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Response: Spreading the “Tone at the Top” Throughout the Organization

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Many thanks to Dov Fischer and Hershey Friedman, the authors of “Psalms: Lessons for a ‘Tone at the Top’ Based on Trust and Justice,” for a very interesting and timely article. I am pleased that my own article, “Proverbs: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Organizations” (Dose, 2012), published in the *JBIB*, sparked the ideas presented in “Tone at the Top.” My goal in the Proverbs paper was to conduct an inductive study of Proverbs to find themes related to business. The assumption was that organizational members, particularly leaders, who follow the set of principles that Proverbs advocates, bring about beneficial organizational outcomes. A model of trust adapted from Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) and Zand (1972) tied together those principles in a coherent way, suggesting that effective leaders demonstrated the three components of trust: benevolence, ability, and integrity.

PSALMS: LESSONS FOR A ‘TONE AT THE TOP’ BASED ON TRUST AND JUSTICE

Fischer and Friedman’s (2014) article creates an excellent platform for highlighting the contribution of Scripture to our understanding of leadership, particularly attributes that contribute to effective, ethical leadership. The article points to a significant concern in the public’s loss of confidence in leaders as well as the consequences of loss of trust between institutions. The authors take the principles of trust and justice beyond Proverbs and demonstrate the consistency of Scripture by showing the extensions of these leadership principles in Psalms. Fischer and Friedman also integrate research literature, making important connections to current practice.

Drawing from Psalms is significant; the Book of Psalms is often considered as a set of prayers, focusing more on the relationship between an individual and God or perhaps lamenting something found lacking in fellow human beings (Guthrie, Motyer, Stibbs, & Wiseman, 1970). Since the focus of Psalms is not primarily on

providing examples of effective human behavior or on fostering beneficial relationships between individuals, instances in which particular psalms demonstrate principles for effective leader behavior are noteworthy. Fischer and Friedman’s examination of Psalms 72, 82, and 101 demonstrates these psalms’ unique value in guiding leader behavior in the areas of benevolence, ability, and integrity. These examples of leaders acting justly provide us with role models of how to act. Psalm 72 presents recommendations to Solomon as a leader. Psalm 82 exemplifies the benefits of seeking and accepting instruction in achieving moral and technical ability, and Psalm 101 addresses benevolence and particularly denounces gossip.

Another helpful aspect to Fischer and Friedman’s paper is their connection of the COSO (Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission) points of focus to the lessons on organizational trust from Psalms 72, 82, and 101. Figure 2 of the article provides a cogent summary. Advocating transparency and condemning gossip are particularly valuable principles that are often overlooked.

EXTENDING TRUST AND JUSTICE BEYOND THE LEADER

Although Fischer and Friedman (2014) largely focus on implications for leaders, they note that the principles discussed apply throughout the organization. The following section offers an extension and complement to Fischer and Friedman’s work by expanding their ideas about trust and justice to other organizational relationships and to roles besides the leader. The leader is instrumental in setting the values and culture of the organization, both in a formal way and through relationships with individual subordinates. In addition, the relationships realized in the informal organizational structure demonstrate significant impact. After a discussion of findings from leader-member exchange and social network analysis research, some other key Scripture

passages that apply to organizational relationships are provided. Ability, integrity, and benevolence as aspects of trust are highlighted throughout. Finally, I return to the discussion of the impact of organizational leaders by providing some recommendations.

Leader-Member Exchange

Trust is an important foundation for relationships across the organization. As mentioned by Fischer and Friedman, leaders listen to followers as well as vice versa. The authors note the importance of the social and communication aspects of the relationship between leaders and followers. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is consistent with Fischer and Friedman's ideas. LMX theory predicts that based on follower ability, values, or other attributes, leaders have differential relationships with followers (e.g., Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998). For some, greater time and resources given to followers is matched by greater expectations of them. There is a higher level of trust. The action of leaders providing resources to followers is consistent with the idea of benevolence as presented by Fischer and Friedman. In return, followers take on some of the responsibilities that might otherwise be undertaken by the leader. Although the term "exchange" may imply a transactional perspective, LMX is transformational: mutual activity that works to effect change. As Fischer and Friedman (2014) observe, effective leadership is transformational. Additionally, in keeping with the importance of justice, it should be noted that LMX theory advocates treating all followers fairly, notwithstanding the fact that some leader-follower relationships are different than others (Bennis, Murphy, Hock, & Muldrone, 2003).

Dose (2006) described how Scripture is consistent with LMX. Luke 12:48 states, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." The parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14ff) also expresses this theme: although the master entrusted a different number of talents to each servant, he expected all of them to use the talents wisely in accordance with what they had been given. The talents were given according to ability (Mt. 25:15), and those who were found to be able and trustworthy were then given more over which to be responsible (Mt. 25:21). 1 Corinthians 4:2 states, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." Ability is the recommended criteria for LMX (Graen & Scandura, 1987).

Social Network Analysis and Social Capital

Recent research has increasingly recognized how the informal relational structure within an organization differs from the formal structure and emphasized the significance of the informal structure for organizational effectiveness. Social network analysis has examined informal organizational network relationships, finding significant relationships between network attributes and outcomes such as information diffusion (Schaefer, 2011), creativity (Perry-Smith, 2006), team effectiveness (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Cummings & Cross, 2003), and job satisfaction (Flap & Völker, 2001). The network of relationships among organizational members is a vital resource for member satisfaction, commitment, innovation, and overall responsiveness to a changing environment (Cross, Baker, & Parker, 2003; Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2002; Kezar & Lester, 2009a). Of course, the collective knowledge, skills, and abilities of organizational members themselves provide a key precursor to the value of relationships between these members. The better an organization is at developing these relational conduits for values, knowledge, and ideas, the better it is at building creative responses to the challenges it faces, whether it be developing new products or services, entering new markets, increasing customer satisfaction, or finding ways to fill important goals and objectives more efficiently and effectively (Cross, Liedtka, & Weiss, 2005).

The social capital generated by network relationships has implications for trust and justice. Social capital has three basic components: "the *network*; a cluster of *norm, values, and expectancies* that are shared by group members; and *sanctions* — punishments and rewards — that help maintain the norms and the network" (Halpern, 2005, p. 10) and improve group efficacy by facilitating coordinated action (Putnam, 2000). Resources embedded in social networks facilitate flow of information, exert influence, provide social credentials, and reinforce identity (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Coleman (1988) provided an excellent example of how these components work together when he described the wholesale diamond market in which merchants hand over bags of diamonds, worth many thousands of dollars, to other merchants to examine at their leisure. The arrangement works effectively only because of the high degree of trust and trustworthiness among the community of merchants; their close business relationship and common understanding of appropriate behavior allows for the free flow of information without requiring

expensive or complicated contracts or insurance. Social capital requires developing a sense of trust (Lesser & Storck, 2003).

The basis for network relationships is crucial as well. Network researchers have investigated aspects such as shared vision and values, information and advice sharing, help and friendship. The overlap between the basis for network relationships and the aspects of trust is noteworthy.

Vision, values, and integrity. As the often quoted Proverb says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). Common values and vision promote organizational identity. Shared values — especially those related to integrity — constitute a key way in which organizational members form relationships (Fugazzotto, 2009), as well as create a sense of purpose, build trust, and foster collaboration (Kezar & Lester, 2009a). Support of an institution’s mission is dependent upon organizational members holding similar values. Leaders play a key role in fostering important values and culture; however, social network analysis can highlight which organizational members are the key culture carriers — and also determine if they are transmitting cultural values that are consistent or inconsistent with the organization’s mission (Cross & Thomas, 2009). Often longer-tenured members are central in the network, having had more time to develop trusted ties, while newcomers are on the periphery of a network; intentional efforts to connect these newer members across the organization can make them more central within the network (Cross & Thomas, 2009).

Information and problem solving. Proverbs 15:14 notes, “An intelligent mind acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.” Cross and Thomas (2009) noted the importance of informal networks in solving ambiguous problems not anticipated by formal organizational structures. They also note the importance of individuals who build relationships across organizational units and the fragmentation that can occur if one of these individuals leaves the organization. Wegner (1987) pointed to the advantages of transactive memory networks in which being able to rely on other group members produces a knowledge-holding and retrieval system that is more effective even than its individual component systems. In such a differentiated system, members rely on others’ ability; contact between them yields integrative solutions to organizational problems.

Help and friendship. Friendships between organizational members and the ability to ask others for assistance constitute key connections between individuals and have been found to contribute to job satisfaction (Ibarra, 1995). Proverbs 23:21 states, “Plans are established by taking advice.” Network relationships can facilitate help-seeking and knowledge of appropriate sources. Both ability and benevolence are relevant here.

Trust. Trust is particularly valuable in large organizations where members interact only infrequently (LaPorta, Lopez-de-Silanes, Shleifer, & Vishny, 2000), as may be the case in horizontal connections across departments. In a complex environment, uncertainty about the consequences of decisions makes trust increasingly necessary (Luhmann, 1988). Trust has been linked to knowledge sharing, and is present in both strong and weak ties within a social network (Levin, Cross, Abrams, & Lesser, 2003). It becomes part of the culture and impacts organizational effectiveness. Trust in an organization is associated with more effective problem solving and enhanced communication, cooperation, and information-sharing processes (Levin & Cross, 2004).

A recent social network analysis study within a higher education organization (Dose, 2013) asked survey respondents to report ways in which they developed network connections and assessed organizational attitudes, including organizational trust (Mayer & Davis, 1999). Individuals ascribe a level of trust to an organizational entity, much as they do to individuals (Buskens, 2002). There were some significant relationships between individual network attributes and attitudes. Organizational trust was related to strong network relations (number of reported direct links) among department members as well as the number of network connections based on shared vision and frequent communication.

Consistency of Scripture

The research described above is consistent with principles from Scripture regarding interpersonal interactions within groups that foster trust. Although the importance of leaders for setting the tone at the top does not diminish, the mechanisms for organizational effectiveness at all levels go beyond solely leader behavior. Exodus 18:18 notes that leaders cannot bear the exclusive burden, as Jethro tells Moses: “The work is too heavy for you, you cannot handle it alone.”

Examples from the New Testament demonstrate the role of the organization as a whole in building trust and

administering justice. Acts 6 depicts how responsibilities were assigned so that the widows in the church were not overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Some leaders of the Christian disciples focused on prayer and ministry of the word while others who were gifted and wise took on more administrative functions.

This distribution of tasks is consistent with several places in the New Testament that convey the idea that we each have gifts and talents and that we have the responsibility to use them well. I Timothy 4:14-15 states, “Do not neglect your gift . . . Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.” We also read in Scripture that the body of Christ is made up of people with a variety of gifts, and that all are valuable. I Corinthians 12:12 states, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.” And I Corinthians 24b-29 goes on to say, “But God has combined the members of the body and has given even greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

Often when churches or other organizations administer spiritual gifts inventories, there is an individual focus on encouraging people to use their gifts. However, in addition to this individual focus, it is beneficial to look at the organizational members and their gifts as a whole and as connected. The metaphor of the body does not stop with the idea of it containing different, necessary parts. Those parts are connected as well, just as multiple organs make up the circulatory system and ligaments and tendons attach the bones and muscles. Romans 12:5 states that “each member belongs to all the others.” Thus, in addition to an individual focus on gifts, it would be beneficial to look at the organizational level whether there are connections among these parts of the body and the extent to which those connections may be fostered for mutual benefit and the glory of God. “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another” (Proverbs 27:17).

Role of Leaders in Organizational Networks

Although I have highlighted the value of organizational networks for various aspects of organizational effectiveness, including justice, leaders have an important role to play in fostering an environment in which organizational members treat each other with benevolence, share abilities, and exhibit integrity.

Develop culture. As Fischer and Friedman emphasize, leaders are integral to developing culture and can foster one that values justice. Ephesians 6:7 says, “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people.” Models of leaders who exemplify justice for their followers exist throughout Scripture. In addition to individual guidance, collective socialization of new organization members plays an important role in establishing culture. Developing a culture related to service early on is key. Leaders can help by valuing collegiality and creating connections (Kezar & Lester, 2009b).

Develop relational networks. Leaders can proactively aid the organization to develop relational networks, which are then in place when the need arises. Hebrews 10:25 states, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting with one another.” Both vertical and horizontal organizational relationships are important for sharing expertise and maintaining a culture of trust and justice. Another aspect of culture is one that encourages relationships outside the natural work unit (Cross, Nohria, & Parker, 2002). Organizational assistance by providing opportunities to build networks allows colleagues to meet efficiently, creating relationships between individuals who may not have the time to organically develop relationships due to other demands on their time (Kezar & Lester, 2009b). Examples of mechanisms through which networks can be developed include creating common gathering/break spaces; forming affinity groups or communities of practice; and offering speakers, workshops, or brown-bag lunches focused on relevant themes.

Provide professional development. Leaders also can make sure that organizational training exists that provides professional development regarding ethics, teamwork and/or group decision-making ability. Proverbs 9:9 advocates, “Give instruction to the wise and they will become wiser still.” Considerable research exists on best practices in group decision-making, for example. Such training could build the confidence of newer employees as well as increase the skill level of employees overall.

Succession planning. If leaders are instrumental in establishing and maintaining culture, then they must also make preparation to pass culture on to their successor. Psalm 72, written for Solomon by King David, is an example of such an effort (Fischer & Friedman, 2014). The extended time leaders spend with those followers

with whom they have a high level of exchange relationship can be a way to prepare future leaders. Although Jesus had many followers, he selected twelve with whom he spent significantly more time and to whom he devoted more teaching, giving further explanations, asking questions, providing unique experiences, and developing greater expectations (Dose, 2006). Succession planning focuses on high-potential employees, assessing them, giving them special assignments, and preparing them for future leadership positions. Today's fast-changing business environment means that succession planning is vital (Wells, 2003), yet fewer than half of organizations have an intentional process (Wolf, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Scripture consistently emphasizes justice within many passages, exhorting God's people to treat each other in ways that exhibit their best ability, integrity, and benevolence. Within an organizational setting, leaders set the tone through their own example and by establishing a culture of trust that values these behaviors. Organizational research also emphasizes the relational natures of leaders and followers, as well as the informal network structure relationships between organizational members. Informal network relationships may be based on communication and information, help and advice, and common vision and values, among other things. These contributions to an environment of trust and justice honor both God and fellow human beings created in His image, as well as contribute to organizational effectiveness through higher performance, satisfaction, and commitment.

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