seemed noteworthy in reverse. Is it really that important to help followers understand what they are facing? Why is it important to have communication that empowers?

It also seemed that the nature of the message and amount of information was particularly important. The accuracy, completeness, truthfulness, and timeliness seem to be just as important as the mechanism of distribution itself. Both stories included a leader saying something unpopular, but the latter left followers questioning their sense of purpose or direction. It seems that the kind of information distributed matters. What contexts make information useful to followers? How much information can be too much information?

As we will explore further in the next chapter, cognitive biases, or mental defects of judgment, affect all human beings. Accounting for these biases can be problematic for leaders in the workplace. Most people approach problems in unique ways. As in the first
story, leadership is about getting everyone on the same page. For some reason or another, the employees had no idea their performance was not meeting expectations. But, genuine leadership can be about showing employees the limitations of their customary or once adequate methods, techniques, or processes. In that case, if you had asked the employees, they would have been sure they were successfully meeting expectations. As depicted in the second story, even leaders can be biased. Sometimes people commit errors in judgment or philosophy. Illuminating these types of biases, mistakes, or limitations is a very sensitive topic no matter what the situation. In what ways are we biased in the workplace? How can we overcome bias in the workplace?

Followership is the complement to leadership. Both stories depict team members receiving the problems and obstacles in stride. While the leadership seemed to make a difference in the outcome, most organizations also rely on the hard work, contributions and comradery of the workforce. There is a certain set of skills associated with followership. What is good followership? How can leader methods affect followership?

Poise under pressure and comfort with uncertainty are the hallmarks of organizations with effective communication, leadership and followership. Of all the identified developmental attributes depicted in the two stories, this document centers on how effective and timely communication results in developed followers with strong perspectives, poise under pressure, self-control in demanding situations, and a tolerance for uncertainty. What conditions promote this type of development for followers?

We’ll attempt to answer these questions in Chapter 2 with theory and research. We’ll evaluate that theory in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, we’ll extend these questions out to real people in real situations in a small series of interviews to see if this endeavor passes a
real-world applicability test – all in order to consider the research question: *What impact does leader dissemination of accurate and timely information have on follower effectiveness?* Over the next few chapters, we’ll imagine organizational potential as we unpack decades of leadership theory, psychology, sociology, and organizational models. We will reveal something about ourselves as much as about our organizations.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Application

This literature review will walk through each of the organizational development characteristics illuminated by the two opening stories in the previous chapter: the essential qualities of leadership, the value of information dissemination, the impact of the accuracy and timeliness of that information, the individual bias perspective, the importance of followership, and the resultant poise under pressure for followers once empowered with knowledge.

It’s important to keep in mind this Capstone assumes a rather typical or every-day case for transforming leadership. I’m attempting to stay near-centered in my analysis in terms of likely circumstance. I’ll try to stay away from the extremes or fringe-related arguments to be sure this document can focus on what the majority of leaders and followers find in the workplace. While much can be learned from the fringe, I want to create a predictable and likely argument for readers. Call them status quo, straight-up, calm seas, day-to-day, or routine, the settings described herein are my conditional assumptions of the normal operations which we will be evaluating. While there are many case studies and scholarly resources available on extreme conditions, this document will not be one of them.

It is also helpful to clarify before we begin that I will assume that a leader and follower relationship as described throughout the Capstone document must not necessarily be a superior and subordinate relationship. While it is more likely that a superior would lead a subordinate given the position and typical workplace roles and responsibilities, I offer than anyone at any level may lead anyone in any situation. Please keep that point in mind as we embark.
I’m also granting, for argument’s sake, that the employees envisioned in the described scenarios have all the essential life basics covered. All participants have food, water, shelter, and clothing. There is no mortal danger involved and when people arrive to work, they are generally at work in presence and mind. In my opinion, life-threatening conditions tend to overshadow the more nuanced psychology of everyday workplace dynamics.

Next, employees are generally being paid as they should. These fringe cases needn’t be argued in the same discourse about truth and deception as do non-fringe cases. In other words, not many employees would likely concentrate on professional development in an occupation if they are already compensatorily discouraged. Relatedly, I assume employees are adequately trained and experienced to handle the already assigned tasks of the workplace. I also assume the organizations we’ll discuss are resourced in ways they should be. Similar to the extremes of an employee being underpaid, it is not the topic of this paper to address leadership where the processes and tasks required of the job cannot be completed physically, materially, or in the prescribed time.

A principal condition of the discussion will be considering workplaces in relative steady state. We’re not looking to address deeply chaotic or stressful situations where employees and departments do not function with any processes. This could be true of startup companies or those in some state of acquisition or dissolution. This is not to say that the principles described in this Capstone wouldn’t apply in extreme conditions, but that I would like to focus our analysis of these concepts in a “usual” or normally functioning workplace.
With previous assumptions characterizing the workplace I am concerned with here, my last assumption is that followership is a choice. With all things being equal, I presume a follower is free to choose to follow. I list this as an assumption because there exist workplaces where followers do not have this option. Two examples that come to mind could be incarcerated workforces or economic systems that force laborers to obey.

This topic is important to me because I’ve perceived multiple instances where employees and organizations benefited from deliberate information sharing. I’ve witnessed the positive effects of concerted efforts on the part of leaders to grow followers. I’ve also witnessed the effects of the inverse condition where followers slow, disengage, distrust, and leave because of inadvertent neglect, intentional deceit, and everything in between. These situations are professional in nature simply because they occur in a place of business. But, make no mistake, they are also profoundly personal to psyches of the afflicted employees. I suppose the humanity of this concept is what compels me the most to examine this organizational dynamic.

2.2 Leadership

What is effective leadership?

Arguably the foremost authority on the theory of leadership, James Macgregor Burns (1978) defines the practice in definitive terms:

Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers… I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers. (p. 18-19)
Useem (2011) believes a leader must “appreciate the distinctive intentions that people bring, and then build on those diverse motives to draw the best from each” (p. xv). This appreciation affects the type of leadership you practice. It is important to define the first story of organizational change from the Chapter 1 as *transforming leadership*. Burns (1978) describes this noteworthy set of concepts in detail. He identifies

...two basic types of leadership: the *transactional* and the *transforming*. The relations of most leaders and followers are *transactional* – leaders approach followers with an eye to exchanging one thing for another: jobs for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions. Such transactions comprise the bulk of the relationships among leaders and followers, especially in groups, legislatures, and parties. *Transforming* leadership, while more complex, is more potent. The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (p. 4)

Transforming situations test all involved, both leaders and followers. Leaders can find themselves unable to affect positive change if they don’t approach the task with the motive of followers in mind (Burns 1978). Transformational moments tend to test a leader, break down artificial defenses and reveal human nature.

Leadership finds our faults. The stresses of leadership probe us until our weaknesses surface. Someone who has always deflected responsibility by putting the blame on others, in times of stress will blame with a vengeance. Someone who is veracity-challenged will lie under duress. ...Everyone has hidden weaknesses, fault lines, stress points. They are woven into our character. And leadership finds them out. Like a metal girder pushed to its limits in a stress test until its microscopic weaknesses cause it to crack, a leader in crisis may abruptly find that human strength also has its limits. (Jinkins & Jinkins, 1998, p. 102)

These limits of our human nature are rooted in our predisposition to value certain outcomes over others. Psychologists Lawrence and Nohria (2002) establish four innate
“drives” that affect every decision we make and action we take in *Driven: How human nature shapes our choices*. They are the drive to acquire, learn, bond, and to defend.

In the organizational context, the four-drive theory implies that every person, from the CEO to the most junior employee, will bring a predictable set of mental equipment to work each and every day. This mental apparatus will be engaged in every item of behavior that takes place at work. Likewise, all the other people engaged with the focal organization – its customers, its shareholders and creditors, its suppliers, its neighbors and its regulators – will have this same mental equipment. (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002, p. 221)

Our human nature, it seems, can drive how we prefer some solutions over others, and how, for example, we might value defending over acquiring. It is therefore important for leaders and followers to recognize the “drive” preference of individuals and groups in the workplace. One methodology in this personalized approach is Eldred’s (2007) power strategies model. Eldred (2007) describes the political functionality of influence, cooperation, negotiation, and domination. High goal confluence, or alignment, coupled with high power balance results in cooperation as a strategy. This power choice includes the idea of the sharing information freely. Conversely, low goal confluence coupled with low power balance results in domination. While there is a time and a place for dominance as a leadership function, most would agree influence, cooperation, and negotiation more routinely, permanently, palatably and voluntarily align followers’ organizational goals.

And when we talk about what leadership is, we must acknowledge what it is not. Another dynamic of our innate tendencies or drives could be a superior’s loss of empathy and potential over-reliance on domination. These are the drives to defend and acquire protracted to a level where winning trumps bonding and learning. I mention this conduct in the same breath as leadership to demonstrate that this type of behavior may not be leadership at all. It approaches the world of psychological or political domination.
Most would agree these extreme traits don’t sound much like genuine leadership. Baron-Cohen (2011) summarizes with,

Zero degrees of empathy means you have no awareness of how you come across to others, how to interact with others, or how to anticipate their feelings or reactions. … You feel mystified by why relationships don’t work out, and your lack of empathy creates a deep-seated self-centeredness. Other people’s thoughts and feelings are just off your radar. This leaves you doomed to do your own thing, in your own little bubble, not just oblivious to other people’s feelings and thoughts but also oblivious to the idea that there might even be other points of view. The consequence is that you believe 100 percent in the righteousness of your own ideas and beliefs, and judge anyone who does not hold your beliefs as wrong or stupid. (Baron-Cohen, 2011, p. 45)

“The role of a leader is not to come up with all the great ideas. The role of a leader is to create an environment in which great ideas can happen” (Sinek, 2009, p. 99). A safe space for ideas to grow and for individuals and teams to explore can directly impact organizational effectiveness. Selecting which information to distribute and when to enact change can be tricky for superiors, especially in high-paced operational situations like the chaos of the hurricane recovery from Chapter 1. Haidt (2012) offers support via the work of a scholar he worked with earlier in his career on the interactive effects of surroundings on and individual psyche:

Shweder was the leading thinker in cultural psychology – a new discipline that combined the anthropologist’s love of context and variability with the psychologist’s interest in mental processes. A dictum of cultural psychology is that ‘culture and psyche make each other up.’ In other words, you can’t just study the mind while ignoring culture, as psychologists usually do, because minds function only once they’ve been filled out by a particular culture. And you can’t study culture while ignoring psychology, as anthropologists usually do, because social practices and institutions (such as initiation rites, witchcraft, and religion) are to some extent shaped by concepts and desires rooted deep within the human mind, which explains why they often take similar forms on different continents. (Haidt, 2012, p. 115-116)

In a related thought, Jinkins and Jenkins (1998) argue that effective leadership senses effectively or creates a culture of opportunity for followers.
Leadership is always grounded in a particular time and place – in a particular culture. And the effective leader inevitably maintains a connection with this specific time and place, this culture, leading these people in this moment – a connection that is as elusive as it is real. (p. 62)

Based on the combination of the selected leadership theory presented so far, it is reasonable to posit that effective leaders mobilize resources for the ends of whichever goals they deem appropriate for a given moment or context. Their methods, whether transactional or transformational, test leaders in unique ways that potentially reveal flaws or limitations of their motivational techniques. Leaders must overcome inherent flaws of human tendencies, both their own and the followers’, appeal to the mutual motives of all, read the environment, and call on situational knowledge to effectively navigate, then, from problem to solution with their followers.

This brings us to the second half of the leadership equation. It’s not as though only leaders exert influence to make progress and solve problems. The people who perform the actions are arguably more important to the situation than the previous few pages would lead you to believe. It’s followers and the skillset of followership that make solutions happen.

*What kind of leadership can support followership?*

Human beings seem to crave genuine leadership. Most also need some form of autonomy, an outlet for creativity, and the ability to choose of their own free will. Deci and Ryan (1985) explains this assertion when speaking on participants of a group:

The intrinsic needs for competence and self-determination motivate an ongoing process of seeking and attempting to conquer optimal challenges. …They seek challenges that are suited to their competencies, that are neither too easy nor too difficult. …A challenge is something that requires stretching one’s abilities. (p. 32-33)
Hamel (2007) points out that our current workplaces could be deficient in allowing autonomous creative employee growth as a byproduct of previously implemented management methods.

…Industrialization disconnected employees from their own creativity. In the industrial world, work methods and procedures were defined by experts and, once defined, were not easily altered. No matter how creative an employee might be, the scope for exercising that gift was severely truncated. To put it simply, the pursuit of scale and efficiency advantages disconnected workers from the essential inputs that had, in earlier times, allowed them to be (largely) self-managing – and in so doing, it made the growth of an expansive managerial class inevitable. (Hamel, 2007, p. 141)

Leaders must be conscious of the needs and desires of those who follow them. Just as leaders can be affected by stress and adverse condition, so too can followers be subjected to situational dilemmas of whether they need to or want to choose. Followers can choose not to follow the leader. It is therefore imperative for leaders to provide sound judgment and thorough reasoning perceptible by followers when presenting options. “Ultimately the moral legitimacy of transformational leadership, and to a lesser degree transactional leadership, is grounded in conscious choice among real alternatives” (Burns, 1978, p. 36).

This conscious choice for followers not only relies on the freedom to choose, but on the leader-follower emotional connection as well. Barbara Frederickson (1998) believes that the leader-follower relationship hinges not only on the degree of appropriate free will in intellectual or rational decision-making, but also on emotions created by the relationship. They can greatly affect the relationship between a follower and a leader. They can facilitate professional growth, or deter it. Strong, honest, positive emotions in the workplace may have lasting salutary effects for fostering follower’s growth. Frederickson (1998) thus offers,
A new model for understanding the form and function of a subset of positive emotions, including joy, interest, contentment, and love. Specifically, I propose that these positive emotions broaden (rather than narrow) an individual’s thought-action repertoire, with joy creating the urge to play, interest the urge to explore, contentment the urge to savor and integrate, and love a recurrent cycle of each of these urges. In turn, these broadened thought-action repertoires can have the often incidental effect of building an individual’s personal resources, and social recourses. I call this the broaden-and-build model of positive emotions and suggest that it can explain why the propensity to experience positive emotions has evolved to be a ubiquitous feature of human nature and how, in contemporary society, positive emotions might be tapped to promote individual and collective well-being and health. (p. 315)

Patterson et al. (2012) confirm the relationship or emotional bond aspect of the leader-follower cannot be overlooked,

Our research has shown that strong relationships, careers, organizations, and communities all draw from the same source of power – the ability to talk openly about high-stakes, emotional, controversial topics. ...At the heart of almost all chronic problems in our organizations, our teams, and our relationships lie crucial conversations – ones that we’re either not holding or not holding well. Twenty years of research involving more than 100,000 people reveals that the key skill of effective leaders, teammates, parents, and loved ones is the capacity to skillfully address emotionally and politically risky issues. (p. 11-12)

The positive relationship grows as leaders and followers share ideas, grow, and improve their organization together one situation at a time, even through conflict.

Badaracco, (2002) describes the end-result:

Responsible compromises begin with courageous honesty, and this honesty often reveals conflicts of feelings and interests within a person’s heart. Understanding these conflicts can be helpful, even critical, when deciding how to resolve a dilemma. To the extent the conflicts create biases and preconceptions, they have to be acknowledged and, if possible, overcome. (p. 159-160)

Environments where the leader-follower relationship is weak would be similar to that in the disaster recovery story from Chapter 1. There was poor and potentially inaccurate communication that was negative and seemingly disconnected from reality to the receiver. Lawrence and Nohria (2002) observe:
Some leaders have relied heavily on the negative side of the drive to defend, using threats and inducing fear in an effort to motivate followers to obey directions. This does work, but at a price. In general it produces rote compliance – not the intelligent, eager response that can be secured from followers motivated by a combination of the other drives. (p. 255)

Conflict of professional opinion would arguably be inevitable in any organization. Positive leader-follower relationships embrace differences in ideas and thought processes rather than use them as weapons or armor. Hill, Brandeau, Truelove and Lineback (2014) confirm that leaders must find ways to blend solutions so followers feel invested in the chosen direction.

Leaders and their groups can resolve problems, disagreements, and conflicting solutions in one of three ways. The leader or some dominant faction can impose a solution. Or the group can find a compromise, some way of splitting the difference between opposing options and viewpoints. Unfortunately, domination or compromise often leads to less than satisfying solutions. The third way, integrating ideas – combining option A and option B to create something new, option C, that’s better than A or B – tends to produce the most innovative solutions. (Hill, Brandeau, Truelove & Lineback, 2014, p. 19)

Kouzes & Posner (2011) relate to this idea about building the sense of contribution that plays to a person’s need for learning, bonding, acquiring, and defending all at the same time. Followers begin to invest in the solution both in the creation of the idea and in the execution of it:

When people work with leaders they admire and respect they feel better about themselves. Credible leaders raise self-esteem. They set people’s spirits free and enable them to become more than they might have thought possible. Credible leaders make people feel that they too can make a difference in others’ lives. (Kouzes & Posner, 2011, p. 28)

Credible leaders who raise self-esteem motivate followers to work progressively toward solutions beyond what the organization was previously capable of. In some cases, leaders can inspire organizational actors to inspire others. Hamel (2007) cites Mary Parker Follett’s *Creative Experience* (1924) to affirm that leadership is more than just point and
command. “Leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those who are led. The most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders” (Hamel, 2007, p. 186).

What does this leader-follower development really look like in terms of information sharing? Hersey and Blanchard (1974) offer a model that clearly depicts assessing the follower’s capabilities and moving them forward on a path toward independent success. The figure below shows how to develop a follower from the realm of low competence into high competence with clear direction to start, then a progression into coaching. Next, a leader would support his or her growth with less direction and more supportive behavior or small course corrections. Lastly, in the culmination point of the model, the leader can effectively delegate to the subordinate, who is now trained, highly competent, requiring little direction and little support to succeed in the workplace.

Figure 1. Hersey & Blanchard (1974) Life Cycle Theory of Leadership (p.28)
As we’ve read, leadership is a relationship with followers that fosters choice among blended solutions, responsible compromises, honesty and alternatives so the followers can be successful. Leadership is about addressing the wants and needs of the followership and inspiring action. Leaders must also acknowledge their own faults. Leaders empower the group to be stronger than any individual could be. Credible leaders build-up their followers and navigate progressive levels of professional development with the followers in order to grow more leaders.

2.3 Dissemination

*Is it really that important to help followers understand what they are facing?*

Most employees arrive at a workplace with little or no knowledge of the political climate, operations, systems, mechanisms, or workload. They may be trained, skilled or experienced in a field of expertise, but I would argue most organizations are unique and require some form of immersion before a player can adequately succeed in the environment. Some observe, some are guided, some listen, and some go it alone.

Imagine an employee’s initial view of the workplace landscape as a slightly obscured interpretation through a series of curtains, filters, or veils between employee and the reality that, in turn, prevent employee comprehension of the situation, conditions, or potential solution. I believe it is the leader’s role to remove the veils to reveal and refine interpretation of the workplace. The employee is afforded the opportunity to see more with this method, and therefore comprehend or sense more about the workplace. This act of removing curtains to establish a more comprehensive view is a great analogy for employee professional development. As employees begin to see the organization without most or all veils, they are then in the position to start removing their own veils and those of others and
expanding the comprehension of the world around others. As we’ll discover, this end-state is a cultural way to create organizational capacity without throwing additional personnel, money or materials at a problem.

I’ve found a common workplace mechanism is to guard information at some levels of the organization – to protect the information to keep it safe from others. In some cases, employees and leaders have illusions that other personnel cannot be trusted with information that is “over their pay-grade.” As it was put in a popular military courtroom drama, *A Few Good Men* (1992), “You can’t handle the truth” (Brown, Reiner & Scheinman).

As opposed to this common mechanism of hoarding information, potentially as a source of power, or parsing out information in small doses, Pink (2009) describes the individual need to self-direct, and create, based implicitly on adequate knowledge acquisition and sharing. He believes employees have a drive to succeed and contribute to the world around them through self-direction.

The science shows that the secret to high performance isn’t our biological drive or our reward-and-punishment drive, but our third drive – our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, and to make a contribution. (Pink, 2009, p. 145)

These individual contributions can positively or negatively affect organizations. Gladwell (2013) asserts that “ideas and products and messages spread just like viruses do. …they are clear examples of contagious behavior” (p. 7). As we saw in the second story from Chapter 1 of the reorganization gone bad, some organizations do not develop widely known or distributed plans. This leaves employees without clear direction, adequate understanding of circumstances, or specific perspectives offered by a leader to a follower.
The notion of ideas spreading uncontrollably could result in inaccurate or incorrect information is plaguing an organization.

This spreading of ideas, whether positive or negative in nature, could have lasting effects on organizations. Patterns of behavior emerge, and Gladwell (2013) calls these patterns character.

Character, then, isn’t what we think it is or, rather, what we want it to be. It isn’t a stable, easily identifiable set of closely related traits, and it only seems that way because of a glitch in the way our brains are organized. Character is more like a bundle of habits and tendencies and interests, loosely bound together and dependent, at certain times, on circumstance and context. The reason that most of us seem to have consistent character is that most of us are really good at controlling our environment (Gladwell, 2013, p. 163)

If humans are driven to self-direct, and therefore control their environment as a normal pattern of behavior, it is therefore the mission of leaders to define organizations for the purpose of channeling that self-direction to the desired mission of the environment, that is, the organization. Ira Chaleff’s *Intelligent Disobedience* (2015) stresses “finding the healthy balance for living in a system with rules and authorities while maintaining our own responsibility for the actions we take” (p. 1). Chaleff’s (2015) work aims at followers in the workplace grasping an advanced understanding the overall mission, examining the evidence, making conscious choices, and then assuming personal responsibility for actions taken to achieve results. If leaders expect positive character from followers, it would therefore be a requirement for any follower to have at least all applicable information available to them to make logical and effective, confluent, business-minded choices with that personal responsibility.

Deciding how much autonomy to foster is a strategic decision. Robert Keidel’s (2010) *triangular thinking* gives a way of recognizing the options for operational decisions
based on evaluations for the need of individual autonomy, controls in the workplace, and cooperation amongst contributors. Analogous to what we read previously in the Hersey & Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory Model (1974), triangular thinking allows for strong leader-follower relationships, which likely move towards autonomy and cooperation with a specific focus to move away from top-down workplace controls. But communication of the rationale for these operational decisions is key to a productive relationship.

Why is it important to have communication that empowers?

Most organizations readily define the who, what, where, when, and how for employees, the “control” noted above. These definitions define the tasks. Communication empowers employees when it offers the why. Simon Sinek’s (2009) characterization of why is depicted in Figure 3. In most organizations, the tasks and methods are many. But, giving the reason for doing anything normally unlocks a multitude of productivity and initiative. So long as someone knows why they are performing a task, they are more likely to deduce or innovate a new how and what autonomously when conditions change. Sinek refers to this concept as the Golden Circle, similar to the Golden Rule, that a leader must always

![Triangular Thinking Diagram](image-url)
begin communications about assignments, from mundane tasks to organizational strategies, with why.

Communication is an organizational necessity. Without it, systems break down, products stop moving, innovation stagnates, and progress halts. Communication effectively ensures direction and keeps everyone moving in the same direction. George Bernard Shaw aptly points out, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place” (Patterson et al., 2012, p.1).

Leaders and followers alike must remember that communication is not a one-way street: it is the sending and receiving of information particularly when much rides on the completed exchange. “Crucial conversation [is] a discussion between two or more people where (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong” (Patterson et al., 2012, p. 3). Patterson et al. (2012) conducted a study reviewing over 7000 doctor/nurse interactions during medical procedure errors and the likelihood that one medical professional might correct the error of another.

In fact, 84 percent of respondents said that they regularly see people taking shortcuts, exhibiting incompetence, or breaking rules. And that’s not the problem! The real problem is that those who observe deviations or infractions say nothing. Across the world we’ve found that the odds of a nurse speaking up in this crucial
moment are less than one in twelve. The odds of doctors stepping up to similar crucial conversations are much better. (p. 11)

Effective communication goes hand-in-hand with diversity of thought in the workplace. Leaders must facilitate inclusive environments. Karen Phillips (2014) speaks directly to sharing information and fostering communication in the workplace as a means of diversity inclusion,

This kind of leadership is a conglomeration of six behaviors: ensuring that team members speak up and are heard; making it safe to propose novel ideas; empowering team members to make decisions; taking advice and implementing feedback; giving actionable feedback; and sharing credit for team success. (Phillips, 2014)

Make no mistake, communication is not always easy. It takes poise and integrity to manage effective professional communication. Some leaders find themselves in positions where they realize “wisdom is more associated with deciding between better or worse wrongs; a winless situation” (Nayak, 2016, p. 1). Leaders can retain their organization’s trust throughout the day-to-day grind of making operational decisions and potentially prioritizing certain goals over other valid considerations through consistent and meaningful dialogue – that is, with integrity – with their subordinates. Jinkins and Jinkins (1998) agree:

Integrity means wholeness, completeness, and entireness. Leaders of integrity are not divided against themselves. They possess congruency of being and action. They do what they say they will do, and their actions disclose who they are. Hypocrisy and double-mindedness are opposed to integrity. Integrity makes truth a weapon of incredible power. (Jinkins & Jinkins, 1998, p. 114)

Communication can become combative at times when two or more parties cannot quickly agree, especially when the above mentioned “conglomeration” of behaviors is achieved (Phillips, 2014). Martin (2009) suggests supporting something he refers to as constructive tension among many ideas to synthesize new perspectives in the workplace. His relevant, data-based solutions explore viable and principled methods of synthesis in
the workplace. “We were born with an *opposable mind* we can use to hold two conflicting ideas in constructive tension. We can use that tension to think our way through to a new and superior idea” (Martin, 2009, p. 6).

The reality of communication in today’s workplaces is that some speakers see the greater value of their position and lesser value in the positions of others. Sometimes compromise is the only option when both otherwise honorable participants remain stalemated. Fisher and Ury (2011) observe,

> The answer to the question of whether to use soft positional bargaining or hard is ‘neither.’ Change the game. At the Harvard Negotiation Project we have been developing an alternative to positional bargaining: a method of negotiation explicitly designed to produce wise outcomes efficiently and amicably. This method, called *principled negotiation* or *negotiation on the merits*, can be boiled down to four basic points. ...People: Separate the people from the problem. Interests: Focus on interests, not positions. Options: Invent multiple options looking for mutual gains before deciding what to do. Criteria: Insist that the result be based on some objective standard. (p. 11)

There’s no question two-way, *why*-based, and divergent communication with integrity and principles is essential to organizational success. But, sometimes the sequence of the communication, the accuracy, and timeliness make a difference in the effectiveness of the communication.

### 2.4 Accurate/True/Complete/Timely Information

*What contexts make information useful to followers?*

As we’ll read in this section, research shows that information and the idea of “knowing” an answer is likely a human psychic need. This individual psychological need accumulates as a group dynamic for organizations. Therefore, a fundamental building block of effective leadership and change management becomes the ability to manage information flow, confirm accuracy, and tell the truth. The act of lying or the employment
of misinformation, either intentionally or unintentionally, can be devastating to group dynamics and affect the way followers view their leader, possibly irreversibly.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online defines *truth* as, “the property (as a statement) of being in accord with fact or reality” and “a judgment, proposition, or idea that is true or accepted as true” (n.d.). I’m going to ask you, the reader, to hold onto that concept of *judgment* for a moment while we re-read the prominent definition of leadership from Section 2.2. James Macgregor Burns’ (1978) definition:

> Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers… I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers. (p. 18-19)

It is these motives that Burns (1978) describes – these purposes, values, politics, and psychology – that are crafted by a leader’s *judgment* of the “truth.”

I believe it stands to reason that telling the truth is to *not* lie. In an excellent book examining how human beings lie and scientifically proven ways to detect liars, Ekman (2009) offers the following definition of lying, which I believe to be helpful as we examine how misinformation, intentional or not, affects organizations. Ekman (2009) offers the following:

> …definition of a lie or deceit, then, one person intends to mislead another, doing so deliberately, without prior notification of this purpose, and without having been explicitly asked to do so by the target. There are two primary ways to lie: to conceal and to falsify. (p. 28)

If telling the truth is the opposite of lying, then telling the truth must be to intentionally reveal (not conceal) and to preserve accuracy (not falsify).
Therefore, as a combined definition of the above three sources, I imagine telling the *truth* is to propose or communicate ideas that are factual in each circumstance, and that this act requires situational understanding, values, ethics, morals, wisdom or tact to serve as judgment regarding a purpose to intentionally reveal and to preserve accuracy when disseminating information.

Telling the truth is one thing, but receiving the intended message or processing the information can be another. Sinek (2009) explains that the experience of human beings when communicating is tied to the functionality of different sections of the brain and how they process information. In other words, the need for accuracy is built into our physiology,

The neocortex is responsible for rational and analytical thought and language. The middle two sections comprise the limbic brain. The limbic brain is responsible for all of our feelings, such as trust and loyalty. It is also responsible for all human behavior and all our decision-making, but it has no capacity for language. (p. 56)

Sinek (2009) relates the functionality of the portions of the brain with how we process communication. When you instruct someone to perform an action or simply “order” them to do something, you are only engaging only one portion of the brain – the neocortex – while the other lies dormant. To effectively inspire a follower, Sinek (2009) argues, a leader...
must engage all of their brain. More specifically, leaders must explore the why of the limbic brain in addition to the how and what of the neocortex.

Kahneman (2011) describes these psychological distinctions as two competing systems that operate the brain in *Thinking, Fast and Slow.* As the title suggests, he describes the fast portion of the brain, System 1, as the quick reactive method of the brain that moves rapidly toward response at the expense of accuracy. He asserts the slow portion of the brain, System 2, is the methodical reasoning portion which is not engaged to take the time it needs to evaluate decisions completely.

The moral is significant: when System 2 is otherwise engaged, we will believe almost anything. System 1 is gullible and biased to believe, System 2 is in charge of doubting and unbelieving, but System 2 is sometimes busy, and often lazy. Indeed, there is evidence that people are more likely to be influenced by empty persuasive messages, such as commercials, when they are tired and depleted. (Kahneman, 2011, p. 81)

As Kahneman (2011) suggests, some operate in the workplace with little time and less-than-complete information. They therefore use their System 1 brain or their limbic system. We’ll explore bias in a later section, but for now let’s focus on the immediate psychological impacts that informational *shortcuts* have in the workplace. Maybe it’s a time constraint, or maybe some leaders are comfortable with the 90% solution instead of complete corrective action. Leaders must be aware of how followers process information and be clear with expectations, else they risk unintended negative impacts on the organization. Followers often operate with intuitive reactions (System 1) as opposed to a logical or methodical process (System 2). Jonathan Haidt (2012) asserts, “People sometimes have gut feelings – particularly about disgust and disrespect – that can drive their reasoning. Moral reasoning is sometimes a post hoc fabrication” (Haidt, 2012, p. 30). I’m sure most readers have experienced this phenomenon where you immediately react
with an intuition (*System 1*) and then, after-the-fact, attempt to justify your potentially controversial position with a manufactured or assembled logic to defend the decision (*System 2*).

To ignore one portion of the brain or the other would be ill-advised. Directive or authoritarian methods without “why” information to engage the limbic system of followers could ultimately be a losing battle against our human nature. In fact, some experts assert the need for autonomy is an evolutionary, biological or psychological need of human nature. Deci and Ryan (1985) depict the need for information to fuel autonomy as inherently human,

Self-determination is a quality of human functioning that involves the experience of choice, in other words, the experience of an internal perceived locus of causality. It is integral to intrinsically motivated behavior and is also in evidence in some extrinsically motivated behaviors. Stated differently, self-determination is the capacity to choose and to have those choices, rather than reinforcement contingencies, drives, or any other forces or pressures, be the determinants of one’s actions. But self-determination is more than a *capacity*; it is also a *need*. We have posited a basic, innate propensity to be self-determining that leads organisms to engage in interesting behaviors, which typically has the benefit of developing competencies, and or working toward a flexible accommodation with the social environment. This tendency toward adequate accommodation in the service of one’s self determination is central to the development of extrinsic motivation. (p. 38)

In other words, Deci and Ryan (1985) posit followers’ capacity and need for self-direction drives their search for information, which in turn leads to the development of greater competencies. Does this mean those in power necessarily know about leadership, information management, and how to develop followers with integrity? I’m inclined to think not. Some organizational actors are untrained or ignorant. Some ignore what sounds above like common sense. Some try to get ahead and disregard the well-being of others. Some lie. Some organizational players charged with positional authority believe that the
measure of success is simply whether or not the organization fulfills its mission. I’m sure we’ve all heard the idiom, *the ends justify the means*. In other words, method matters little when the desired end-result is achieved. I think back the previous discussion of Burns (1978) with respect to the difference between transactional or transformational leadership. The former seems to be a short-term gain orientation while the latter seems longer term. Some believe that withholding, concealing or falsifying are simply the way the *game* is played. Some argue that the politics of deception in organizations are inevitable or justifiable given the environmental conditions or the situation in which one finds themselves. I’ve heard some ask rhetorically, *when traveling at 60 mph, are you the bug or the windshield?* Some even view misinformation as the only method to fully achieve competitive results.

While there are merits to any side of the argument, it is clear that some “leaders” will do anything or say anything in order to provide the organization a “win,” which need not be sustainable or progressive. Kouzes and Posner (2011) explain, to the contrary, that information dissemination with an orientation toward accuracy creates repeatable success within organizations.

If you knowingly mislead or lie, for example, making a promise you never intended to keep, other people have good reason not to trust you. There is no such thing as a little bit of dishonesty. Discovering that someone has been dishonest casts doubt over everything that person says and does. By the way, honesty doesn’t require full disclosure. It does, however, require a clear indication of areas about which full disclosure should not be expected and an explanation of why it is not appropriate. Still, greater disclosure between people generally makes for better working relationships and easier resolution of problems should they arise. (Kouzes & Posner, 2011, p. 80)

Information sharing with honesty and integrity becomes a long-term leadership, System 2 thought process. It is not a quick, one-time endeavor. It’s about understanding
you as a leader or a follower. It’s about understanding those around you, how they think as humans and their individual needs. Though Simon Sinek (2009) speaks in terms of the seller-customer, the idea is analogous to the leader-follower relationship. “There are only two ways to influence human behavior: you can manipulate it or you can inspire it” (Sinek, 2009, p. 17). Sinek (2009) depicts common manipulations in the marketplace as price changes, promotions, fear, aspirations, peer pressure, and novelty.

Manipulations are a perfectly valid strategy for driving a transaction, or for any behavior that is only required once or on rare occasions. … In any circumstance in which a person or organization want more than a single transaction, however, if there is a hope for loyal, lasting relationship, manipulations do not help. (Sinek, 2009, p. 31)

A common manipulation, though you may not necessarily view it negatively, is the practice of issuing rewards for favorable performance. Kohn’s (1993) research shows that once you’ve surpassed a compensation threshold of what you need to survive, rewards act as a deterrent to your free thought and creativity. Kohn (1993) adds, “Rewards usually improve performance only at extremely simple – indeed, mindless – tasks, and even then they improve only quantitative performance” (p. 46). Further, “even assuming we have no ethical reservations about manipulating other people’s behavior, to get them to do what we want, the plain truth is that this strategy is likely to backfire” (Kohn, 1993. p. 47). He completed the idea with

what makes behavioral interventions so terribly appealing is how little they demand of the intervener. They can be applied more or less skillfully, of course, but even the most meticulous behavior modifier gets off pretty easy for one simple reason: *rewards do not require any attention to the reasons that the trouble developed in the first place.* (Kohn, 1993, p. 59)

A related study conducted in Finland by Auvinen et al. (2012) found that leaders employ a range of manipulation in the workplace. Their study found common unscrupulous
behavior in the form of stories in four arrangements; humor, pseudo-participation, seduction, and pseudo-empathy (Auvinen, Lamsa, Sintonen, & Takala, 2012). The first recognized manipulation style conveyed humor in a way that followers lessened their critique of facts because of the presence of comedic delivery. The next took a form of pseudo-participative manipulation, or a fake conveyance of feelings from the leader to make the follower feel trust. Another was a seductive manipulation, or an over-reliance on positive spin on facts, whether intentionally or unintentionally. And lastly, they noticed pseudo-empathetic manipulation in the form of intentional emotional or psychological relating that might not have been completely genuine (Auvinen, Lamsa, Sintonen, & Takala, 2012, p. 422-428).

There is no question, as the experts agree, honesty and information dissemination are the hallmark of stable, long-term organizations. This transparency is also of paramount importance during change initiatives. Leaders must stay in-touch and actively communicate about the workplace when approaching any type of transitions. These potentially traumatic change moments try the patience of leaders and followers alike. Bridges (2009) suggests:

It isn’t the changes that do you in, it’s the transitions. They aren’t the same thing. Change is situational: the move to a new site, the retirement of the founder, the reorganization of the roles of the team, the revisions to the pension plan. Transition, on the other hand, is psychological; it is a three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about. (p. 3)

As Bridges suggests, it is extremely important to monitor closely how the evolution of a new truth is affecting the workplace. A leader must also consider that “those who were most at home with the necessary activities and arrangements of one phase are the ones who
are the most likely to experience the subsequent phase as a severe personal setback” (Bridges, 2009, p. 83).

Vineet Nayar (2010) recalls the causes and effects of his own positive experiences as a CEO guiding his organization through a change. He implores telling the truth and how sharing it affects all types of contributors:

Could transparency really be the catalyst to drive trust? I believed so… why would a customer be transparent with a potential partner like us if that company does not trust its employees enough to be transparent with them? (Nayar, 2010, p. 67)

Increased transparency led to quicker action at the grass roots level. It also motivated the teams that were doing well. They felt that their success was being recognized, and they worked even harder to remain in the top-performer club. A new sense of purpose and direction was quite visible in the teams. Now that they had the information they needed, they could spend more time on execution and less time searching for data and trying to understand the reality of their performance. (Nayar, 2010, p. 73)

It seems clear that accurate and timely information dissemination is a necessity for organizations – because organizations are made of human beings who think, rationalize, deduce, feel, and imagine. The organizational actors need to use both System 1 and System 2, need the “why” as well as the “whats” and “hows.” The take-away for leaders and followers alike is that information, correct and timely, engages of all portions of our brains. Tickling the correct parts of the brain, appealing positively to a follower’s limbic system of the brain with why and explaining rationally to the neocortex can promote effective leadership and empower strong followership. With these methods, it is possible and even likely that a leader inspires his or her followership.

Manipulation and inspiration both tickle the limbic brain. Aspirational messages, fear or peer pressure all push us to decide one way or another by appealing to our irrational desires or playing on our fears. But it’s when that emotional feeling goes deeper than insecurity or uncertainty or dreams that the emotional reaction aligns with how we view ourselves. It is at that point that behavior moves from being motivated to inspired. When we are inspired, the decisions we make have more to
do with who we are and less to do with the companies or the products we are buying. (Sinek, 2009, p. 74)

You’ll recall from the two examples in Chapter 1 that the accuracy of information dissemination can greatly impact the effectiveness of a team. The first story of a manager returning from an abysmal customer meeting with negative information seemingly worked out positively. The team learned the truth and became a part of the process to correct it. Call it good leadership, good followership, or both, the result was positive nonetheless. The team had a correct amount of information presented in the “right” way and used it to their advantage. What they learned was enough to recognize the problem, why it needed to be solved, and define solutions collaboratively.

I’ve seen other organizational situations where the why is lost in translation. Team members receive directives over email with 140 characters or less in poor attempts to expedite product or process corrective actions. Another example of this loss of why lies in the whisper-down-the-lane effect on verbal guidance passed from and to multiple levels of an organization. Details lost in translation sometimes destroy value as the message travels. Edicts absent the why can quickly become ineffective as if they were sent from distant lands in foreign languages telling the subordinates to abandon the task altogether.

A third type of dissemination was depicted clearly in the second narrative where inconsistent, incorrect or potentially falsified information lay at the foundation of the directives and in the superior’s behavior. Too much information, false, misleading information, erratic, or inconsistent behavior can lead to confusion and discontent in the organization. Some could argue that the VP in that example could likely have better influenced the situation by simply saying nothing as opposed to creating the wildly inappropriate and disruptive power struggle during and after a disaster recovery. Sandberg
(2016) recognizes position within the organizational hierarchy could be a source of the problem. Subordinates might appease inaccurate leaders as opposed to speaking out simply because of the way the organization is oriented.

Being honest in the workplace is especially difficult. All organizations have some form of hierarchy, which means that someone’s performance is assessed by someone else’s perception. This makes people even less likely to tell the truth. Every organization faces this challenge, no matter how flat it tries to be. (Sandberg, 2016, p. 78)

So why isn’t telling the truth, sharing information, leading by example, explaining why, or building collaboration commonplace for every organization? Why do some struggle to find meaning in what they do?

The answer to that all of these idealistic questions could reside in what all players in the workplace, both leaders and followers, bring with them to the job site: flaws in our human nature. We carry with us our own ideas, habits of mind, and predetermined conclusions. We have personal lives and problems to deal with outside the workplace. We have good days and bad days. We have potentially flawed perceptions. Our experiences and our discipline, or lack thereof, all of these attributes can be summed up with a single term: bias.

2.5 Combating Bias

In what ways are we biased in the workplace?

Every human being can fall victim to cognitive, or unconscious, biases. They can be big and small, near- and far-reaching, innocuous or deeply impactful. They can be as simple as a predisposition to wearing a certain color for parties or as improper as choosing only the attractive employees to tackle important projects or on large contracts. If you think this last bias is not a real dynamic, Hamermesh (2011) is able not only to prove it’s
happening in the American workforce, but also computes how much revenue bad-looking people earn relative to their attractive peers.

How much less do bad-looking people earn? The evidence on these questions is by now abundantly clear. Being in the top third of looks in America generates around 5 percent more earnings as compared to the earnings received by the average person who, except for beauty, is identical. People whose looks are in the bottom seventh earn perhaps 10 percent less than the otherwise identical average person. (Hamermesh, 2011, p. 65)

Aside from lookism or colorful sweaters, my point is that sometimes we think without thinking. Recalling Kahneman’s (2011) System 1 and System 2 heuristics, sometimes we let our rapid-fire System 1 segment of the brain select a quickly generated answer instead of deliberating and computing a thoughtful answer with System 2. System 1 normally doesn’t consider all the factors that should affect the decision. System 2, the mentally taxing and laborious portion of our thought processes, consumes time and energy to operate. It’s easy to see why we would choose the easy route, make the snap judgement and move onto the next obstacle.

Jumping to conclusions is efficient if the conclusions are likely to be correct and the costs of an occasional mistake acceptable, and if the jump saves much time and effort. Jumping to conclusions is risky when the situation is unfamiliar, the stakes are high, and there is no time to collect more information. These are the circumstances in which intuitive errors are probable, which may be prevented by deliberate intervention of System 2. (Kahneman, 2011, p. 79)

Banaji and Greenwald (2016) assert that habits of mind, like the use of System 1, affect leaders’ and followers’ perception of the world around them, and therefore their decisions in the workplace, through unconscious biases they refer to as mindbugs.

Social mindbugs are not restricted to decisions based on a person’s race or ethnicity. They stem from psychologically and socially meaningful human groups of all sorts. Age, gender, religion, class, sexuality, disability, physical attractiveness, profession, and personality are only a few examples, and some are more magnetic than others in drawing us toward them as explanations of behavior. (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016, p. 17)
Some biases manifest themselves as group dynamics. Fernbach and Sloman (2017) dissect the dangers of these situations:

The sense of understanding is contagious. The understanding that others have, or claim to have, makes us feel smarter. …Such collective delusions illustrate both the power and the deep flaw of human thinking. It is remarkable that large groups of people can coalesce around a common belief when few of them individually possess the requisite knowledge to support it.

Biases are all around us and affect almost everything we do. Sometimes they affect groups of people and create social rifts. They can mislead public opinion to create communal positive perceptions of bad situations. Chip and Dan Heath (2010) hint very clearly at the veil metaphor we previously discussed in Section 2.3,

Positive illusions pose an enormous problem with regard to change. Before people can change, before they can move in a new direction, they’ve got to have their bearings. But positive illusions make it hard for us to orient ourselves – to get a clear picture of where we are and how we’re doing. (p. 115)

Biases can inhibit or destroy communicative workplaces. As much as we tell ourselves we’re free from these biases when we grace the front doors of the office, we are not. From racial prejudice to sour previous experiences, biases affect our thoughts at work. Kahneman (2011) described one such bias as an example,

If you like the president’s politics, you probably like his voice and his appearance as well. The tendency to like (or dislike) everything about a person – including things you have not observed – is known as the halo effect. (Kahneman, 2011, p. 82)

Kolbert (2017) defines another as “what’s become known as ‘confirmation bias,’ the tendency people have to embrace information that supports their beliefs and reject information that contradicts them” (Kolbert, 2017). Banaji and Greenwald (2016) agree, “You may be only dimly aware of forces that work your answers away from truth. Those
forces reflect a diverse set of motivations, including (paradoxically) a desire to be accurate and truthful” (p. 21).

Chris Argyris (1977) suggests that some workplace systems and methods create bias in decision-making because competing interests result in employee perception of political vulnerability. He calls these situations *double binds.*

To complicate matters, when employees adhere to a norm that says ‘hide errors,’ they know they are violating another norm that says ‘reveal errors.’ Whichever norm they choose, they risk getting into trouble. If they hide the error, they can be punished by the top if the error is discovered. If they reveal the error, they run the risk of exposing a whole network of camouflage and deception. The employees are thus in a double bind, because whatever they do is necessary yet counterproductive to the organization, and their actions may even be personally abhorrent. (Argyris, 1977)

An example of how common and how quickly double bind bias can affect a workplace could be a manager expected to get all the work done as soon as possible but also be expected to adhere to safety regulations, personnel limitations, budget constraints, contract language, additional tasks, evolving scope, and negative feedback from customers. Sometimes the conditions of the workplace compel the manager in these types of under-resourced situations to act without thinking and potentially violate some or most of the aforementioned constraints. In doing so, he/she might overlook or not control for even a known bias and allow it to dictate a decision.

*How can we overcome bias in the workplace?*

How can we overcome the way we make decisions if we think *without thinking?* As we’ve read in previous sections, the scientific findings of psychology have a lot to offer the art of leadership. Remember, organizations are comprised of people, not inanimate objects. We all have personalities, attributes, strengths, weaknesses, individuality and goals – and susceptibility to bias. We should learn to embrace these strengths and weaknesses
and explore diversity and create inclusive work environments. We should take care with our communication and find ways to control for bias. Dweck (2016) asserts that simply identifying these types of mindset barriers in oneself can help.

Believing that your qualities are carved in stone – the fixed mindset – creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. If you have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character – well, then you’d better prove that you have a healthy dose of them. It simply wouldn’t do to look or feel deficient in these most basic characteristics. (Dweck, 2016, p.6)

Dweck’s (2016) alternative mindset is one of collaborative growth and appreciation for other’s strengths and aptitude.

In this mindset, the hand you’re dealt is just the starting point for development. This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way – in their talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience. (p. 7)

Dweck’s depiction raises the soul-searching question in any reader: what kind of person am I? How do I approach problems or see solutions? Chances are, if you’re reading a document like this and thinking of the impacts of cognitive bias and followership, you’re likely approaching your world with a growth mindset. But if you don’t, it’s important to realize that those around you might think with growth in mind. Similar to Keidel’s (2010) single-minded or point thinking, “fixed-mindset leaders, like fixed-mindset people in general, live in a world where some people are superior and some are inferior. They must repeatedly affirm that they are superior, and the company is simply a platform for this” (Dweck, 2016, p. 112). Dweck also expands on this concept as it related to contagion between leaders and followers:

When bosses become controlling and abusive, they put everyone in a fixed mindset. This means that instead of learning, growing, and moving the company forward, everyone starts worrying about being judged. It starts with the bosses’ worry about
being judged, but it winds up being everybody’s fear about being judged. It’s hard for courage and innovation to survive a companywide fixed mindset. (Dweck, 2016, p. 124)

One thing is for sure, you cannot change everyone around you and implore them to avoid bias at all costs. Instead, one method of evaluating and addressing workplace biases is to discuss issues like these without confronting or accusing. The effort should be to simply increase awareness of the issue, maybe recommend a great book on the subject.

Another simple and rather low-impact method for decreasing bias in the workplace is to provide time and space for others to make thoughtful decisions. Forcing others to quickly take action and make definitive on-the-spot judgement calls can force decision-makers into System 1 thinking, and therefore leave the decision incredibly vulnerable to bias. Kahneman (2011) adds an excellent example of how to approach the workplace when you realize someone around you could be inhibiting the slow and methodical processes of System 2 of the driver:

Everyone has some awareness of the limited capacity of attention, and our social behavior makes allowances for these limitations. When the driver of a car is overtaking a truck on a narrow road, for example, adult passengers quite sensibly stop talking. They know that distracting the driver is not a good idea, and they also suspect that he is temporarily deaf and will not hear what they say. (p. 23)

Insofar as biases in the workplace, it seems clear that the first method to address them would be awareness and identification. Next, each organization member should be careful in communication to be sure biases or fallacies don’t spread. When biases they do show themselves and affect the organization, it supports long-term organizational growth to speak out against it. Leaders and followers alike should seek ways to control for bias. But, when the situation arises where you’ve seen bias affect a decision or where a member of the organization has fallen victim to improper decision making, it is our responsibility
as a member of the organization to speak out and remind others of the truly unconscious cognitive effects of bias. This might sound risky. But it also sounds to me like good followership, our next discussion segment.

2.6 Followership

What is good followership?

Examining leadership’s relationship with followers serves as an organizational advantage. It’s important to recognize the leader and follower as a relationship that must be fostered and nurtured, where the distinction between power over versus power with is critical.

We must see power – and leadership – as not things but as relationships. We must analyze power in a context of human motives and physical constraints. If we can come to grips with these aspects of power, we can hope to comprehend the true nature of leadership – a venture far more intellectually daunting than the study of naked power. (Burns, 1978, p. 11)

As Chaleff (2009) describes, “the two critical dimensions of courageous followership are the degree of support a follower gives a leader and the degree to which the follower is willing to challenge the leader’s behavior or policies if these are endangering the organization’s purpose or undermining its values” (p. 39). When arranged on a grid with these dimensions on each axis, followership takes the form of four “follower styles,” according to Chaleff (2009): the implementer, the partner, the resource, and the individualist (p. 42). Implementers are normally viewed as supportive and compliant. Partners are purpose driven and tend to hold themselves and others accountable. Resources are normally uncommitted but present and available to help. Individualists are rebellious, uninhibited by authority and sometimes confrontational. While each is radically
different in style, all are important to successful organizations and all of these show power

with.

In many ways, enacting the art of followership is an even greater responsibility than that of the leader. Followers and their styles can determine how much action an organization takes or does not take. They can serve as the barometer of how much pressure the organization is feeling or stand idly by while the organization fails. They can advise a leader when he or she is wrong or allow the leader to fail. They can produce positive results even when the conditions are less than optimal. Chaleff (2009) sums this responsibility best:

The bottom line of followership is that we are responsible for our decision to continue or not to continue following a leader. …The duty to withdraw support increases in proportion to the egregiousness of the violation of values and our proximity to the leader. Our responsibility as close followers is great because often only the inner circle sees the leader’s true values at an early stage; others may still see only the public persona. We can protect a values-deficient leader and allow him to amass power, or we can strip away the camouflage we are providing. (Chaleff, 2009, p. 168-169)

Followers with improved information flow and freedom to form new methods tend to surprise their superiors. Leaders could see their own teams creating and managing their work and while driving innovation and change. Chaleff (2009) describes followers of all four quadrants even as potential models of change for a leader. “When a leader is engaged in transformation, old ways of doing things become insupportable and start to break down. Models become important. Followers can sometimes provide those models” (Chaleff, 2009, p. 135-136).

How can leader methods affect followership?

It’s important for a leader to remember that not all methods resonate for every employee and their followership style. A leader must tailor his/her techniques to each
follower. A leader must develop a dynamic contingent of personas to facilitate follower development. I am not suggesting that, like a phoenix or shapeshifter, the leader navigates the workspace as a completely different being from one cubicle to the next. Instead, I believe leaders who employ alternative methods of leadership based on the human nature or known objectives of the individual or group are more likely to be successful at harnessing the power of the organization towards the desired purpose. Some employees appreciate space when working. Others need specific direction. Others still prefer to be paired in teams and work collaboratively. Setting these types of advantageous conditions in the workplace can promote good followership, organizational functionality, and successful mission fulfillment.

This concept relates directly to the previously mentioned movement around Keidel’s (2010) triangle of autonomy, control and cooperation. This dynamic blend of autonomy and control, for example, requires specific attention.

To say that leaders should always increase freedom and relax constraints is intellectually dishonest and totally unrealistic. To say that constituents should always accept the constraints and never challenge the status quo is equally dishonest and unrealistic. Count on people to strive to be free. Also count on organizations to exert constraints. Part of a leader’s job is to engage people in grappling with the tension between freedom and constraint. (Kouzes & Pozner, 2011, p. 176)

If we blend this notion of choosing the correct persona, and setting advantageous conditions, we might expand our perspective of the growth mindset to include the appreciation for how people learn and what drives them. Leaders looking to foster good followership must understand that employee skill development is an extension of their choosing to demonstrate or test their aptitude and potential to do so. As Duckworth (2016) defines:
The four psychological assets of interest, practice, purpose, and hope are not *You have it or you don’t* commodities. You can learn to discover, and deepen your interests. You can acquire the habit of discipline. You can cultivate a sense of purpose and meaning. And you can teach yourself to hope. (p. 92)

Purpose, meaning, hope – these concepts don’t seem likely to enter many workplace discussions during the day-to-day grind of organizational leadership. And that’s the point of this capstone. In many ways, superiors ignore their subordinates’ thoughts in and out of the workplace. Superiors looking to force employees to perform tasks often ignore any emotional dynamics in the workplace. Leaders looking for good followership, or coworkers looking to foster followership amongst their peers must acknowledge the differences in the ways we all think and feel by illuminating purpose, finding meaning, fostering hope, and encouraging discovery.

*Why?* We are all governed by our own motivations and ideas. Cognitive psychologists Lawrence and Nohria (2002) believe that every human being blends all or some of four inherent, default or baseline operating system drives. These are not choices or inclinations, rather, they are hard-wired default mechanisms that govern our brains. They affect our choices, emotions, relationships, words, and behaviors. They are the drive to acquire, learn, bond, and defend.

Clearly, every job must provide an opportunity to fulfill, to some reasonable degree, all four drives. In other words, every job needs to provide an opportunity for the incumbent to acquire, to learn, to bond, and to defend. A job that fulfills only one or two drives, no matter how lavishly, would not be a substitute for a job that provides a balanced opportunity to fulfill all four drives. This simple design rule is the fundamental and primary one that should guide the work of the organizational leader throughout the design process. (Lawrence & Nohria, 2002, p. 222)

Figure 5 depicts a range of emotions you’ll likely evaluate as intuitive. Upon closer inspection, you’ll notice some common workplace reactions are tied closely to these biological drives. When someone is energized about a product they’ve created and
seem aggressive or anxious, it is likely their predetermined sense of defense manifesting in that situation. Those who are competitive, eager or greedy likely feel the evolutionary purpose of acquiring “more.” Those who express embarrassment, listen often or look to be cooperative likely have a strong inherent bonding mechanism. Inquisitive employees who explore the workplace for new methods likely evolved with a default sense of learning capacity.

Figure 5. Paul Lawrence and Nitin Nohria (2002) Four-Drive Grid (p. 155)

These differences in the way we default or return to our biology are interesting in and of themselves. More significantly, they relate directly to redefining followership from a peer-exploratory and leader’s perspective. “What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity. …What looks like laziness is often exhaustion. …What looks like a people problem is often a situational problem” (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 17-18). Outward behavior is not always interpreted with regard to its motivation. Knowing that some are predisposed to embarrassment while others may not feel any and are normally aggressive should provide
key insight into which methods leaders choose or how a good follower could approach coworkers. Lawrence and Nohria (2002) suggest an aggressive employee could or might better be met with some acknowledgement of what they are trying to defend. An embarrassed employee could be consoled to promote a strong bond. Again, these techniques would be mutual to leaders and followers alike.

Followership is about supporting relationships and recognizing others’ strengths and weaknesses so the organization succeeds in its given mission. Vineet Nayar (2010) advocates the spread of operational knowledge around the organization, which creates speed and agility. Nayar (2010) believes leaders should “enable people to excel, help them discover their own wisdom, engage themselves entirely in their work, and accept responsibility for making change” (p. 164). This thought process on fostering good followership and increasing organizational understanding feeds directly into the key message of this capstone document. In my opinion, individual professional development and performance is the direct descendant of leaders’ information dissemination, both accurate and timely, acknowledgement of biases with controls for them, and the promotion of good followership. A further reagent of organizational effectiveness is the ability to be cool and collected when uncertain.

2.7 Professional Development: Tolerance for Uncertainty

Poise under pressure and comfort with uncertainty are the hallmarks of organizations with effective communication, leadership and followership. Of all the developmental dynamics implicitly depicted by the initial stories, this document is centered on how effective and timely communication results in developed followers with strong perspectives, self-control in demanding situations, and a tolerance for uncertainty. Leaders
communicate information to expand the viewing aperture of the followers. In turn, the aptitude and the potential of the employee is released to create, innovate and accomplish the organization’s goals.

*What conditions promote this type of development for followers?*

You’ll recall from Figure 1 in Section 2.2, Hersey and Blanchard (1974) offer a prescriptive model that clearly depicts assessing the follower’s capabilities and moving them forward on a path toward independent success. Professional development flows from the realm of low competence into high competence with clear directions and then a methodical progression into coaching. Next, a leader would support a follower’s growth with less direction and more supportive behavior or small course corrections. Lastly, in the culmination of the model, the leader can effectively delegate to the subordinate, who is now trained, highly competent, requiring little direction and little support to succeed in the workplace.

In the case of professional development, information is power. Information and data build an organizational actor’s perception of the workplace around them. This perspective matters. In my opinion, this perspective comes from education and information sharing. The image of pulling back veils that obscure our vision of reality returns to the forefront over and over again. Bararacco (2002) acknowledges that having this perspective – that is, knowing your operational situation – and understanding the followers’ capacity for growth is great place to start.

Quiet leaders are realists. They try hard to see the world as it is. This means recognizing, almost as a sixth sense, that all sorts of things can happen and often do. And they happen because people act for all sorts of reasons, virtuous and vicious, clear and muddle-headed, sensible and nutty. Realism, in other words, isn’t pessimism or cynicism. It is making ample room for the many ways in which people and events can surprise, dismay, and astonish. (Badaracco, 2002, p. 11)
Robert Kegan’s (1994) *orders of consciousness* models exactly this objective of increasing the scope of one’s view of information.

By considering the postmodern curriculum in three exemplary areas – the meaning of conflict or difference, good leadership, and knowledge creation – I hope to demonstrate what these curricular demands all have in common: they all require an order of consciousness that is able to subordinate or relativize systemic knowing (the fourth order); they all require that we move systemic knowing from subject to object. On other words, they are all ‘beyond’ the fourth order. (Kegan, 1994, p. 317)

I find Figure 6 helpful as it depicts the raw theory of the developmental progression in orders of consciousness with drawings to illustrate how accurate information helps an employee see the world from expanding only him- or herself, singular, then part of a group, then in relation to other groups, then how all the groups work together, and lastly how to change or alter the relationships between all the created systems of groups. Kegan’s (1994) fifth stage of development would be the goal for all leaders to develop their followers. As we’ve heard from other experts like Hersey & Blanchard (1974), an employee would achieve the professional development objective when they understand the world of systems and subsystems around them, how they affect one another, and how to actuate them for organizational success. In a sense, the leader would have then passed the torch, so to speak, and created conditions for their follower to become a leader. Recall the same observation from Fallett (Hamel, 2007) mentioned in Section 2.2.

So, the objective of effective organizational performance can be served when those inside the organization share information so that employees become self-sufficient, good followers, and eventually good leaders for others. Resiliency in the face of change or adversity enters the picture when an employee can see a larger picture on a different or higher-level plane, observe all the inner workings of the organization, and have the
capability to design a dynamic and robust solution on their own without that losing perspective.

Figure 6. Robert Kegan's (1994) Five Orders of Consciousness (p. 314-315)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>OBJECT</th>
<th>UNDERLYING STRUCTURE</th>
<th>LINES OF DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERCEPTIONS</td>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Single Point/ Immediate/ Atomic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CONCRETE</td>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td>Durable Category</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POINT OF VIEW</td>
<td>Social Perceptions</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACTIONS</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Cross-Categorical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUTUALITY/INTERPERSONALISM</td>
<td>Point of View</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT SYSTEMS</td>
<td>Abstractions</td>
<td>System/Complex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTITUTION</td>
<td>Mutuality</td>
<td>Interpersonalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF-AUTHORSHIP</td>
<td>Inner States</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIALECTICAL</td>
<td>Abstract System</td>
<td>Trans-System</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTER-INSTITUTIONAL</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Trans-Complex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9.1 The Five Orders of Consciousness
Some change initiatives prompt discomfort or unease amongst organizational players. Haidt (2012) suggests,

The main way we change our minds on moral issues is by interacting with other people. We are terrible at seeking evidence that challenges our own beliefs, but other people do us this favor, just as we are quite good at finding errors in other people’s beliefs. When discussions are hostile, the odds of change are slight. (p. 79)

So, the answer seems clear. Share information and teach employees to see the big picture and share their ideas all while keeping the operational environment stable and supportive. Should be simple enough? But you don’t get something for nothing.

I would offer a word of caution to the new-comer to facilitations or empowerment concepts. Information control sometimes exists for a reason. The release of previously withheld information can be problematic if not done responsibly. If you begin to change the perspective of an employee by revealing information that might be too much to handle, it is possible to overwhelm the audience. This thought returns to our previous discussion on Dweck’s (2016) fixed mindsets and how some simply cannot or don’t want to process new information in new terms. It further harkens back to the discussion on the four drives to acquire, learn, bond, and to defend. Some are predisposed to perceive and perform a certain way. Again, people are not inanimate objects. We are complex, or complicated, to borrow a term from Kahneman (2013). One must be mindful of the intended and unintended consequences of our words and actions. As quickly as you think you’re setting the organization free, you could be crippling it. Keen observation of the impact of the information is key. A prime example of the inappropriate release of information would be the VP’s actions from the second narrative in Chapter 1, revealing openly and honestly to anyone who would listen that some of the hardworking and high-performing employees were not his top choices as he seemingly randomly replaced them one-by-one. The team
was left without understanding, no new perspective of what would be a successful employee, or how to alter their performance so they could remain in place.

In the first anecdote from Chapter 1, as I pulled back the curtains to let daylight expose the processes and systems, I noticed small positive shifts in my team members’ performance and level of engagement as they began to troubleshoot with me. Because I involved them in the process, we were all invested in the future, together. In some cases, this meant revealing to them financial and reporting information that was previously unapproved for general consumption. For my subordinates, these progressive moments were meaningful in their own career development, and yet, sometimes difficult to embrace. I had to be careful not to overwhelm them. Nevertheless, it was a necessary step in the expansion of their individual capabilities, and therefore, that of the team. In the end, this honest and empowering method yielded more organizational capacity and a more resilient business.

2.8 Resultant Research Question

In this Literature Review, we explored effective leadership as a long-term relationship. While brainstorming for this thesis, a trusted mentor and I came up with a very simple and elegant way to phrase leadership as a \textit{mutual interactive dialectic with a follower}. What that means to imply is that a leader is more of a facilitator than a forcing function. A leader’s true purpose is to unlock the hidden potential of his/her followers. Metaphysically, this dynamic interaction between the soul purporting to do the leading and the soul purporting to do the following is likely dependent on the honest flow of information as a catalyst. Biases and psychological barriers exist everywhere. Leaders and
followers alike must acknowledge them and control for them. Good followers support the organization by keeping their mind on the organizational goal and taking action.

Individual professional development is a function of honesty in a sense of pulling different “higher level” reality to the forefront or stripping away the veils or pulling away the curtain to reveal hidden realities. This begs the question, what are good techniques when moving or sliding around Keidel’s (2010) triangle away from leader control toward subordinate control, autonomy and cooperation? Perspective-enhancing change for a follower reveals new purpose and new reasons for improving methods. How does a leader know when and what to reveal so others follow optimally? What enters leaders’ mind when they decide to develop through increased autonomy and cooperation while shifting away from more control?

Those questions can be refined into a single research question I believe worthy of pursuit so the reader might profit from real-life practical application of the aforementioned exhaustive theory. What impact does leader dissemination of accurate and timely information have on follower effectiveness?
CHAPTER 3 – CRITICAL RESEARCH EVALUATION

3.1 Assessment of the Research Question

Before we go any further with this capstone document, we must regain our footing as to purpose and direction. To start, we explored two anecdotes from my professional experience that exhibit the best and worst of workplace leadership and the results of these methods. The research literature review drew insight from leadership theory, psychology, behavioral economics, motivation theory, change dynamics, and management literature, among others. These explorations yielded and supported the research question. Why are we spending our time asking this question? Why would I spend more than a few semesters researching and presenting a document asking only a powerful and yet simple question? The truth is, I don’t think we’ve know how to answer it yet in practice.

How many times have you looked around your workplace and noticed systemic inconsistencies or injustices but said nothing or done nothing about it? You might not have labeled the occasions with such strong words. Perhaps one kind of employee is treated differently compared to another based on job classification, position in the hierarchy, educational background, or physical attributes. How often have you stopped listening to a coworker or superior because you imagine anything they say will likely be blatant fabrication? Maybe a superior incorrectly handled your feelings or did not address your concerns in the past and you’ve lost faith in their ability or concern for your wellbeing. Or how often have you become tone-deaf to blatant concealment or inappropriate representation of facts and figures on the part of a coworkers or superiors? Maybe it would help if everyone in the room could hear, touch, and feel the problem, armed with real facts and be afforded the opportunity to engage in intelligent discourse. Maybe they’d be more
likely to affect robust solutions to a variety of workplace problems and uncertainties than they are when subject to edicts of imposed change directed from above.

In my opinion, the answer to these “how often” questions for many of us is likely to be somewhere between “sometimes” and “all the time.” If you’ve experienced any of these situations, this paper is likely to be of value.

The main premise of this capstone is not to get everyone to share all information, hold hands, and live happily ever after. I think we’ll all agree that vision of grandeur is likely unobtainable and perhaps inappropriate in today’s world of information, education, global fluidity, and pace of life. Instead, my intent is to explore how we develop followers so that they can support productive leadership initiatives and enact meaningful organizational effectiveness.

We do poorly as an American workforce in our efforts to train leaders in proper leadership and followers in appropriate followership. We mostly rely on the experience of others and the acquired skills of our careers to create conditional evaluations for the future. In other words, not many managers obtain exhaustive initial or recurring management training. Most individual contributors obtain job-related skills training but never explore what it means to be an ideal employee for the type of organization in which they find themselves. Some workplaces can become uber-concentrated on production and output with less-than-adequate focus on employee well-being, quality of participation, or mindfulness of the organization itself, unaware, perhaps of the contribution of these latter outcomes to the former.

A simple cost-benefit analysis may suggest, in my view, why most superiors neglect the importance of professional development has for the good of their organization.
The likely reason that supervisors do not develop their personnel is that they don’t see themselves as the likely beneficiaries – perhaps rather the victims – of the time and effort this act requires. The person being developed would either be moved up or out. If the promotee moves up, it likely won’t be under their purview, or they could replace the supervisor in his or her own role. If the promotee moves out, the subordinate moves to another superior who then receives the benefits of the developmental engagement. This apparent, binary conflict of interest could, and in my opinion often does, deter most superiors from developing their subordinates as they have not so been themselves by their superiors.

In my experience, the idea of growing and grooming employees for the next progressive level of their career is paramount for successful organizations. In a way, it would be a cultural shift for most workplaces to ignore the short-term benefits for the individual superior in lieu of the long-term benefits of the organization. This holistic mentality, which would be a case study in and of itself, was impressed into my leadership philosophy during my years of U.S. military service. During combat deployments, casualties, promotions or transfers (to other units) made it essential for everyone remaining to step up into the vacancy and fill the void left by the incumbent. Much like an understudy in a Broadway play, each position had a successor waiting in the wings to fill the role. In that line of work, redundancy was not an optional amenity, but a cultural way of life. The survival of the organization depended on it. Lives depended on it.

Admittedly, most civilian workforces are rarely presented with conditions similar to those of combat. But the lessons learned in those circumstances are more than applicable to today’s civilian organizations. Supervisors would find greater flexibility in their
organizations when the demands of business change or the inevitable promotion or retirement occurs. Gone would be the days of long and painful transitions where human capital vacancies slow an organization and leave it vulnerable to ineptitude or stagnation during a period of requisite growth.

As we’ve seen from many experts in many fields of study in Chapter 2, employees would love professional development and information sharing as well. In addition to being promotable, potentially able to earn more income and increase their levels of influence within their organization, they’d feel encouraged by the organization’s placement of value on their wellbeing, enhanced ability to do good work, and personal organizational net worth.

Employers might reap the benefits of uninterrupted productivity. Organizations would begin to appropriately design to face the business situations they encountered, and not try to mold the business environment to the needs of the organization. Redundant capabilities mean rapid response to emerging needs and innovation. Further, temporary human capital problems like Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) absences or maternity leave become personnel issues of the past as those around the team member will be able to assume the helm during the absences.

Where planning ahead is possible, the organization could even publish or advertise a development matrix so employees could know where and when their next promotion might be coming. If they have that next-level or systemic situational awareness, what Torbert (2004) calls “super-vision,” they might better prepare themselves, their systems, and their own capabilities to adequately adapt before the transition occurs. Again, this
speaks directly to less downtime, more productivity, more forward thinking, and potentially greater organizational output.

Some critics might say that a flaw in the concept could be that people who are not fit to move up might elevate in the organization without merit or before they are “ready.” On the contrary, this would be a featured benefit of the idea. This process could quickly reveal, on a temporary basis, who in the organization has seized the investment and those who could not handle additional responsibility. The development portion would take the form of honest and accurate feedback for employees coupled with very specific assessment mechanisms to capture the progress in real time. Those who truly want to mitigate these concerns about premature promotion might opt for quarterly or monthly written feedback sessions in an effort to document and guide the employee toward the desired behaviors and outcomes. In other words, I’m suggesting anticipatory professional development paired with a post-promotion development to confirm and solidify personnel progress.

Admittedly, employers would find these types of initiatives expensive. Cross-training and information sharing are not easy or free. It takes time and investment at all levels of the organization. Do you want to pay now or pay later? Each organization and situation is different, but I know that in the maintenance field you can choose your baseline philosophy: preventative maintenance with limited need for reactive services, or mostly reactive services with little investment in preventative measures. The difference in the two philosophies is the reliability of the assets considered. Those preventatively maintained are more likely to be available for their intended use more often than those under a reactionary maintenance plan.
Similarly, do you want to develop your employees now so you could, at a moment’s notice, promote them while maintaining your organization’s goals and initiatives? Or do you want to neglect your “asset,” allow it to depreciate or stagnate, and then pay for recruitment and wait for replacements for personnel when you have no one ready to promote in your organization? Preventative or reactionary – it’s up to the leader. In my opinion, it’s stronger to suggest readiness and ready-made options when uncertainty strikes than advocate delay to develop a plan when circumstances require action.

To channel my inner Sinek, the why seems to make a lot of sense when you talk it through. Growing replacements in your organization makes your organization much more resilient, agile, and ready for growth. Based on the research shown in Chapter 2, information sharing inspires employees and inherently motivates all levels of the organization to excel.

### 3.2 Autonomy and Development

A particularly resonant concept from Keidel (2010) strongly exhibits exactly the point this capstone suggests. His observation summatively relates leadership with development as a dynamic blended evolution among autonomy, control and cooperation. This method often requires close attention to employees’ wellbeing, their drives, their state of readiness for expansive influence in a given context or task, and their professional development in the role they occupy and the role for which they may be considered. Some employees require close attention and guidance, or a strong presence of control. Others require time and space to create and engage, or autonomy. And others still long for community and teamwork, or cooperation. Leaders and organizations alike profit from
recognizing which type of leadership and management style is appropriate for the individual, situation, and organization.

Keidel’s (2010) autonomy, control and cooperation could be seen as a function of the four inherent drives to acquire, learn, bond, and defend as described by Lawrence and Nohria (2012). Autonomy seems like the concept of acquiring and learning. Control seems much like defense. And cooperation seems like a synonym for bonding. Given the similarities in the theory, Keidel, Lawrence, and Nohria might all agree that the effectiveness of leadership and followership is closely tied to our human nature, our default preferences, or our psychological predisposition to be motivated in specific ways.

Leaders must therefore intentionally navigate around Keidel’s (2010) triangle with a sense of purpose and recognition of the followers’ needs. Leaders looking to empower and develop their followers should develop constructive ways to reduce controls with a preference toward subordinate autonomy and cooperation as appropriate in each case or task, context, time, and relationships.

We saw anecdotal evidence of this type of developmental progression in the act of leadership in the first story of Chapter 1 when I, the leader, permitted the release of finances and previously withheld information to foster ownership within in the group. It was our why, to invoke Sinek (2009) yet again. I was met with much criticism from superiors and peers alike for revealing too much to a group that “couldn’t handle it.” Instead, we saw ingenuity and teamwork spawned from what could have likely been a book of business closed to all but the leaders and consequently their imposed decisions.

Make no mistake, this method can be inconvenient. It can be grueling. The subordinate may not like it. But, as we’ve discussed previously, the leader is obviously not
motivated solely by his or her own gains or the good feelings of whomever about the situation. The focus must be on the good of the organization. This means, when autonomy is granted but a follower wanders too far from the established intent, leaders must guide them back to a procedure, enforce rules and regulations, invoke the letter of the law, or follow guidelines all the way to ensure the employees fully grasps the developmental moment. This, again, could be another instance when superiors decide to forgo the entire process – it’s a lot of hard work both at the start and throughout. Professional development includes not only the act of granting autonomy, but also the willingness to seize it back and navigate towards control when the situation or conditions warrant.

Some might ask, how do leaders know for sure when and what to reveal so others follow optimally? The short answer, they won’t. Each of these situations is different. Each employee is different. Each organization is different. The amount of knowledge per employee could be different, too. The best the leader can do is guess – and I’m not suggesting a whimsical, random or thoughtless guess. A leader must develop a strongly evaluated and calculated estimate of the situation, employee, organization, and subject matter. No one will be flagging the leader into the exact solution. He or she must know the organization enough to know what’s best for it, and develop the plan from there. Some leaders use simple litmus tests, like, “Is it right or wrong?” “Does this fit into the long-term goals for the team?” or “Is it good for the organization or bad?” If you read them again, none of these questions or evaluation metrics is self-centered. They call on a higher-level understanding of the business and how the team fits into it. As displayed by Kegan’s (1994) system and trans-system level thinking in Section 2.7, leaders must realize how their pieces of the puzzle fit into the whole.
“The role of a leader is not to come up with all the great ideas. The role of a leader is to create an environment in which great ideas can happen” (Sinek, 2009, p. 99). Developing your subordinates is a way to create an environment for greatness. It can be painful, laborious, and you may never reap the benefits. But leaders are not out for themselves. Leaders exist to serve their followers and the organization. This self-less act of professional development could only be described as the overall mission of their role. Again, Fallet asserts, “leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those who are led. The most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders” (Hamel, 2007, p. 186).

3.3 Value of the Research

Leaders find ways to bring out the best in us. Whether the situations are mundane or dire, low-cost or expensive, routine or chaotic, leaders find ways to rise to the occasion and bring us all with them.

In my experience, I believe this to be true because I’ve seen leaders in peacetime and combat alike round up the group, drive a few improvised words into the air and turn a mulling herd of soldiers into the most competent, organized and effective team of which any military unit would be proud. I’ve seen leaders rally a civilian workforce into months of round-the-clock recovery for a business that they could have just as easily left to find employment and similar compensation elsewhere. I’ve experienced the creative impact autonomy can have on employees who previously would not or could not develop their own solutions.

In contrast, I’ve seen superiors give speeches behind a microphone for more than an hour with close to 200 PowerPoint slides and not even realize most of the crowd has
tuned them out or left in large portions. I’ve witnessed confinement and restrictions of an organization in efforts to promote loyalty. I’ve seen belittlement and berating of employees firsthand as an effort to drive results – and the devastating effect those tactics can have on a group.

There’s value in considering this distinction through research because some cannot tell the difference between the leader/follower and the superior/subordinate relationship. That inability to see the difference directly leads to employee stagnation and ultimately to organizational inefficiency, discontent, and ineffectiveness.

Honesty is absolutely essential to leadership. If people are going to follow someone willingly, whether into battle or into the boardroom, they first want to assure themselves that the person is worthy of their trust. They want to know that the would-be leader is truthful, ethical, and principled. (Kouzes & Posner, 2011, p. 8)

It is for all these reasons that I ask: What impact does leader dissemination of accurate and timely information have on follower effectiveness?
CHAPTER 4 – QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

4.1 Confirmation of Interview Purpose

We’ve seen what the experts think about how information dissemination impacts the workplace. I’ve provided some basic exploration of the theory from my perspective. In my opinion, this capstone would not be complete simply by secondarily researching a topic, proposing a research question and expressing my thoughts on the issue. I believe we should take it for a road test to confirm we’re on the right path by speaking personally with people about their real situations.

What do others think on the topic? What do real working-class people think about the effects of honesty and truth in the workplace relative to performance of the organization and its members? For sake of time and scope of the capstone, I’m not looking to conduct a comprehensive or definitive exploration of the theory with a large-scale investigation. I’m not looking to prove a definitive answer to my research question. Instead, what I hope to accomplish is to suggest that this research question would be a valid exploration for a large-scale study. I’ll base this claim on a small sample size of interview subjects and their experiences.

4.2 Qualitative Research Question

As we’ve stated before, the research question is, what impact does leader dissemination of accurate and timely information have on follower effectiveness?

4.3 Background and Context

This limited-trial study looking to validate whether the question seems worth asking was conducted with a series of individual interviews with subjects of differing
genders, backgrounds, occupations, experience, age, and education. Though small, this varied sample collectively has more than 48 years’ experience in different industries and organizational types. All subjects are non-academic acquaintances specifically chosen for their subject matter expertise and years of experience.

- Subject A – Female Facilities Manager
- Subject B – Male Aircraft Technician
- Subject C – Female Elementary School Assistant Principal and Counselor
- Subject D – Male Small Business Retail Store Manager

4.4 Assumptions

Before we go further, there are a few shortcomings of my study that should be identified. Some of these shortcomings were compensated with controls while others could only be acknowledged. As we have already stated, the group is small and not at all representative of all workplaces and all situations employees face. A much larger sample would be required to say anything definitive about this subject or approach answering the question I have posited.

Second, I know the participants of the study. Because I do not have the resources to pay participants or the time to widen the scope or quantity of the interviews, the results may be skewed simply because I have a relationship, be it personal or professional, with the subjects. Their availability to me could lead to bias in the results. Some term this halo effect, or a tendency to say yes to someone because you like them (Kahneman, 2010, p. 4).

Third, all participants are from, live in, and work in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. This regionalism of the sample could impact how the subjects perceive right and wrong, approach morality, think, speak, act, etc. This could be termed culture bias (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013, p. 191). For this, I have no control other than to identify the limitation.
Fourth, there could be a confirmation bias occurring in the way I’ve created the interview or how I’ve asked the participants. I had to broadly tell them what the hour-long discussion was going to be about and what I’ve been working on for my capstone. This why could have altered how they view the topic and how they selectively prepared for the discussions. I’ve also used terms like “truth” in the questions as opposed to “information dissemination.” One participant didn’t actually know what the word dissemination meant.

Fifth, discussions like these could be strongly affected by the current moment for each subject. When discussing right and wrong, truth and lies, feelings and emotions, subjects could be affected by the current issues they are experiencing at work or at home. These potentially compromising yet momentary events could prompt rash or inefficient conclusions in the subject’s perspectives and alter the results. In other words, suppose it’s November. Maybe a sporting event result affected all the subjects at the same time, all are distraught about that issue and not thinking as they would, rationally, the other 11 months of the year. I could not think of a timing study control. For this limitation, all we can do is identify it.

Lastly, it is important to identify my assumptions as a potential bias for this qualitative study. I assume almost all employees and leaders experience the issue of information dissemination affecting professional development in workplaces. I assume each participant will have a story or anecdote related to the success or failure of leaders and followers related to information sharing or telling the truth. As much as I’ve controlled my processes, sanitized my interview questions, positioned myself or curbed my input during the interviews, I assume these assumptions might affect how I ask the questions, how I analyze the data, or how I represent the study in this document.
4.5 Methods

To illuminate the validity of the research question, I have decided to conduct “semi-structured interviews” with voluntary participants centered on their experiences with information sharing and truth in the workplace (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009, p. 17). The interview sample consists of a 4-person maximum variation sample of leaders and followers of varying levels of experience and in different industries and positions. For those who may not be familiar with the term “maximum variation sample,” this type of sampling method obtains the “widest range of views possible” to “capture ‘core’ experiences or views” on a research topic (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009, p. 22).

I have chosen this method because I believe this issue is human, industry non-specific, and fundamental to human social psychology. This qualitative study was conducted independently with each of the four subjects following the Qualitative Interview Questions and Answers Form depicted in Appendix A. Each subject was afforded as much time as he or she needed, though each interview lasted around an hour. Some individuals were prompted with additional questioning to extract out meaning from their stories and experiences. My hand-written notes and account of the interview were then coded for trend analysis. I’ve intentionally masked the identities of the participants and altered details of their stories in an effort to maintain anonymity.

I intended to fill the role of researcher only. To achieve this, I did not interview anyone within my department in my current place of business or within my family. I attempted not to influence the subjects by revealing my research questions to them before the interview. If I were to have, I believe this may create a kind of anchoring effect, or predetermined point of reference, that could alter the perceptions of the subjects artificially.
INFORMATION AS INSPIRATION

(Kahneman, 2011, p.119). My introduction to the interview and questions appreciated their time and spoke to the evaluation the subject’s feelings and experiences with transforming leadership, both as the leader and the follower. Each participant self-identified as having leadership and individual contributor experience.

4.6 Summary of Data Collected

Subject A Data

Subject A is a 38-year-old black female. She is a primary school and collegiate facilities operations manager. She began her career with four years of individual contributor experience and has since been in a leadership role for close to 10 years. She holds a masters-level degree.

Her definition of truth is “honesty and integrity in all you do.” She spoke directly to the hard work and effort required of a leader when faced with whether or not to tell your employees and your coworkers the truth. “It’s the right thing to do. It goes to your morals and values. If you’re invested in the outcome, you’ll put it out there.” People generally would not tell the truth when “they have an agenda or are trying to avoid something. They want to see an outcome that may not happen if the truth is known. It could also be a protective mechanism for themselves, other people, confidentiality reasons, or for their own employment. Some people protect information because it is in their own best interest.”

Subject A told an excellent story for when a leader reveals an inconvenient truth to the employees and the end-users of a facility. A portion of the building was diagnosed with potentially harmful mold and needed to be remediated. What complicated the situation was that the affected area was composed of asbestos-containing materials. The remediation would be much more expensive and much more visible due to this complication. She
noticed the leader was very forthcoming with information towards the affected followers. Timelines for remediation, dates of anticipated completion, methods, who knew what and when, all this information was made public. The resultant effect on the followers was advantageous. Contrasting with previous situations where the affected people were not informed, distraught and wondering what was happening, this situation displayed the notion that information, when provided, puts followers’ minds at ease. Employees were therefore able to avoid the affected areas and continue their roles with the organization. The occupants knew the immediate facilities arrangements were temporary while the project was being carried out, and they also continued their individual progress.

Subject A offered an example of obvious information concealment and the effects it can have on followers. There was an arson committed by a student on a building in the facility. Only a chosen few first responders and insider employees saw the initial reporting and surveillance tape revealing the culprit and the act. However, this information was kept from the occupants of the building and the employees. Although the superior obviously knew, this withholding was a severe “morale blow” to staff and students alike. The administration kept telling everyone it was “under investigation” yet never actually revealed the results or findings of the investigation. The situation created the classic in-group and out-group dynamic where some knew the truth and others did not. Some knew that the occupants of the other group had the information and kept it to themselves. Some began to resent those who wouldn’t tell. The wedge of inaccurate information seemed to tear this organization apart at the seams.

Subject A added another example, this one also depicting the falsification of information. Subject A was told by her superior that the superior was pressed for time and
had a few conflicting commitments. In the same conversation, the superior delegated a few
tasks, a custom report, and a meeting invitation that would cost the subordinate a few hours
of her time. This, in and of itself, was not a big deal or out-of-the-ordinary for this high-
paced work environment. They were used to covering for one another and representing the
organization as a unified front. However, once the report and the tasks were completed,
Subject A heard from a third-party (again) that the superior’s conflicting appointment was
cancelled a few days before the superior spoke with Subject A. She walked around, curious,
to see where the superior was in all the usual workspaces, and she was nowhere to be found.
Subject A not only lost a few hours of her time, but the incident has tarnished the
relationship and resulted in a perceived loss of trust.

Subject B Data

Subject B is a 36-year-old white male. He is an aircraft maintenance technician with
five years’ experience as an individual contributor and eight years’ experience in a
leadership role. He graduated high school and then completed an 18-month Airframe and
Power Plant (A&P) technical certification which is issued by the Federal Aviation
Administration (FAA).

His definition of truth is simply “stating the facts.” He believes “it’s the right thing
to do, rather, the only thing to do.” Subject B believes that people will likely not tell the
truth to “protect themselves from the consequences, to avoid getting in trouble, or to avoid
retribution.”

I asked Subject B why he felt this way and he shared a story that seemed to have
stuck with him since childhood. When he was 9 or 10, he and a friend were out front of
their house playing street hockey. The pucks in those days were bright orange, light, hollow
and very hard. If you shot them hard enough into the air, they seemed to fly for distances. Subject B’s friend told him he could not aim or shoot well. As children often do, the two argued about whether or not they could hit objects. The game escalated to a dare in which Subject B would attempt to hit a window across the sidewalk, street, opposite sidewalk, opposite yard, and on the neighbor’s house. It was easily 100 feet away. Subject B aimed and shot, hitting the window dead-center, shattering it immediately. The neighbor came out of the house and immediately accused Subject B of intentionally hitting the window, which was in fact the case. But Subject B denied and denied the intent of the action. He falsely claimed the puck hit the opposite curb and took out the window by accident. By now, Subject B’s father entered the conversation, apologized to the neighbor, committed to replacing the window, and pulled Subject B back to the house. It was then his father told him something he never forgot. “Don’t ever lie. If you lie, I can’t trust you. No one can trust you. If you tell the truth, I’ll back you up and be in your corner. I’ll have your back.” Obviously, after 25 years, this may be or is likely a paraphrase of the fatherly wisdom. But the recipient of that premise, Subject B, has kept the idea of telling the truth at the forefront of his personal and professional life since that incident. He believes that no matter what happens, no matter how bad it is, always tell the truth.

Subject B recalled a time when a leader told the truth and how it helped the organization deal with a difficult circumstance. His employer, an international airline, conducted a resource study worldwide with an outside consultant firm to determine the cost-benefit of having in-house aircraft maintenance at each outlying airport or if third-party maintenance would be more fiscally responsible. During the study, the firm moved from region to region, airport to airport, studying every operation and closing facilities as
they progressed. Most employees knew what was coming and what it meant for their operation. It was such a volatile situation that some stations did not even participate in the study and simply submitted to the closure. When it came time for Subject B’s airport operation evaluation, they tried another approach. Subject B noticed something distinctly professional about his station chief’s approach to the event. In an example of genuine leadership, he told his people to be completely transparent. Show them everything. Show them all the tasks you complete. Show them what we are all about. Show them we have value and add value. He remembers hearing, “If they’re going to close us, they’ll close us.” Subject B recalls he was “honest, up-front, and fair.” After the review, the final report of the audit not only confirmed their standing with the organization, but the firm also recommended adding resources to supplement their operation. The team was ecstatic to have survived the ordeal. More importantly, they admired their leader for being up-front about the risks of the situation. The group seemed to come together as a team in the face of adversity.

Subject B had a few stories to share geared toward the concept of information concealment. In one example, a superior seemed to be particularly insecure in his role and with his authority. A commonplace observation from Subject B and his coworkers was that they regarded the superior as a liar, someone who hoarded information for himself. They also noticed that he worried a lot about appearance. Subject B left the group for a few months on a training rotation to another country. When he returned from the trip having spent around $5000 out-of-pocket, the normal means of turning in receipts for reimbursement was rejected by the finance department. This superior received the rejection report from the finance department, asserting that there were inconsistencies in the receipts.
Instead of working through the issue with Subject B, he decided to get HR involved to escalate the situation. Subject B turned in the report twice more, and it was rejected twice more. As Subject B later found out, the superior seemingly intentionally withheld the reasons for the financial audit from Subject B and made him go through an interrogation with a human resources representative, reconcile two months’ worth of receipts, and prove the expenses line-by-line with the auditor. In the end, the difference between the original reimbursement submission and the one processed successfully by the finance department was only $57, or about 1%. Meanwhile, Subject B was subjected to countless hours of paperwork, a trip to out of state to see the HR department, and a letter of reprimand for filing incorrect paperwork with the company. Subject B maintains that if he knew what the audit rejected in the first place, he would have corrected the paperwork issue the first attempt.

Subject B told a second story about concealment when two coworkers were under pressure by the airline and the flight crew to finish a routine reset of a flight system just before departure. The technicians could not quickly or easily complete the task. The pressing crew, the stranded passengers, and seemingly all the weight of the job pressed the two technicians to maneuver quickly to obtain the required result. In the process of completing the task, there was a necessity to reach into the aircraft interstitial space and almost blindly to loosen, rotate, and tighten a component. One of the technicians completed the task, but dropped her tool into interstitial space. To remove the small item, it would have required hours of large component removal and potentially cancel the flight. The two technicians talked it over and determined that because of the tool’s impossible but safe location, its small size, and negligible likelihood of any negative impact to the safety of
flight operations, they would leave it and not report the incident. This decision was against FAA regulations, airline policy, and every maintenance practice the two technicians had ever known. “Right now, there is a well-traveled wrench inside a large airliner flying somewhere high above the earth.” If they had told the truth at the outset, they would have done the right thing at the great cost to all on that flight. However, if they told the truth, now, they would have to face consequences, lose their certifications, and maybe even their jobs.

Subject B also shared a story about a coworker’s falsification of information. His airline employs many subject matter experts who are certified to release certain types of planes to fly after the pre-flight maintenance checklists are completed. On one occasion, all the certified employees were unavailable to sign out a flight. One certified employee called in and instructed another uncertified employee to sign his name. The captain of the aircraft was looking over the paperwork and immediately realized the signature was forged. The flight crew held the flight until people who could sign physically presented themselves on the flight deck. The employee was about an hour away, drove in, signed for the plane, and it departed. The incident was reported to the airline worldwide maintenance manager, the highest levels of the organization, and the FAA. The employee who directed the signature and the second who forged it were officially reprimanded. It sent a message to the entire company that this type of shortcut would not be tolerated. This story depicts an employee’s willingness to forgo policy and procedure when it’s inconvenient or problematic to comply.

Subject C Data
Subject C is a 30-year-old white female. Her leadership experience includes the last four years as both an elementary school counselor and the assistant principal. She also worked previously as an individually contributing condominium administrator for a mortgage company for three years. She holds a masters-level degree for counseling in an educational setting.

Subject C’s definition of the truth is “being genuine, straightforward, telling it like it is.” She “always tells the students and peers that you cannot solve a problem if you’re not being honest. More bad things happen when you lie. Being honest is the most important thing to do. People will always find out, no matter what.” Subject C described those who lie as mistaken of the impact. “It just makes them look bad. They probably don’t want to admit a mistake, want to shield someone from a painful situation, or maybe they don’t even realize they aren’t being truthful.” She told me it could also be the perception of the single observer that could be askew. Sometimes when there’s a group, they will remember it a different way as compared to that of the single observer. Truth is simply perception.

Subject C shared an instance where a leader told the truth. Elementary school skill evaluations are a particularly stressful and impactful semi-annual event where teachers are observed and critiqued. Those still in an un-tenured status are closely scrutinized to confirm the hiring process once the teacher has started. During one such occasion, the supervisor conducting a review gave the new teacher very powerful but critical feedback about the way her observed lesson was created, executed, and modified in the classroom. This teacher told Subject C that it was difficult to hear and difficult to get through in the moment. But the message and the techniques suggested by the supervisor directly resulted in better task execution for the teacher and a noticeably improved student response once the
corrective actions were implemented. “It was much better in the long run. It was hard when you hear it, but it also made the conversations easier between the leader and subordinate in the future.” This was a case where an inconvenient truth illuminated enhanced possibilities for an employee who legitimately thought she was doing the right thing.

Subject C also shared a few stories of a leader misinformation. This story is about concealment. Her superior privately disclosed to three employees, including Subject C, that the entire elementary school staff was unprofessional, needed improvement and that he had to do something about it. The superior called a school-wide meeting to discuss the issue. Once the employees assembled and settled into their seats, the leader stood in front of the team, seemingly got nervous or hesitant and completely reversed his position in front of the entire group, including the small in-group of three. Those three immediately knew they could not trust his performance as a leader and questioned why the entire dramatic ordeal took place. There was another small set of about 10 personnel who deduced from context of the meeting that the leader had planned an intervention-style meeting but could not go through with it. The last subset of about 20 people were left questioning what the meeting was about and why they were getting mixed messages. Subject C says just about everyone seemingly lost faith in the administration in some way because of the inept spectacle.

Subject C shared a story of information falsification. A new teacher had proposed and implemented a classroom management strategy that involved tasks and rewards for the pupils. Through multiple conversations and a few emails confirming the principal approved of the system, the new teacher thought it was working out well. An outside observing supervisor came in for an evaluation of the teacher and immediately noted that the system in place was not consistent with district policy. The supervisor and the principal spoke
about her observations and thoughts of the system and the principal immediately reversed position and said the system was not approved. As a result, the teacher received a poor evaluation for using an unauthorized method. The teacher called a meeting with the principal and the supervisor. She furnished the emails and the documentation of the discussions; the principal then claimed the description and the execution were different. He maintained the system was not condoned. The teacher objected and requested the supervisor change her evaluation. It was, and the supervisor spoke privately with the principal immediately after the discussion. The teacher, and all her coworkers who saw the situation play out, collectively thought the leader did not “have their back.” The “lack of support” and dishonesty on the part of the principal had directly affected the employee’s career growth opportunity. Her initial poor observation could have cost her employment. The followers are more hesitant to trust the principal and are now more likely to skip his desk and ask questions directly of the district-level subject matter experts.

Subject C offered a third example of concealment of information in the workplace. She recalled a physical altercation where one student taunted another, and the one being picked-on hit the other. I think almost everyone would agree it can be difficult telling someone when they’ve made a mistake. It can be even harder telling a head-strong parent their child made one. Subject C was told by the teacher of the two students that she decided not to call the instigator’s parents about his conduct because it would have been “a difficult phone call.” The aggressor’s parents were called. In that version of the story, there was no mention of the conduct that caused the incident so that it would not lead to a confrontation with the instigator’s parents. This is an obvious case of the omission of facts out of convenience.
Subject D Data

Subject D is a 33-year-old white male. He works as a manager of a small family business retail operation with seven employees. He served as an individual contributor with this company for 6 years and in a supervisory role for the last 9 years. Subject D has a bachelor’s degree.

Subject D believes truth is about being “up front and honest with every customer even when it’s not the easy answer.” He added that he normally says what he means to his employees, but sometimes must modify his delivery based on how the employees prefer to hear criticism or guidance. For instance, he knows one employee likes having correction done in private, with specifics, and then both parties can move on. Another employee, based on previous attempts, would not do well with individual critique and instead prefers generic emails or policy memos out to the entire group reinforcing the corrective action. This method doesn’t single the employee out and plays to the way he learns. Subject D admitted that both methods convey similar or almost the same information, but that one method can be very specific and individually meaningful where the other may be less personal. Subject D says that telling the truth is, “the right thing to do. Honesty begets honesty. If you tell the truth to your employees, they’ll tell you the truth. It’s reciprocal.”

Subject D admits that he will hide the truth when situations boil over in the workplace. “To de-escalate a situation, I don’t add to the frustration.” In another instance, two employees were frustrated with one another’s performance and Subject D was in the middle of the argument. He knew that siding with one or the other, even though he thought the first employee was right and the second was wrong, would further inflame the situation. He decided to play a benign intermediary and facilitate the discussion until a resolution
surfaced. This concealment situation worked out well in a sense that all three parties achieved a result: the two employees could speak, felt heard, and move on, and the manager resolved the conflict without further influence required.

Subject D recalls another time when he had to tell an employee the truth about an unfortunate administrative situation. In a small business of seven employees, one signed up for and uses the medical benefits plan offered by the company. Subject D found out, through a third-party source, that the medical plan they offered this year is serviced by a fraudulent company. He confirmed the information with the proper authorities and then told the employee immediately. This insurance company takes the money from the employee, the company, and never actually processes or pays claims. “I would not allow her to go into medical debt, even if we weren’t responsible.” The employee took the news well, but what made her quickly able to focus on work again was a guarantee from Subject D and the company that she would be financially covered by the business until the situation could be corrected.

Subject D told me a story about concealment of information in the workplace. He took a day off for a funeral of a very close friend’s child after a long battle with a terminal disease, truly horrible circumstances, to say the least. Late that day, Subject D received an email from his superior regarding a sensitive customer complaint that would need to be handled right away, and if not, first thing the next morning by Subject D. This superior was supposed to be minding the business and handling these issues in the subordinate’s absence. Subject D returned to work the next day and handled the issue within 15 minutes. In the process, he found out that the superior himself had left midday without any reason provided to the employees or indication he wouldn’t be back. That piece of information
was left out of the original email message. The superior could not handle the issue because he wasn’t there, not because it was Subject D’s knowledge or expertise required to handle it. Subject D was very upset about the incident. “I need to know I can take a day off, especially in those circumstances.”

Subject D shared a story of concealment relating to a family business environment. “I don’t just manage workplace communication, I manage family communications, too.” During a protracted changeover between one generation to the next of ownership, Subject D noticed differences in the accounting of the finances. The previous generation would process cash in one way but the new generation implemented more stringent accounting of the cash. More specifically, the previous generation would, for very small services, pocket the small cash payment personally instead of ringing up the transaction at the register. When Subject D realized what was happening and the contrast between the previous and new policies, he decided to “not tell the new owner. He would lose it.” Subject D did say that if or when the business struggled financially, he would absolutely tell the new owner of the previous practice. But, for now, to keep the peace, he’d conceal the information.

Subject D offered an example of falsification of information in the workplace. An intern called out just before a shift claiming to be at an event in another state and would not be able to return for her shift. Subject D called the internship program manager to confirm the details and found out this intern was not out-of-state. Subject D confronted the intern with the information, and she revealed she lied because she had a “secret boyfriend that she was meeting” that she did not want her parents to know about. She was released from the program-affiliated internship immediately.
It’s noteworthy that Subject D was the only participant to speak candidly about his own use of accuracy in information dissemination. Subjects A, B, and C all referred to others or superiors in the workplace.
5.1 Analysis and Interpretation of Interview Data

The interviewees seemingly all defined information sharing or “truth” in the workplace as a similar concept: being up-front, having honesty and integrity, stating the facts, being able to trust, being genuine, straightforward, and telling it like it is. All four participants said it was “the right” or “the most important” thing to do in the workplace.

Each of the stories of leaders telling the truth was directly related to situations where someone’s health, job status, job performance, or personal finances were in jeopardy. These seemed to be no-fail situations for the interviewees.

We heard eight stories of information concealment and four stories of information falsification in the workplace (Ekman, 2009). Through their stories, the participants offered a series of industry-independent messaging for those who might lead. The study suggests that leaders should choose wisely when concealing information or falsifying data in the workplace because their own credibility and the character of the organization could be irreparably damaged.

Superiors may not know or recall everything all the time. When you do not, do not try to make it up because you could be wrong in your analysis or incorrectly represent reality. Sometimes information can be difficult to impart even though a simple omission could de-escalate a situation that is out of control. That misinformation can have lasting effects on relationships.

Disproportionate information dissemination or telling some one thing and others another can create in-groups who know a reality and out-groups who do not understand
what is really happening. These groups may or may not find out about the others. However, when they do, it can have lasting negative workplace effects.

Leaders should be up-front about problems so employees have the opportunity to correct the shortcoming or inappropriate condition. Followers can lose faith in a system if not consistently administered which undermine effective organizational followership. Difficult, strained, or stressful relationships can drive the omission of facts. Lastly, people sometimes lie to support personal gain.

The four participants from four different industries provide tangible corroboration of the literature we have examined on the value of truth or full information dissemination. We see practical indication in this qualitative study of the Burns’ (1978) suggestion that engaging the entire person with a transformational leadership intent requires time, energy and effort, and when you do not invest in your employees, they stagnate or regress. Each participant offered examples of Ekman’s (2009) informational concealment and falsification as commonplace and industry-independent occurrences in their workplaces. Some participants observed what Hamel (2007) described as information deficient or misinformation workplace conditions that discourage individual initiative and suppress new ideas.

The human drives and emotional facets of the leader-follower relationships were clearly on display in each of the four interviews. A few subjects noted the importance of telling the organization Sinek’s (2009) why as a way to engage their individual drives to excel. The organizational situations directly display the power Lawrence and Nohria (2002) models of human drives of acquire, learn, bond, and to defend. The emotions and drives were present as Subject D specifically described his observed use of a blend among
autonomy, control, and collaboration, as in Keidel (2010), when he tailored his mentorship of one employee one way and another a different way.

Follower development as a function of information sharing was also present in the four interviews. Each participant described how each employee progresses with information and similarly regresses with misinformation as Hersey & Blanchard (1974) depict with their inclusion leadership model of employee capacity evolution from direction through coaching and supporting to a culminating point of delegation or trust. A few subjects displayed the inverse of Kegan’s (1994) five orders of consciousness as misinformation broke down employee’s ability to see the organization in terms of systems or trans-systems because they could no longer see single points or simple cross-categorical relationships.

The four participants only seldom acknowledged biases in the workplace. Some seemingly concentrated on a superior’s incompetence and the resultant decision-making biases. I was surprised none of the four subjects acknowledged any presence of “decisions based on a person’s race or ethnicity… from psychologically and socially meaningful human groups of all sorts” or “age, gender, religion, class, sexuality, disability, physical attractiveness, profession, and personality” (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016, p. 17). As we read in the literature review, these types of biases are likely to be present in every workplace.

So far as leadership and followership as defined by the study, the four participants acknowledged much of the research from the literature review. All subjects shared stories of what Burns (1978) referred to as transactional and transforming leadership. Eldred’s (2007) power strategies was present for most of the interviews. Subject D’s moment of “influence” when brokering a truce between two battling employees proved highly
effective. Subject B’s superior displayed clear “cooperation” when he told his team the truth, banded his team together with common purpose, and together they convinced the workplace study team of his crew’s worth in the face of potential workforce reductions. Subject A turned a lose-lose into a win-win with “negotiation” when she decided to protect the individual who divulged confidential information and prove her worth to the organization through other methods instead of confronting the source of the inaccurate and hurtful information. Subject C described the appropriate struggle subset of “domination” when proving to her supervisor and the principal through documentation that she was correct and deserved fair treatment.

What was missing summarily and would likely make sense for different interview for another study would be to amend the interview to specifically ask questions with respect to professional development. It would have been helpful to explore certain aspects of the stories a little more with respect to the model Hersey & Blanchard (1974) put forth to include real-world examples of direction, coaching, support, and delegation.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Larger Study

I believe the literature validates the research question as worth asking with a larger study. This small sample of working-class individuals similarly confirms a need for quantitative, or broader, or projectable qualitative exploration of the concept. I imagine an expansion to a larger and more diverse sample. It would take a mathematically significant study including hundreds of participants from different regions of the United States, different industries, levels of experience, current positions, previous positions, education, and ethnicity to approach the ability to answer the research question in a either a qualitative or quantitative and more meaningful way. I do not believe my qualitative study has
sufficiently answered *all* impacts leader dissemination of accurate and timely information has on follower effectiveness especially since these were a few positive outcomes from intentional concealment or delay. While the above analysis offers a decent start and a validation of the research presented, a larger study could provide definition that is more precise.

I also imagine that many interviews may be difficult to administer in the way I conducted this study. I spent many hours for each study subject. The study required an hour to sit and record responses, then another two hours to write-up, code, and analyze each subject’s responses with respect to each other and in terms of the literature. A larger study would need either a team of interviewers or potentially a modification to a survey-driven mechanism for quicker but scalable coding and data manipulation.

5.3 Return to the Narratives

I’d like to recall the reason we’re investigating this topic with an eye toward some of the ideas we’ve uncovered along the way. The first story from Chapter 1 offers an example of how the “right” information at the “right” time in the “right” way can spark individual and organizational growth. The second story highlighted how the absence or bias of information can cause the downfall of otherwise functional organizations. We heard repetitious examples of these guiding principles over and over again in the four individual interviews.

Most organizational change normally feels like an experiment when you are in the process. Leaders are likely to be unsure of exactly what to and when to do it. But when you take the time, research the topic, communicate effectively, and thereby invest in followers’ competence, I believe they become more agile and more likely to enhance their own
production and their work. Under these conditions, the team is more likely to work together and for each other. Group and individual development may be more likely.

The experts in the literature and the participants in the limited interview study strongly support the idea that a workplace with more trust and transparency fosters professional growth and creates more leaders. Employees self-direct their specifically defined degrees of freedom, and the organization, overall, is in a much better position to achieve more. In my opinion, the organizational operation becomes more predictable and less chaotic, much more likely to anticipate problems. When problems do arise, organizational members are more likely to think through resolution and solve the problems as opposed to watching the situation fail to engage their increased organizational awareness and expanded capacity to contribute with a solution.

Workplace systems, like the CMMS we used in my story from Chapter 1, begin to work for the organization instead of as a deterrent to the success of the organization. Reporting, trending, metrics, and best practices flow freely from and enhance the viability of organizations where contributors are motivated, learning and growing. Personnel explore their environment and begin asking questions on deeper levels as an extension of their already attained progress.

Most often, leaders can overlook or negate professional development through lack of resources, time, funding, or simply a superior’s effort. But when information sharing and transparency are at the forefront, teams build lasting and resilient relationships with their leaders, peers and followers in ways that drive the organization’s mission without a specific, overestimated need for external direction.
5.4 Takeaways

This Capstone project accomplished a few tasks. First, it validates and solidifies my Organizational Dynamics experience with a coherent and useful examination of an organizational dynamics concept from which I can draw both in and out of the workplace.

Next, this Capstone could be a useful tool for any leader, follower or student of organizations to draw meaningful analysis and trends from – not only from the collected literature research but from the original interviews and interpretations therein. Remember, life is about telling stories and learning from others’ successes and failures. “The best way to communicate with people you are trying to lead is often through a story” (Denning, 2011, p. 1).

Lastly, I hope this collection of information could someday be the basis for a course I might teach with collegiate-level students about how information accuracy and timeliness affect the leader-follower relationship. This research and message about our human strengths and tendencies in organizations seem essential to organizational success regardless of business size, industry, sector, or region.

The tendency for and the necessity of truth in successful leadership deserves attention from those who could consider themselves leaders – and especially from those who would responsibly call themselves followers.
REFERENCES


Qualitative Interview Question and Answer Form

Anthony Aciutto  
DYNM Capstone Qualitative Interviews  
Interview Start Time: __________________________

Date: __________________________

Subject Name: __________________________

Interview End Time: __________________________

(Self-Identified) Age: __________________________

Years of Experience in Leadership: __________________________

(Self-Identified) Gender: __________________________

Years of Experience as Individual Contributor: __________________________

(Self-Identified) Occupation: __________________________

Education: Masters  Bachelors  Associates  High School

(Self-Identified) Ethnicity: __________________________

Circle One: OK with Name Appearing  OK. Confidential Coding Only

1) What is your definition of truth in the workplace? __________________________

2) In your opinion, why would someone tell the truth? __________________________

3) In your opinion, why would someone not tell the truth? __________________________

4) Can you tell me about a time when a leader told the truth in the workplace? __________________________

5) How did this situation work out? How did the followers react? __________________________

6) Can you tell me about a time when a leader did not tell the truth in the workplace? __________________________

7) How did this situation work out? How did the followers react? __________________________

8) Can you imagine circumstances when someone would conceal something in the workplace? __________________________

9) Can you imagine circumstances when someone would falsify something in the workplace? __________________________

Interviewer Observations (and back side of sheet): __________________________