Minimising attainment deficit: a grounded theory of the leadership process in a large, public sector bureaucracy

George Kriflik
University of Wollongong

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author.

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
Minimising Attainment Deficit:
A Grounded Theory of the Leadership Process in
a Large, Public Sector Bureaucracy

PhD Thesis

School of Management, Marketing and Employment Relations
Faculty of Commerce
University of Wollongong
Wollongong, Australia

George Kriflik
B.E. Elec (Wollongong), G.DipEd (UTS), MBA (Deakin)
2002
Abstract

This thesis explains the concept of Minimising Attainment Deficit. This is a leadership process whereby leaders help workers fulfil their expectations of achieving their potential in their work.

The purpose of the research was to generate a theory of the leadership process within a large, slow change, public sector, engineering bureaucracy. The aims were to discover the main concern of workers and to explain the leadership processes that resolved this main concern. The substantive processual theory of minimising attainment deficit has been presented as the basic social process which resolves the main concern of workers wishing to minimise the gap between their current work reality and that level which they perceive themselves to be capable of attaining.

A qualitative approach to the collection and analysis of data was adopted through the use of orthodox grounded theory. Its aim was to generate rather than to test theory. This research has contributed knowledge relevant to practitioners in the substantive area by identifying the main concerns of participants and the process by which these concerns can be resolved. It has also identified opportunities for further research that may significantly progress the continually evolving understanding of the leadership process.
Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr Robert Jones, for his patience while I stumbled through the intricacies of Grounded Theory, and for his invaluable guidance throughout the research. The subtle difference between Glaser’s orthodox Grounded Theory and Strauss and Corbin’s conceptual description was not, at first, apparent to me. Dr Jones guided my learning so that I was able to choose the methodology that would allow me to generate a Grounded Theory.
Contents

1 Introduction and Context of the Study ................................................................. 1
  1.1 Aims and Purpose of the Study ................................................................. 1
  1.2 Significance of the Study ................................................................. 2
  1.3 Introduction to the Study Problem ................................................................. 3
  1.4 Background to AGRO ..................................................................... 4
    1.4.1 Organisation Size and Complexity ........................................ 5
    1.4.2 Public Sector Characteristics ..................................................... 6
    1.4.3 Engineering Origin ..................................................................... 7
    1.4.4 Absence of Tumultuous Change ............................................. 9
  1.5 Behavioural Context of AGRO .............................................................. 11
    1.5.1 Job Security ........................................................................... 12
    1.5.2 Task Orientation ........................................................................ 12
    1.5.3 Risk Aversion ............................................................................ 13
    1.5.4 Control and Compliance ............................................................ 13
  1.6 Thesis Structure ................................................................................. 14
  1.7 Summary ............................................................................................. 15

2 Research Design .............................................................................................. 17
  2.1 Nature of Social Science ....................................................................... 17
    2.1.1 Ontology .................................................................................. 17
    2.1.2 Epistemology ........................................................................... 17
    2.1.3 Human Nature ........................................................................ 18
    2.1.4 Methodology ........................................................................... 18
  2.2 Selecting a Research Design ................................................................... 19
  2.3 Quantitative vs Qualitative Approaches in Leadership Research .......... 22
    2.3.1 Why a Qualitative Approach? .................................................. 25
    2.3.2 Types of Qualitative Studies .................................................... 26
    2.3.3 Qualitative Research in the Present Study ................................ 28
  2.4 Symbolic Interactionism ......................................................................... 31
    2.4.1 Research Implication of Symbolic Interactionism .................... 34
  2.5 Why Grounded Theory? ....................................................................... 35
    2.5.1 Orthodox Grounded Theory ..................................................... 38
      2.5.1.1 Concentration Site and Early Interviews .............................. 39
3 Data Collection and Analysis .................................................................49

3.1 Role of the Researcher ........................................................................... 49
  3.1.1 Researcher Bias .............................................................................. 50
3.2 Initial Scoping Interviews ....................................................................... 51
3.3 Emerging the Grounded Theory Model .................................................. 54
  3.3.1 Open Coding and Initial Category Building ...................................... 54
  3.3.2 Re-categorising the Data ................................................................ 57
  3.3.3 Participants’ Main Concern .............................................................. 59
  3.3.4 Core Category .................................................................................. 62
  3.3.5 Selective Coding ............................................................................. 63
  3.3.6 Towards Saturation ........................................................................ 64
3.4 Summary .................................................................................................. 66

4 Minimising Attainment Deficit - the process ..........................................67

4.1 The Leadership Process ......................................................................... 67
4.2 Subordinate Actioning .......................................................................... 70
  4.2.1 Subordinate Perceptioning ............................................................... 70
  4.2.2 Subordinate Emotioning ................................................................. 72
    4.2.2.1 Moderating Emotions ............................................................... 74
  4.2.3 Subordinate Behaviouring ............................................................... 76
    4.2.3.1 Moderating Behaviours ........................................................... 81
  4.2.4 Workplace Consequences .............................................................. 82
4.3 Leader Actioning ................................................................................... 83
4.3.1 Leader Perceptioning

4.3.2 Leader Concerning

4.3.3 Leader Probleming

4.3.4 Leader Strategising

4.4 Summary

Introduction to Chapters 5, 6, and 7

5 Subordinate Centred Strategies

5.1 Subordinate Status

5.1.1 Perception of Subordinate

5.1.1.1 Expectations

5.1.1.2 Limitations

5.1.1.3 Emotions

5.1.2 Subordinate’s Needs

5.1.2.1 Development

5.1.2.2 Support

5.1.3 Subordinate’s Situation

5.1.3.1 Performance Impediments

5.1.3.2 Atmosphere

5.2 Develop Subordinates

5.2.1 Team Involvement

5.2.1.1 Ownership

5.2.1.2 Participation

5.2.1.3 Contribution

5.2.2 Positive Guidance

5.2.2.1 Mentoring

5.2.2.2 Feedback

5.2.2.3 Confidence

5.2.3 Skills Enhancement

5.2.3.1 Training

5.2.3.2 Work Experience

5.2.3.3 Learning Opportunities

5.3 Support Subordinates

5.3.1 Providing Help

5.3.1.1 Assistance
5.3.1.2 Guidance ........................................................................................................ 120
5.3.2 Affirmation ........................................................................................................ 121
  5.3.2.1 Giving Credit ................................................................................................ 122
  5.3.2.2 Listening ...................................................................................................... 125
5.4 Summary .............................................................................................................. 126

6 Environment Centred Strategies ........................................................................... 128
  6.1 Reduce Communication Barriers ..................................................................... 129
    6.1.1 Organisational Factors ............................................................................. 130
      6.1.1.1 Locational ............................................................................................ 131
      6.1.1.2 Integration ........................................................................................... 131
      6.1.1.3 Structural ............................................................................................ 132
    6.1.2 Accessibility Factors .................................................................................. 133
      6.1.2.1 Leader Accessibility .......................................................................... 133
      6.1.2.2 Information Accessibility ................................................................. 134
  6.2 Operational Planning ........................................................................................ 136
    6.2.1 Preparation ................................................................................................ 137
      6.2.1.1 Clear Direction .................................................................................... 137
      6.2.1.2 Issues Anticipated ............................................................................. 138
      6.2.1.3 Achievable Goals ............................................................................... 139
    6.2.2 Achievement ............................................................................................. 140
      6.2.2.1 Deadlines Managed .......................................................................... 141
      6.2.2.2 Competitiveness ................................................................................ 141
      6.2.2.3 Job Security ......................................................................................... 142
  6.3 Create Positive Atmosphere .............................................................................. 144
    6.3.1 Demeanour ................................................................................................ 145
      6.3.1.1 Mature Leader Behaviour ................................................................... 145
      6.3.1.2 Positive Attitude Displayed ................................................................. 147
    6.3.2 Transforming .............................................................................................. 148
      6.3.2.1 Supportive Environment ................................................................... 148
      6.3.2.2 Environment of Honesty .................................................................... 150
      6.3.2.3 Worker Involvement .......................................................................... 150
      6.3.2.4 Enthusiasm Encouraged .................................................................... 151
  6.4 Summary .............................................................................................................. 152
7 Leader Centred Strategies

7.1 Cognitive Processes

7.1.1 Enhance Perceptions

7.1.1.1 Incident

7.1.1.2 Role Model

7.1.1.3 Self Perception

7.1.2 Enhance Understanding

7.2 Accomplishment Strategies

7.2.1 Self Improvement

7.2.1.1 Performance

7.2.1.2 Behaviour

7.2.2 Image Improvement

7.2.3 Positional Improvement

7.3 Summary

8 Literature Comparison

8.1 Situational Analysis and the Leadership Process

8.1.1 Non Grounded Theory Studies

8.1.2 Grounded Theory Studies

8.2 Linkage between leader action and subordinate behaviour

8.3 Linkage between subordinate behaviour and leader action

8.3.1 Servant Leadership

8.3.1.1 Place service before self-interest

8.3.1.2 Nourish others and help them become whole

8.3.1.3 Inspire trust by being trustworthy

8.3.1.4 Listen first to express confidence in others

8.3.2 Socialised Power

8.3.3 Individualised Consideration

8.3.4 Super Leadership

Minimising Attainment Deficit
8.4 Summary ........................................................................................................... 206

9 Implications and Conclusions .............................................................................209

9.1 Achievement of the Purpose and Aims of the Research ......................... 209

9.2 Significance of the Thesis and Its Contribution ....................................... 210

9.3 Implications for Practitioners ........................................................................ 212

9.4 Implications for Further Research ................................................................. 214

9.4.1 Leads to Future Research ......................................................................... 214

9.4.2 Comebacks ................................................................................................ 215

9.4.3 Elevation to Formal Theory .................................................................... 216

9.5 Criteria for Evaluating the Grounded Theory of Minimising Attainment
Deficit .................................................................................................................. 217

9.5.1 Fit ............................................................................................................. 218

9.5.2 Relevance ................................................................................................. 219

9.5.3 Workability ............................................................................................... 220

9.5.4 Modifiability ............................................................................................. 220

9.6 Summary ........................................................................................................ 222

References ............................................................................................................. 224
### Figures

| Figure 1.1 | Social Architecture and Values and Behaviours | 11 |
| Figure 2.1 | Subjective-Objective Dimension in Social Science | 19 |
| Figure 2.2 | Linked Elements in Research Design | 21 |
| Figure 3.1 | Theoretical Model After Two Interviews | 56 |
| Figure 3.2 | Leader Facilitates Work | 61 |
| Figure 3.3 | Sequence of Leader-Subordinate Behaviours | 62 |
| Figure 4.1 | Leadership Process: Core and Sub-Core Categories | 68 |
| Figure 4.2 | Phases of Subordinate Actioning | 70 |
| Figure 4.3 | Subordinate Perceptioning, Emotioning and Behaviouring | 70 |
| Figure 4.4 | Subordinate Status Continuum | 71 |
| Figure 4.5 | Positive Emotional Reactions | 72 |
| Figure 4.6 | Negative Emotional Reactions | 73 |
| Figure 4.7 | Subcategories of Subordinate Behaviours | 76 |
| Figure 4.8 | Properties of Beneficial Behaviours | 77 |
| Figure 4.9 | Properties of Detrimental Behaviours | 78 |
| Figure 4.10 | Categories of Workplace Consequences | 82 |
| Figure 4.11 | Phases of Leader Actioning | 84 |
| Figure 4.12 | Leader Perceptioning, Concerning, Probleming and Strategising | 85 |
| Figure 4.13 | Minimising Attainment Deficit – the Basic Social Process | 90 |
| Figure 5a | Leader Strategies and their Properties | 92 |
| Figure 5.1 | Subordinate Centred Strategies | 93 |
| Figure 5.2 | Properties of Subordinate Status | 94 |
| Figure 5.3 | Properties of Develop Subordinates | 102 |
| Figure 5.4 | Properties of Support Subordinates | 114 |
| Figure 6.1 | Environment Centred Strategies | 128 |
| Figure 6.2 | Properties of Reduce Communication Barriers | 130 |
| Figure 6.3 | Properties of Operational Planning | 136 |
| Figure 6.4 | Properties of Create Positive Atmosphere | 145 |
| Figure 7.1 | Leader Centred Strategies | 154 |
| Figure 7.2 | Properties of Cognitive Processes | 155 |
| Figure 7.3 | Properties of Accomplishment Strategies | 163 |
| Figure 8.1 | Trends in Leadership Theory and Research | 177 |
| Figure 8.2 | Categories and Relationships in the Study of Leadership Effects | 187 |
| Figure 8.3 | Rational-Emotive Behaviour Model and the Meaning Chain | 190 |
| Figure 9.1 | Interaction of Sub-Core Variables and Their Phases | 210 |