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Constraints to Exercising Leadership in the Call Center Environment

Karen M. Chouinard MA
University of Southern Maine

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Constraints to Exercising Leadership in the
Call Center Environment

Karen M. Chouinard

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We hereby recommend that the thesis of Karen M. Chouinard entitled:
Constrains to Exercising Leadership in the Call Center Environment,

be accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

_____ Advisor

_____ Reader

_____ Director

_____ Dean, Lewiston-Auburn College

Abstract

This paper addresses the constraints to exercising leadership in the call center environment. It combines a review of existing research on leadership, research on call centers as organizations, and a case study with call center team leaders.

The main constraints focused on are the rapid advances in technology and their impact on exercising leadership, organizational structure and its role in constraining leadership, and role ambiguity for the team leader. The case study was conducted in a group discussion type of format with team leaders from across the Maine company's four call center sites.

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Introduction

Since the beginning of my journey along the path to obtaining my Master's Degree in Leadership Studies, I have had many opportunities to reflect on leadership. The most enlightening reflection—which I now realize was my personal crucible experience—came in the very first required course entitled, “Foundations of Leadership I.” In this course, we were asked to write an autobiographical case study regarding a bad leadership experience. After sharing my case study, the professor's feedback was that the position I held was not truly one of leadership; instead, it was one characterized as merely implementing the directions given by the hierarchical layers of management above me. At first I was crushed to hear this, and I wondered how and why I had been led to believe that my position as a frontline supervisor in a call center was a leadership position. It later became evident to me that positions exist that may be deemed as leadership, but that the exercise of leadership is not fostered or enabled for reasons I wanted to discover.

Over the course of my next few classes, I came to realize how accurate the professor really was. I decided to turn this personal crucible into a focus on determining what the barriers were to exercising leadership in the call center organization. In working on this thesis, I was able to convince my employer to allow me to conduct a workshop on leadership for the frontline supervisors. This workshop was the result of several years of trying to convince the organization to take a closer look at the constraints to exercising leadership that exist for individuals in the position of call center frontline supervisor.

The workshop content was based on my coursework in leadership studies, research into call center leadership and my personal experience as a frontline supervisor in a local Maine call center. It was an opportunity to gather the call center leaders together armed with their job description and job expectation documents and discuss leadership and what that looks like in practice within the call center organization. The desired outcome of the workshop was to identify what aspects of the position were driving management behaviors instead of leadership. Additionally, the workshop allowed me to gather data about the constraints of technology, a multi-layered hierarchy of reporting relationships, and role ambiguity.

A combination of coursework in the Master's in Leadership Studies program, reviewing literature on call center leadership, the workshop which I use as a case study, my personal experience, and informal discussions with peers and others in positions of leadership in the call center organization have made this journey possible. The journey took me from the defining moment when the professor told me that my job was not exercising leadership, to the conclusion of the workshop and affirmation from other call center leaders that, indeed, there are organizational constraints to exercising leadership in the call center.

The Research Problem

Leadership is defined as “a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization,” (Yukl, 2002, p. 2). Defining leadership in this way leads to the conclusion that exercising leadership should be fairly consistent across different organizations. But in my experience, exercising leadership in a call center environment is prevented by forces or factors that are important to uncover. There seem to be some barriers or constraints to truly exercising leadership, and it is important to identify them in order to either remove the barrier or to find ways to work around it. The combination of observations on the job, researching existing literature, and creating and facilitating workshop (or leadership forum) paved the way for me to discover the three primary factors constraining leadership in my employer’s call center.

The purpose of this thesis is to use existing research to ascertain support for the belief that the three primary factors constraining leadership comprise the following: role ambiguity due to the task-driven nature of the leadership role in a call center, advances in technology driving behaviors that represent managing more than leading, and the complexities and loss of control due to the multi-layered structure of reporting relationships.

The leadership role that will be referred to throughout this paper is that of the leader of a team of frontline representatives in a call center. The title of this role varies in the literature that was used for this research; however, all titles shared the common definition of someone being responsible for a group or team of call center representatives known as customer service

representatives (CSR). In terms of organizational hierarchy, this position is entry level in the call center management hierarchy, and finally for the purposes of this paper, this position of leadership will be referred to as a team leader.

The team leaders' responsibility is to ensure that each of their team members, sometimes referred to as direct reports, is meeting established productivity goals while delivering service to the customer at a level consistent with the organization's service expectations. This researcher found that there was a disconnect between the stated expectations of the job set forth by the organization and the descriptions of leadership in current texts and other literature. The major clash seemed to occur between the organization's constant reminders to exercise leadership and the stated expectations within the job description of the position. If a role is defined by many tasks, could it really be a leadership role? This researcher set forth on an exploration of the literature to see if other researchers had found this same phenomenon to be true in other organizations, particularly call center environments.

To gain insight into the evolution of leadership within organizations, a historical view ranging from the strictly managed organizations of the past to the present day organizations was reviewed. This research also unveils the evolution of organizational hierarchies and supports the idea that organizations with multi-layered structures can present barriers to exercising leadership, especially for those at the lower levels of the hierarchy.

My main research focus was to determine if the constraints to exercising leadership in the call center environment I have identified have been documented by others. In addition to reviewing the literature, I also conducted a workshop in the call center setting which enabled me to get first-hand knowledge from leaders who experience constraints to leading employees instead of just managing performance. By reviewing the literature, conducting the workshop,

and drawing upon first-hand experience and observations, I will draw conclusions that support my initial theory that the barriers to leadership in a call center are role ambiguity, technology, and hierarchy.

Defining the Constraints

Defining Technology in the Call Center

Technology plays an important role in the call center environment as it represents the way that work is delivered to the employee and allows the organization to measure success. Ellis and Taylor (2006) highlighted the qualitative advances in information networking technology as an impetus for companies to begin utilizing call centers for customer service and sometimes sales. “The dramatic increase in computing capacity, and concomitant price reduction, enabled the transmission and processing of enormous amounts of data, leading to the further integration of computer and new voice technologies” (p. 109).

Technology, as it pertains to the call center, is typically in the form of phone technology systems, including the automatic call distributor, computer technology that allows the representative to record data, and systems that allow the team leader to monitor computer as well as phone interactions. Alder (2001) reported that an estimated 6 million U.S. workers were monitored using electronic technology in 1987, and this number rose to at least 40 million as of 1996 (p. 324). Alder (2001) also noted that in 2000, the American Management Association reported that as many as 75% of large companies were monitoring their employees electronically (p. 324).

Technology is continually evolving with increased capacity for measurement of the work done in the call center. Most organizations cited the following reasons for using monitoring technology: to increase productivity, to improve quality and service, and to reduce costs (Alder, 2001; Moorman and Wells, 2003; Norling, 2001; Van den Broek, Callaghan, & Thompson, 2004; Wickham & Collins, 2004).

Today's call centers have easy access to technological tools that can observe, record, and measure, almost every aspect of the frontline employee's work. This abundance of data can be generated in the form of reports that the team leader can use to measure the productivity of employees and what they are doing at almost any given moment. Reynolds (2006) listed the top 20 contact center metrics for which technology can generate data. Much of this data is obtained via automated call distributor systems:

- number of calls answered
- average speed of answer
- number of calls abandoned
- average hold time, customer on hold
- representative's average talk time
- amount of time the representative blocked calls from coming in
- service level – percentage of calls answered within a defined wait threshold
- longest delay in queue
- transfer rate
- agent occupancy- measure of time an agent is busy on customer contacts compared with available time
- schedule adherence
- schedule efficiency
- average handle time
- after call work time
- cost per call
- blockage

- self-service availability
- first resolution rate
- adherence to procedures
- up sell or cross sell rates (pp. 1-5)

While the preceding is not a complete list of the data that can be obtained from the technology used in call centers, it provides insight into the many different statistics and measures that team leaders have at their disposal.

Some call centers also use call recording technology to evaluate the quality of the service the representative provides. Computer monitoring, recording of calls, phone metric tools, and similar technological enhancements have all added new dimensions to what leaders can use to obtain and track data about employees. Panker (2004) noted that Borders Group Inc. evaluates its agents by randomly monitoring a sample of about six of their calls each month.

Supervisors meet with agents monthly to evaluate the quality of the interactions.

Borders also tracks service levels, such as the number of contacts an agent makes per hour. When agents sign on to the system, they compare their stats with the center's averages and can access updated performance information using dashboards on their screens (p. 2).

The pace of change has affected call center technology, forcing an almost constant need for faster systems as well as for technology that ties together all of the various selling channels: retail, on-line, and catalog sales. Recent developments in call center technology allow the customers ways to get the information they want without ever speaking to a representative. However, when these 'digital clients' have a question or service issue, they prefer to contact the call center for a quick answer instead of searching on-line (Goldenberg, 2008). This requires

that computer technology be able to supply information to the CSRs regarding each customer's history of interactions with that organization. The impact of the fast paced changes that technology brings to the call center environment creates a need for the team leader to ensure that representatives fully utilize the resources available to them to provide top-notch customer service. Interacting with CSRs in this way presents an opportunity for the team leader to exercise leadership in the form of teaching and guiding.

Call Center Structure

To better understand the structure of the call center, it is important to discuss its origins within the evolution of modern businesses. In the 1970-1980s, organizations began to grow and diversify, which resulted in restructuring their sales and customer service components into separate entities. Ellis and Taylor (2006) found that the impact of technological innovation and application resulted in call centers becoming an organizational imperative. The call center was defined by the integration of telephonic and computer technologies (p. 109).

The call center is typically a division or department within a larger company. Call centers, also referred to as contact centers are further defined by Fluss (2008) with the following characteristics, "Contact centers use technology, structure, and best practices to manage inbound and outbound calls—plus emails, chat sessions, and faxes" (p.12). Within the call center division itself, multiple layers of management are often organized in a hierarchical structure. Since many call centers retain the top-down management structure common to factories, they are often compared to them using terms that emphasize the control of labor. Much of the literature on call centers notes their poor reputation for people management, little career advancement and high rates of attrition. Beirne, Riach, and Wilson (2004) concluded: "Call centres have attracted an enormous amount of academic and media attention in recent years, most of it projecting a

very bleak picture of life at the sharp end of a technological treadmill” (p. 96). Wickham and Collins (2004) reviewed literature on call centers as work organizations and found them referred to as electronic sweatshops or white collar factories. Additionally, three defining and distinct features of the call center were identified: Taylorization (embedded in the key technology, ACDS, which routes incoming calls to the next available agent), emotional labor (the agent must make the customer feel valued despite a scripted interaction), and surveillance (visual in the open office plan and in aural monitoring of calls) (pp. 4-5).

In the call center’s hierarchical structure, the team leader’s position is usually near the bottom, often just one level above the frontline representative, and this can limit the leader’s decision-making power. The team leader has to pass ideas up through layers of management before implementing any change. This constrains the exercise of leadership because it removes the in-the-moment ideas and risk-taking that could highlight the individual team leader’s creativity.

Conversely, the benefit of having limited authority can lead to an enhanced understanding of the circumstances that the frontline employee faces. Heifetz (1994) supported this observation by concluding that, “Operating with little or no authority places one closer to the detailed experiences of some of the stakeholders in the situation. One may lose the larger perspective but gain the fine grain of people’s, hopes, pains, values, habits, and history” (p. 188). In my experience, building a trusting relationship with each employee can be one way of overcoming constraints to exercising leadership in the call center.

Evolution of Organizational Structure - Management vs. Leadership

Research into organizational structure reveals that, over time, organizations have evolved from the factories of the early 1900s to the complex business systems of today. A brief glimpse

back into this evolution shows some of the reasons why the structure of the organization can constrain the exercise of leadership.

Today's organizations represent the consequences of structural designs that have weathered economic fluctuations and increased competition. Gone are the industrial days when the family-run business thrived with the patriarch at the helm and the manager dictating direction to the workers. The top-down structure may have worked well at one time, and many businesses clung to this design through much of the early 1900s. As companies began to grow and diversify, so did the number of positions and levels of management. Managers were previously viewed as the people who took charge, were directive, and authoritative. For example, Morgan (2006) observed that "Organizations are many things at once! They are complex and multifaceted; they are paradoxical. That's why the challenges facing management are often so difficult (p. 337).

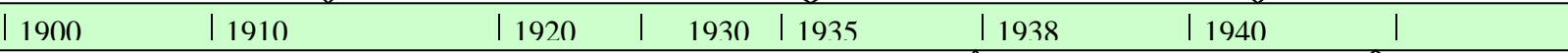
The following timeline gives more details regarding the evolution of organizational structure and points to the evolving need for leadership.

A brief history of organizational structure

Labor was a critical factor in the firm. As technology became more advanced, training took longer and was more varied and specialized. It became more costly to turn over labor, thus requiring recruitment to become more selective. This caused labor's power to increase and the appearance of Unions. Management adjusted to by trying to establish a system of cooperation between capital, management and labor.

Changes to the organizational structure required changes to the way people were treated. The days of the "dark, satanic mills" which thrived on child labor and supervisor brutality became impermissible.

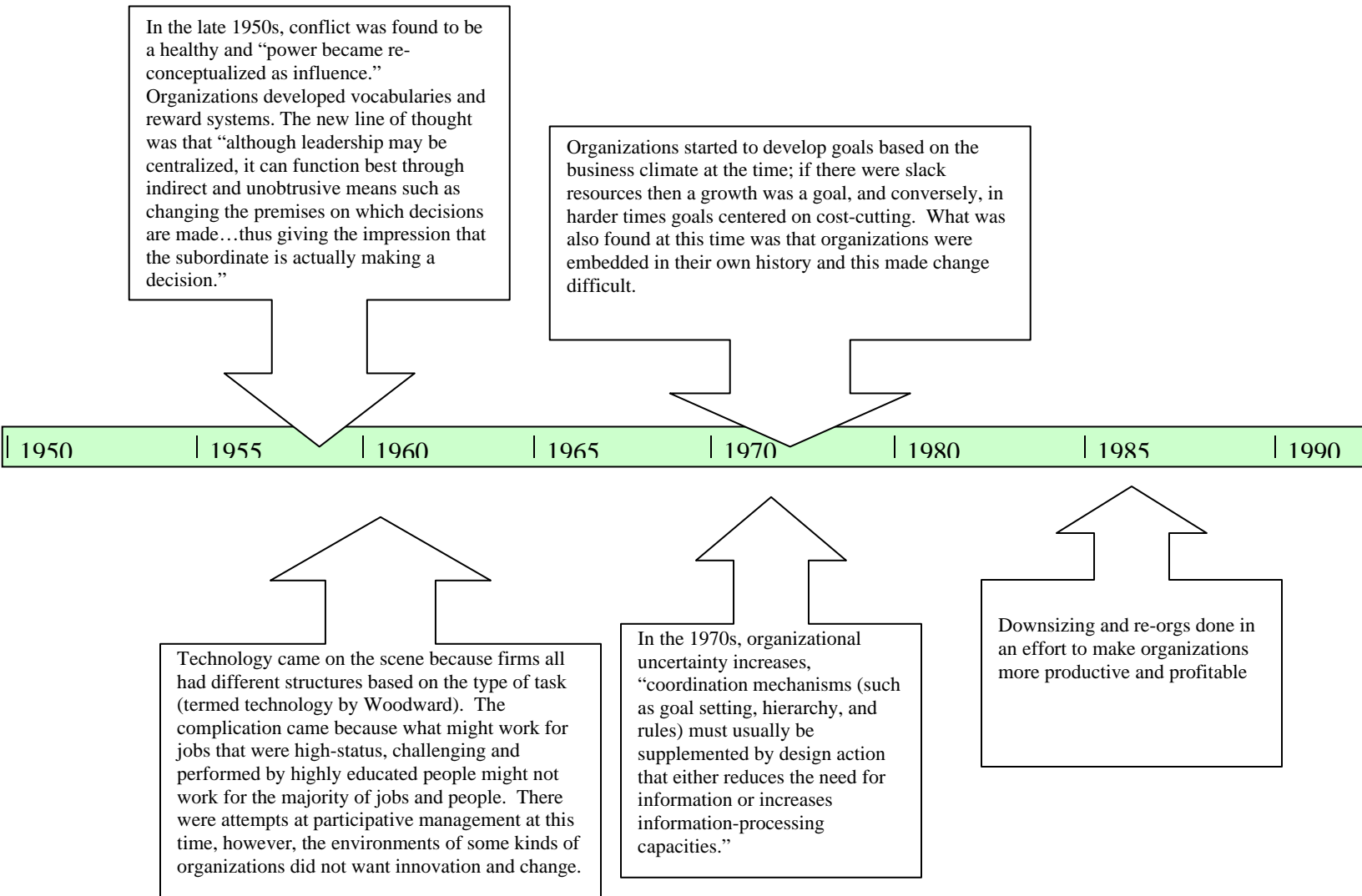
In 1938 came a new theory of organizations cooperative system, not the product of mechanical engineering. The traits of a good leader in these organizations were kindness, courteousness, loyalty and courage. Next came the dynamics of the group within the organization and defining what conditions were optimum for the group and organization to be successful.



Markets were increasing in complexity and products became more variable. This increased the number of plants and required a more adaptive organization to handle technological changes. "The scientific management school was ill-equipped to deal rapid change." Once the proper structure was identified, this would forever run a firm. The late 1930's brought a need for adaptation and change in industry, subsequently abandoning some scientific management principles.

Mergers and growth happened at a brisk pace and gone were the days of the firm of the founding entrepreneur. The mechanical structure of the past now searched for "the qualities of leadership that could fill the large footsteps of the entrepreneur."

In the 1940s, Max Weber's writings on the efficiency of bureaucracy were translated from German. Managers were fond of this type of structure because of its clear lines of communication and authority. Weber's organizational model stressed expertise, more so than leadership traits.



Frederick Taylor studied turn of the century organizations and helped to implement his scientific management approach which “broke tasks into minute parts and retrained workers to get the largest payoff from each motion (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 38). Max Weber viewed the turn-of-the-century organization as patriarchal; a single individual acted as father figure with almost unlimited power. Weber’s model of the organization focused on bureaucracy with several major features: “1. a fixed division of labor, 2. a hierarchy of offices, 3. a set of rules

governing performance, 4.a separation of personal from official property and rights, 5. technical qualifications for selecting personnel, and 6. employment as primary occupation and long term career” (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 38). Taylor and Weber, as well as many others after them, examined the elements of structure and what impact it has on morale, productivity, and effectiveness. The result of these efforts has resulted in a better understanding of the need for leadership in organizations, as well as many different forms of re-organization or restructuring efforts.

Many organizations have also restructured to meet changing economic conditions, while still holding on to a structure that remained hierarchical. Cloke and Goldsmith (2002) summarized the state of organizations in the 2000s: “Hundreds of thousands of change efforts are underway in organizations throughout the world, each seeking to invent new strategies, streamline processes, decrease costs, improve customer service, and increase productivity” (p. 44). An environment of uncertainty is prevalent in organizations today as the needs change more rapidly than ever and organizations struggle to adapt.

Much of the literature on organizational theory and evolution points to a distinct difference between management and leadership.

Management, as defined by Antonioni (2000), typically involves handling or controlling the work of other people, which generally means directing others so that their work meets the expectations of the organization’s customers and thus maintains the organization’s productivity and profitability. Managers plan the work, implement the plan and evaluate performance” (p. 28).

Bratton, Grint, & Nelson (2005), define management as a process that produces a degree of order and consistency in human systems (p. 24). Yukl (2002) offers this distinction between management and leadership:

Managers value stability order, and efficiency, whereas leaders value flexibility, innovation and adaptation. Managers are concerned about how things get done, and they try to get people to perform better. Managers organize, plan, delegate and control work. Leaders are concerned with what things mean to people, and they try to get people to agree about the most important things to be done (p. 5).

As organizations evolved, the need for more than management functions was recognized as workers sought out a voice against unfavorable work conditions and inflexible systems and processes. Morgan (1989) concluded that, “Many organizations often resisted fundamental change – because people, for one reason or another, wished to cling to a hierarchical [management] model” (p.64). But change was needed, and leadership was to become the voice of change as well as the voice of the employees. As early as 1921, Munson defined leadership as the creative and directive force of morale. The definition of leadership continued to evolve and change throughout the 1990s as suggested by the following:

- The process by which an agent induces a subordinate to behave in a desired manner (Bennis, 1959).
- The presence of a particular influence relationship between two or more persons (Hollander & Julian, 1969).
- Directing and coordinating the work of group members (Fiedler, 1967).
- An interpersonal relation in which others comply because they want to, not because they have to (Merton, 1969).
- Transforming followers, creating visions of the goals that may be attained and articulating for the followers the ways to attain those goals (Bass, 1985; Tichy & Devanna, 1986).

- The process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing its goals (Roach & Behling, 1984).
- Actions that focus resources to create desirable opportunities (Campbell, 1991) (as cited in Wren, 1995, pp. 41-42).

Antonioni (2000) suggested that, “Leading means speaking up with new and better ideas that can require changing established systems” (p. 28). In order for organizations to evolve and stay competitive with new and emerging entities, it was important for systems and processes to change. Furthermore, Heifetz (1994) concluded that, “our societies and organizations clearly need leadership [because] we are facing many adaptive challenges” (p. 26). For all these reasons, it can be concluded that leadership is important to the success of organizations. The work of Heifetz, Morgan, Bolman and Deal, Bratton and Grint, and Yukl all points to the conclusion that organizations can no longer support a directive, authoritarian management structure that disregards the needs of the people within an organization. We must have leaders to show the way and motivate employees to work toward organizational goals. Heifetz (1994) observed, “Business people have drawn a distinction between leadership vs. management and exercising leadership has also come to mean providing a vision and influencing others to realize it through non-coercive means” (p.15). As the literature reveals, the definitions of leadership vary; however, a common thread woven into all of the definitions of leadership is the focus on developing a relationship with the people who are being led.

Some organizations have struggled to move their structure from strictly management-oriented to leadership-oriented with a management balance. Kotter noted the importance of leadership in coping with change within organizations. He concluded, “Coping with complexity and coping with change shape the characteristic activities of management and leadership ... more change always demands more leadership” (as cited in Wren, 1995. p. 116). Nevertheless,

leadership and management can and do co-exist in many organizations. Kotter argues that both leadership and management have specific functions and are complementary systems. He summarized, “Most U.S. Corporations today are over managed and under led. They need to develop their capacity to exercise leadership. The real challenge is to combine strong leadership and strong management and use each to balance the other,” (as cited in Wren, 1995, p. 114-115).

Overview of Leadership in the Call Center Organization

This researcher observed and experienced leadership within a call center in which inbound calls are taken for a well-known outdoor sporting goods company. This section will describe the call center as an organization in more depth to further define the expectations of the leader in this type of organization.

Norling (2001) defined the call center in this way, “Broadly defined, a call centre is any communications platform from which firms deliver services to customers via remote, real-time contact ... this typically means live agents operating telephones and delivering a defined set of services” (p. 155). Companies such as GE, AT&T, MCI, and Pacific Bell all have call centers as a facet of their business (Alder, 2001). The call center is most often one department or unit within the larger organization and typically deals with service issues concerning clients or customers. This department often contains a multi-level hierarchical structure of leadership and management levels much like the larger business. The call center may also be logistically separated from the organization that it is a part of, for example, this researcher’s workplace is located in a separate building about 30 miles from the corporate offices of the parent company.

Call center work has grown rapidly over the last 20 years with more businesses utilizing the center as their service platform.

The U.S. Department of Labor reported that in 2006, about 2.2 million people were employed as customer service representatives in call centers. Although they were found in a variety of industries, about 23 percent of customer service representatives worked in finance and insurance. The largest numbers were employed by insurance carriers, insurance agencies and brokerages, and banks and credit unions. About 14 percent of customer service representatives were employed in administrative and support services...Another 11 percent of customer service representatives were employed in retail trade establishments such as general merchandise stores and food and beverage stores. Other industries that employ significant numbers of customer service representatives include information, particularly the telecommunications industry; manufacturing, such as printing and related support activities; and wholesale trade (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008, p. 3)

The Department of Labor describes the call center as a work environment that can be crowded and noisy. Representatives typically have a workspace consisting of a cubicle equipped with a telephone, headset and a computer. Workers are usually expected to minimize the length of each call, while still providing excellent service. To ensure that these procedures are followed, conversations may be monitored by supervisors, which can be stressful for the CSR. According to Wickham and Collins (2004), "Calls can be monitored or actually taped, in either case without the agent necessarily knowing it is occurring. Certainly the sense of being monitored in this way is often pervasive" (p. 5). Thus, some of the functions of the team leader's role in a call center are to ensure procedures are followed, to insure service goals are being met, and to monitor conversations with customers.

Expectations of the call center team leader and role ambiguity

In order for leadership to be developed within an organization, it must first support and promote the role of the leader. One can easily train a supervisor to interpret reports and to understand and manage to department goals; however, the greater task is to encourage and support the behaviors of leadership such as coaching and guiding employees toward meeting established goals. The existing literature on call centers does not place a focus on discussing the role of the team leader as Wickham and Collins (2004) concluded, “The existing literature on call centers focuses largely on control within the call centre as isolated from the rest of the organization and largely from the rest of society” (p. 16).

In the research that does mention the team leader’s role, the positional title of this leader was referred to in the following ways: team leader (Beirne, Riach, & Wilson, 2004), supervisor (Alder, 2001), or in the case of the call center used for this research, frontline supervisor. While the titles were different, the expectations and organizational structure of each job title were similar. The team leader has responsibility for a group of CSRs that are organized on a team; however, the independent nature of the CSR job does not require the group to function as a traditional team. Yukl (2002) deems this a “co-acting group” whereby the team members do not depend on each other and they do not need coordination of roles (p. 306). The size of the team that the team leader is responsible for managing was not discussed in the call center research; however, an informal survey of area call centers showed that teams vary in size from 4 to over 35 members.

Role ambiguity can exist between the organization’s stated expectations of a job such as team leader, and its actual mission or vision statements. As defined by Bratton, Grint, and Nelson (2005), “A role in an organizational setting is an expected set of activities or behaviors stemming from a position held” (p. 7). In the experience of this researcher holding the job title

of frontline supervisor is a source of confusion due to the ambiguous expectations of the role and the conflicting views stated by the company. The job description contains expectations such as ensuring reasonable call length, service goals are met by monitoring call quality, generating reports to assess attendance, tracking break length, measuring the time between calls, and keeping performance documentation. Since many of these tasks and duties are more management-type functions, confusion is created between the company's expectations that leadership be provided while simultaneously completing the list of tasks. The research of Green, Anderson, and Shivers found that "the organizational setting presents the leader with various opportunities and constraints that strongly influences the quality of their exchange relationship with their subordinates" (as cited in Shivers-Blackwell, 2006, p. 27). Yukl (2002) confirmed that, "The extent to which subordinates, peers and superiors make incompatible demands on a manager determines how much role conflict will be experienced and has obvious implications for the difficulty of satisfying various demands," (p. 33).

Many team leaders try to meet the needs of their workers. Subsequently, even though one may hold a position that is considered one of leadership within the organization's structure, the actual role can consist of tasks that cause ambiguity between role and expectation. For example, the leader of the team can attempt to guide the team members to a greater understanding of the company vision; however, they must do this while insuring that production targets are met and productivity goals achieved. For this reason, the leader often relies on managing employee performance to achieve results by focusing on a number targets instead of leading team members to achieve the results by guiding their development and using positive encouragement. This push and pull between being told to provide leadership but manage performance causes ambiguity for the team leader. Shivers-Blackwell (2006) refers to this as the

differences between transactional and transformational leadership. She studied the influence of perceptions of organizational structure and culture on the leadership role. Her results indicated that when managers interpret the structure of an organization to be mechanistic, the resulting leadership behaviors are more transactional (pp. 34-35).

The potential for reducing the ambiguity of the role lies in the organization's willingness to reduce the number of tasks expected of the team leader, especially the administrative tasks. In order to truly exercise leadership, the organization must support giving the team leader time to work directly with employees so that they can coach and develop them. Providing this guidance on an individual level and being able to help individuals achieve their greatest potential is exercising leadership.

How Technology Constrains the Exercise of Leadership in the Call Center

It would seem that advances in technology would make the work of the team leader easier; however, as Morgan (2006) concluded, the information technology has led to increased surveillance: "Through the use of sophisticated software and on-line information systems ... telephone operators and service staff can be subject to constant control ... their productivity can be measured and updated every minute of the day" (p. 312). Computer monitoring, recording of calls, metric tools, and similar technological enhancements have increased the team leader's access to information about the work of the frontline employee. Alder (2001) noted that the primary use of monitoring was administrative in nature; however, "its objective is to help management enforce production standards, assess worker performance against those standards, and dispense rewards and punishment accordingly" (p. 135). The effect of electronic performance monitoring on the leader-follower relationship can be negative if the employee perceives a lack of trust.

Another potentially negative effect of the reporting technology is that it takes a significant amount of time to utilize—time to generate the reports, review the data, and decide on ways to implement the findings of the data. Wickham and Collins (2004) support the notion of time, “Listening to the tape of an agent requires passive and ‘unproductive’ time from the supervisor” (p. 5). The impact is that less time is available for those in roles that are defined as leadership roles to be able to actually exercise leadership in the form of coaching and developing followers to better performance. As Heifetz (1994) noted, “Frequently there are impediments to leadership intrinsic to the setting that would make it hard for anybody to lead” (p. 49). The call center seems to be one such setting in which technology becomes an impediment to exercising leadership because it adds complexity that can be difficult to overcome.

Advances in technology have also increased the number of forces that put pressure on organizations, including call centers, to adapt to rapid change. Alder (2001) concluded, “Organizations have monitored their employees for centuries; however, recent advances in electronic technology are transforming the nature of employee performance monitoring” (p. 324). Proponents of performance monitoring cite increased productivity, improved service, and cost reduction, while critics note that electronic performance monitoring decreases job satisfaction, increases stress, diminishes trust, and negatively effects work relationship and research further indicates that monitoring may reduce communication between supervisors and employees as well as change the nature of that communication (Alder, 2001, pp. 324-331). It is this change in the nature of the communication that is the manifestation of the leadership constraint. Utilizing statistics to facilitate a performance discussion with an employee often sends the message of moving a number from one point to another without an explanation.

Conversely, if leadership were exercised in this discussion, the employee would be coached on ways to meet the goal.

It has been the observation of this researcher that call center team leaders in her company were managing performance using statistic measurements as the only tool. Improvement was measured by an increase or decrease in the numerical statistic. To get a more accurate read on the situation, a discussion forum (workshop) was held with team leaders from the four call center locations of the researcher's company. The results of that discussion follow in the next section.

While the reasons for using the phone monitoring technology are documented in the literature, the impact on the team leader using this technology is not documented. On one hand, the reports provided by the technology can assist a leader in pinpointing areas of performance the employee needs to improve; conversely, the reports can also become a crutch for some leaders. When the team leader uses only the numerical statistics that the technology provides when speaking to CSRs about their performance, they take more of a management approach instead of exercising leadership. While an element of necessity exists in using this type of data to ensure goals are met, what is often missing from the interaction is the coaching on how to reach the goal. It is the coaching and guiding part that truly represents the exercise of leadership.

Case Study

A Workshop on Leading vs. Managing in one Maine Call Center

Since having my personal crucible experience in 2003, I began a crusade to get others in the call center where I am employed as a frontline supervisor to listen to my ideas regarding the existence of constraints to exercising leadership in the call center environment. Not surprisingly, getting a large established organization to listen to the theories of one employee only a few levels from the bottom of the organizational chart is not an easy task. Whenever the topic of leadership

was raised in meetings or other venues, I took advantage of every opportunity to point out the constraints to leading in the call center environment.

In the fall of 2006 when the call center (also known as the Customer Satisfaction department) suffered its third consecutive decline in scores on an employee satisfaction survey, minds were finally opened to new ideas. One of the more alarming results on the survey was employees reporting that their leaders did not care about them or their best interests. Call center employees reported that they did not feel that their team leader spent enough time with them. What employees seemed to need and want was leadership in its truest form – someone to coach and guide them to meet the department goals instead of using performance management tactics. The overall results of the survey seemed to confirm what I believed to be true from my experience and also what I had observed– that the employee had someone who was called their ‘leader;’ however, what they expressed were feelings of being managed not led. One of the survey questions asked employees to describe their concerns about their current work experience and here are several responses:

Internally company functionally continues to embrace excessively rigid structure.

Leaders set high expectations for subordinates ... it is looked at that you are only as good as your average handling time and if it is high, that’s bad. I feel that we are just a number. The level of micromanaging, I had a supervisor in the past year that was always too busy and stressed out to do the job well. Leaders here don’t make a connection with us, often it feels like they are administrators instead of in the trenches with us ... it gets discouraging, they don’t develop the relationship part well.

These survey results spawned upper levels of management to place a new focus on leadership development programs. With the department’s sudden realization that ‘leadership’

was something that needed to be developed, a group was formed to design a leadership development program for the team leaders in all of the company's call centers. One interesting note here is that I was asked to be the 'leader' of this leadership development group because of my commitment to the study of leadership. This was exactly the leverage I needed to finally gain approval to conduct a workshop.

My original workshop concept was to offer a series of discussion forum sessions with pre-reading assigned in the form of articles on leadership. These readings were to be the springboard to group discussions and other forums. The series of sessions would take the journey from discovering the meaning of leadership, to examining the current state of the call center leader, to identifying the constraints to leadership, and finally discovering ways to lead despite the constraints. It was my hope that by dissecting the expectations of the frontline supervisor in my own workplace that personnel in positions deemed "leadership" would be able to confirm my hypothesis that constraints to providing leadership in the call center environment do exist. Subsequent sessions of the workshop would have focused on examining the structure of the organization with the proposed outcome being a greater understanding of the constraints that hierarchies place upon decision making and authority.

While the call center management wanted to begin sessions and classes to develop leadership, resistance surfaced to the idea of a workshop series. The resistance stemmed from the opposing viewpoints that leadership development was needed based on survey results; however, there was the conflict that team leaders faced with competing issues all requiring what little time they had to complete their tasks. Ultimately, the senior management team decided to support gathering the team leaders from all four of the organization's call centers together for one two-hour session. With this abbreviated timeframe, the workshop was pared down to more

of a discussion forum where my ideas could be presented, and I could seek agreement or disagreement about whether other team leaders had experienced similar constraints to exercising leadership.

The objectives for the session titled Leadership vs. Management included the following:

- Participants will be able to further define the meaning of leadership
- Participants will be able to differentiate between leading and managing
- Participants will be able to recognize aspects of their position that can constrain the exercise of leadership by reviewing the job expectation documents.

The audience for the session was 35 team leaders from four call centers of the outdoor sporting company that employs this researcher. Also in attendance were members of the upper levels of management including several senior supervisors and the manager of two of the four call centers. The significance of these other participants is that their presence can sometimes change the participation level of audience members. For example, I have observed that when the direct supervisor of a team leader is in attendance, they respond less candidly. Unfortunately, there seems to be a perception of being evaluated for participation in the session. Consequently, the true opinion of the participant is not what is conveyed.

In setting up the physical space for the workshop, I made the conscious decision to have six participants per table in a large conference room. The tables faced a large screen on which a PowerPoint presentation was shown as visual support for the concepts being presented.

On each table I placed colored folders with a packet of handouts for each participant. The packets included: 1) A sheet on which to record words or phrases that came to mind when participants thought of an exceptional leader, 2) An application activity to allow the participant to take the concepts from the workshop and apply them to work in the coming days and months,

3) An evaluation of the workshop that included questions to assess learning as well as to gather ideas for future sessions, 4) The list of leadership definitions with their authors and copyright dates, 5) A document I had received as a student entitled “Leadership” and gleaned from the work of Kouzes & Posner’s book, *The Leadership Challenge*, Bolman & Deal’s book, *Leading the Soul*, and Heifetz & Linsky’s, *Leadership on the Line*, 6) A document entitled Management that was also adapted from the same previous three books, and 7) A resource list that included sources I had used in my own course literature review as well as in preparation of the workshop material.

My own past experience with this audience proved beneficial in the design of the session. The workshop needed an attention-getting opening to gain buy-in for the importance of the topic of leading vs. managing. I decided to tell the story of how I came to focus my Master’s Degree work on the constraints to exercising leadership in the call center environment. With the aid of a PowerPoint slide depicting *The Crucible*, I told the following story:

One of the required texts in my coursework was *Geeks and Geezers*, by Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas (2002). The part of the book that really struck me, and relates to our work here today, is one of the theories the authors developed to define how leaders come to be leaders. Bennis and Thomas (2002) created a model that explains how individuals make meaning out of difficult events – the model is called a crucible, which can be likened to the defining moment that causes you to change direction or creates a great ‘ah-ha’ moment.

The moment that really defined our type of leadership and helped me to make meaning of the role of ‘team leader/frontline supervisor’ came back in 2003. I was in my very first class in the Master’s program called Foundations of Leadership I. The assignment was to write a real life case study about a bad leadership experience– one in which we were not

pleased with how we demonstrated leadership. We had to read our example aloud to the class, so the rest of the class could critique the leadership and offer ideas about what could have been done better. To be honest, I do not recollect the actual example I used but that was not as important as the feedback I received. The professor, a very credible leadership expert, said these words to me: “that is not leadership – that is implementing direction given from above.” I distinctly remember feeling crushed! How could this professor say that I was not a leader – only an implementer? More importantly, how could my organization tell me I was in a leadership position but what I was doing was not leading? For me, the crucible moment was hearing the truth! The next step was to decide what about this position that is considered to be leadership is standing in the way of leading? After reading many books and articles about the call center as a type of organization, I came to these assumptions: leadership is constrained by role ambiguity, technology, and hierarchical structure. So, if what we are doing is not leading, then what is leadership?

It was important to ground the participants in the concept of leadership, so I asked them to think about an exceptional leader in their own lives. Utilizing the work of Sashkin and Sashkin (2003, p. 9), I used this introduction to the activity:

Have you ever known or worked for or with someone you consider a truly exceptional leader? Think of someone with whom you had a significant amount of interaction – it could be a past or present situation. Take this a step further and try to think of a specific time and interaction that made you identify this person as an exceptional leader. Take a moment to visualize this and once you have a good recollection of the person, begin to write down some characteristics that come to your mind as descriptive of that leader.

<u>Managing</u>	vs.	<u>Leading</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuing stability and order • How things get done • Expect better performance • Management is about applying expertise from a position of authority 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value flexibility and innovation • What things mean to people • What is most important to get done • Leadership is mobilizing people toward the achievement of the common good

Participant responses were written on a flip chart and discussed to see what common themes arose regarding the behaviors and attributes of a great leader. Descriptors of such a leader included: caring, empathetic, concerned, helpful, gave clear direction, set clear expectations, high expectations, believed in my abilities, encouraging, great coach, showed me ways to achieve my goals, didn't solve things for me, etc. The group agreed that all these descriptors were behaviors of leading instead of managing. Next the group examined the differences between leading and managing by reviewing a summary of key points gathered during my review of the available literature and research.

The following quote from Yukl (2002) reinforced the important bullets on the slide:

Managers value stability, order and efficiency, whereas leaders value flexibility, innovation and adaptation. Managers are concerned about how things get done, and they try to get people to perform better. Leaders are concerned with what things mean to people, and they try to get people to agree about the most important things to do (p. 5).

I also included another quotation: "Leadership is mobilizing people toward the achievement of a common good. Management is applying expertise from a position of authority" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 13).

Early in the session, it became apparent that a point of confusion had developed between the concept of managing people and the positional role of the manager. Because we had a manager present, some of the participants referenced her by name as if the points being made were about her specifically. When I realized the confusion, I took a moment to explain that we were discussing the behaviors of leading and managing and not the specific position of the call center manager. With this clarification, the looks of bewilderment seemed to decrease.

Participants were asked to summarize the differences they saw between management and leadership in their own words. Responses included the following:

- management and leadership are similar but different
- soft skills are important
- there is confusion about what leadership means
- leadership is collaborative, management is directive
- both are required in the call center
- at times we need to implement ideas, and at times we are hands-on guiding our reps
- a leader must implement management components to be effective
- leadership is more of a partnership with the person being led

Next, a list of leadership definitions from various leadership experts was shared with emphasis on the importance of leadership. I chose to present a chronologically ordered list to show that leadership has been written about for hundreds of years. The Author names and years were also added to the leadership quotes in case workshop participants wanted to follow up with their own research. Leadership is:

“The creative and directive force of morale” (Munson, 1921).

“The process by which an agent induces a subordinate to behave in a desired manner” (Bennis, 1959).

“The presence of a particular influence relationship between two or more persons” (Hollander & Julian, 1969).

“Directing and coordinating the work of group members” (Fiedler, 1967).

“An interpersonal relationship in which others comply because they want to, not because they have to” (Merton, 1969)

“Transforming followers, creating visions of the goals that may be attained and articulating for the followers the ways to attain those goals” (Bass, 1985 & Tichy and Devanna, 1986).

“The process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing its goals” (Roach & Behling, 1984).

“Actions that focus resources to create desirable opportunities” (Campbell, 1991) (as cited in Wren, 1995, pp. 41-42).

As a means of moving into the next activity, the following quote was offered: “Our societies and organizations clearly need leadership...we are facing many adaptive challenges” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 26) I pointed out some of the changes that had happened in the call center – going from a CRT to a personal computer, going from a mainframe system to a more user friendly front-end system, team leaders moving from an office environment to having a work station in the row with the representatives, moving from ratios of 1:17 to 1:30, advances in reporting technology, just to name a few. At the close of this statement was the question – Do you agree? And the resounding conclusion was that they did agree that the pace of change was more rapid than ever before.

In developing this session, I recognized the importance of making the learning a mixture of interactive activities combined with presenting information. Additionally, I recognized the critical need to relate the information to the reality of the participants’ work experiences. The next slide in the presentation displayed the question, “Do I lead or manage? Let’s bring these ideas into your daily duties!” At this point I described the activity that I designed using the job expectations of the participants’ role as team leaders. There were two main expectations

documents for their team leader role, one called the position results description -PRD, which spelled out the tasks the team leaders are expected to accomplish. The second document entitled the leadership competency model-LCM, which detailed the five core competencies that each team leader was expected to meet by displaying behaviors defined in each competency (the competencies are innovative, communication, feedback, management focus and empathy). From these documents I took the expectations and put them on to individual slips of paper. Participants formed groups at their tables, and the goal of the activity was to determine if the item on the slip of paper was more of a leadership task or a task that was managerial in nature. The slips were pasted to a flip chart that was divided by the heading “leading vs. managing”.

The goal of the above activity was to have the leaders discover how many of their job expectations were behaviors that would be classified as ‘leading’ and how many fell into the ‘managing’ category, based on the previous presentation of the differences between the two. This activity would help to support or refute my hypothesis: there are barriers to leading in the call center environment. It was my hope that they would conclude that the tasks/expectations of the position that they held represented managing more than leading. (See Appendix for list of expectations used for the activity.) This would be help to support the assumptions that I had arrived at based on experience and review of the available literature on call centers.

At the close of the activity, the next slide asked, “What did you discover about the tasks/behaviors of your frontline supervisor position?” The overriding theme to the discussion that followed this activity was that there were far more expectations in the managing column than expected. Additionally, the group expressed surprise at how many of the tasks fit into both categories.

Transitioning from the activity to the next section of the workshop felt somewhat awkward. It was not until I read the feedback forms that I realized that I had skipped over the readout portion of the activity, and the comments confirmed this. While there was no real right or wrong placement for the expectations, the goal of the activity was to encourage discussion, and to help me discover the opinions of others regarding the team leader role.

To keep the participants actively involved in the session, I decided to use an inquiry method for presenting the next topic. The PowerPoint slide read, “Technology – mountains of data” and it involved asking questions that pertained to the technology used in the participants’ role within the organization. I used the following introduction:

Let’s pause for a moment to discuss the mountains of data available through the computer, as well as the reports that you can generate from data gathered via the phone consoles. We, as a group, are facing the challenge of how to provide leadership in our technologically advancing environment. As new ways of measuring the frontline representatives’ work are developed, more and more data becomes available to you. In order for this data not to take over all that you do, we have to find ways to work with the data and exercise leadership behaviors.

I used the following questions to facilitate the discussion:

1. In what way do you currently use the reports available to you?
2. What is our purpose as leaders of frontline customer service representatives?
3. What are the competing issues here?
4. How can we learn to learn during a process? (the process of changing the way we use the data)

5. What resources do you have to assist you in finding leadership paths through the technology?

The workshop group spent a considerable amount of time discussing the importance of using the reports that technology provides in order to measure results. Some respondents expressed conflict between the company's mandate that leaders produce results and the inability to find time to coach and develop their employees. Finding enough time to exercise leadership was a common theme during this part of the discussion. Several participants stated that it was sometimes simply easier and faster to hand out reports with comments on them. Several times in the session I felt it appropriate to challenge notions such as this. For example, I asked one participant how the employee was going to meet the goals if he or she was not shown how to get there? In other words, I was trying to emphasize one of my research points: the technology is constraining your ability to exercise leadership because you somehow ran out of time to spend with employees to explain reports and what they need to do to meet the goal. Instead, they were given a report to interpret and a number target to meet. This represents an instance of managing rather than leadership behavior.

There seemed to be one segment of the group that was adamant about the importance of constantly exposing the frontline employees to performance measurement statistics. It was very interesting to me that this group was mainly comprised of supervisors from one particular call center, which happens to be newest of the four sites. It became apparent that there were some distinctly differing opinions among the participants regarding the use of the statistical reports provided by technology. Participants that shared their opinions during this segment displayed great conviction in their viewpoints. For this reason, I let this discussion finish and found that in doing so, time had all but run out. Before ending, I asked participants to complete an application

activity when they returned to their respective sites. The idea for this final activity was to help put theory into practice and challenge these team leaders to exercise leadership in delivering year-end performance appraisals.

The closing activity directions were as follows:

To be able to absorb new learning, it is important that we find ways to apply concepts that are presented. This application activity will allow you to take the concept of leading versus managing and apply it to your work in the coming days and weeks. Since you will be presenting year-end appraisals beginning next week, it will be a great time to try out some leading behaviors. As we all know, we assess our rep's performance by many different statistical measures. We ask them to lower their average handling time or increase their Visa transfers. Here's the application assignment: take at least one opportunity during these meetings to discuss performance improvement without the use of the numbers. You may want to practice with a peer or jot down some verbiage. Report back to me using this form no later than May 6th. Three questions were asked as a way to gather the information: What was the area of performance you discussed without referring to the numbers? What phrases did you use? (Give one or two examples.) What was the representatives' response?

To my regret, only one of the 34 participants later returned the activity form.

Participants were also given a workshop evaluation, and 79% were returned before leaving the room. The goal of using an evaluation was to determine if the session met the objectives, but more importantly, to determine whether support existed for my ideas about the constraints to exercising leadership in the call center.

The following questions were on the evaluation form:

1. What was the objective of today's session on your own words?
2. Was the learning environment appropriate for the learners and the learning activities?
3. Name one thing you learned about leadership vs. management in today's session.
4. Give an overall impression of today's session.
5. What suggestions do you have for future workshop sessions?

The results of the evaluations were mostly favorable in terms of participants gaining a better understanding of the difference between leading and managing. This response summed it up well: "I felt like the objective today was to open our eyes to opportunities to 'lead' rather than 'manage,' even though our business is very numbers driven." It was interesting to note that some participants realized that there is some cross-over between leading and managing and that, when balanced, this could actually lead to positive results.

The workshop evaluations also suggested that there was confusion among group members about what leadership means. Several of the evaluations mentioned a need to "take it to a lower level," from which I concluded that there exists a need among some participants for a more entry-level explanation of leadership behaviors and for differentiating them from behaviors classified as management. In my original workshop design, I had several articles on leadership that would have served as pre-work for the session and these may have been beneficial in addressing some of these concerns.

There were several disappointing responses on the evaluations regarding the topic of leading versus managing being better suited to leaders who were new to the call center team leader position. Another response said the session was valuable only as a review. These responses helped me to conclude that I did not achieve my desired outcome of highlighting the constraints to leading that the call center environment imposes upon the position of 'frontline

leader/supervisor.’ Another significant conclusion was that some participants felt they had already achieved a proper balance of leading vs. managing and, therefore, that this was not new or useful information for them. Important to note here is that this workshop was not optional for the frontline supervisors and that the audience was a mixture of veteran and new leaders. Upon reflection, I also recognized that the questions asked in the workshop evaluation were not formatted in a way that would yield the primary desired result of ascertaining the recognition of constraints by others holding the same team leader position.

Interpretations

Given my research topic, I believe that the workshop generally supported my idea that the technology and hierarchy of the call center organization are constraints to providing leadership. It is apparent that, due to the many layered structure of the call center organization, the decision-making power of the frontline supervisor position is very limited. Adding to the complexity are the following two messages given to leaders in this organization:

1. Every employee deserves a great leader, and every leader deserves to be great.
2. Your success will be dependent on your ability to develop the capacity and motivation in others to deliver extraordinary results.

Without sufficient training or education on leadership, some leaders interpret this to mean they should focus on the numbers that technology provides as tools to motivate employees to produce better results. It is these leaders who become slaves to the reporting tasks and lead by fear and intimidation. Thus, they are not leading; they are managing by the numbers.

Another outcome of the workshop was my realization that a leader in the capacity of frontline supervisor (referred to as team leader throughout the paper) has a limited degree of

control and decision-making power. Yukl (2002) confirms this, “Lower level managers must operate within the constraints imposed by formalized rules and policy decisions made at higher levels” (p.34). This also supports what the professor summarized from the leadership story that was the impetus for this project; that being in a low level management position requires that you implement the decisions made by upper levels of management.

In reviewing the literature and compiling the information into this thesis, this researcher discovered that one of the more concerning issues constraining the exercise of leadership in the call center is role ambiguity. The ambiguity comes from the disconnect between the written expectations of the team leader job, and the verbal expectations given by top management requiring leaders in any capacity to be exercising great leadership. The company’s leadership materials include the following statement: Your success will be dependent on your ability to develop the capacity and motivation in others to deliver extraordinary results.

The organization probably did not intend to create role confusion; it is partially a result of rapid change. In the nearly one hundred year history of the Maine based company used for this research, competition and the cost of doing business have increased. Bolman and Deal (1997) concluded that, “Global competition, turbulence, and rapid change have heightened an old organizational dilemma: Is it better to be lean and mean or to invest in people?” (p. 119). This company touts being proactive with employee relations and visibly displays the following community statement, “We are a community of dedicated people who serve, respect and trust one another, contribute our best efforts and preserve and renew our heritage.” Therefore, some of the constraints to leading in the call center environment have developed due to the pace of change outpacing role expectation updating.

Summary

As the pace of technology has increased, a constant stream of newer and better programs has become available to the call center organization. While this technology can provide mountains of data, it also presents a constraint in the form of a need for additional time to sort out the many reports that can be generated into usable pieces of information. A call center leader can literally track the movements of all of his or her employees for every second of time they are working, including activities such as taking a bathroom break! The leader must interpret and use the data provided by the technology to assist in finding ways to achieve desired results, vs. using the data to track an individual's every movement. The constraint comes in the form of lost opportunity costs – the time spent in controlling the employee using the technology, instead of time that should be spent in leadership and development activities. Mountains of data constrain leadership because they lead to behaviors that are better characterized by managing than by leading.

Although the research does support the existence of these constraints to leadership, the majority of the literature is written from the employee's perspective. For this reason, it is difficult to gain an understanding of the long term implications from trying to exercise leadership despite constraints. A study of leadership roles in the call center organization may help to assess the level of constraint; however, equally important is an assessment of management's recognition that role ambiguity exists. A separate study would be needed to explore ways to overcome the constraints to exercising leadership in the call center.

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Appendix

The tasks (taken from the expectation documents of the frontline supervisor):

- I am meeting with each rep on my team as appropriate to review performance, coach and develop, communicate business updates and foster relationship building.
- I identify and recognize positive contributions to the workplace.
- I participate in leadership meetings on a regular basis.
- I contribute to the training and development of Performance Coaches (mentoring).
- Team members have received documented mid-year and year end appraisals based on clear guidelines as defined by job objectives.
- My direct reports are meeting performance expectations or performance is being managed appropriately.
- I have contributed to customer satisfaction's meeting workplace safety goals by modeling safe behaviors, and managing ergo and safety issues on my team.
- I have given input on reps' skill, competency and potential to assist with filling regular and temporary positions.
- My team members are compliant with company policy on status and attendance.
- My team members have met productivity goals.
- My team has met Visa transfer goals.
- I have managed individual reps' non-phone time to meet budget goals.
- I assist senior supervisor in assessing and managing budget performance.
- My team members understand the significance of their contributions to our critical measures.
- I provide input and feedback to operations leadership and support areas to help develop and refine work processes.
- I support customer satisfaction projects by managing change and providing expertise and support to reps.

- I provide quality feedback from my team (call monitoring) 6 times in the spring season and 4 times in the fall.
- I identify quality trends and take appropriate action (recognize, coach, or inform others).
- I set personal goals as well.
- I explain the context around change.
- Seeks employee input and follows through on questions.
- Goes beyond problem solving to problem solving.
- Encourages employees to bring ideas forward and responds appropriately.
- Open to new ideas and willing to experiment.
- Willing to take risks and learn from mistakes.
- Speaks in front of direct reports with clarity and ease.
- Actively listens to others, uses paraphrasing in response, asks clarifying questions.
- Engages in on-going, constructive and specific two way feedback.
- Identifies and addresses issues and concerns in the moment.
- Adheres to all company ethical standards.
- Involves other in the decision making process when appropriate.
- Decisions based on customers and company's best interest.
- Builds trust by following through on commitments.
- Separates the decision making process from the emotional response.