

Feelings matter, too By Dr Simon Albrecht.

There has been little research into the distinction between how employees feel about senior leaders and what they actually think about them. Although some preliminary research has been conducted on how the display of emotion by leaders impacts on the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of employees, very little research has been conducted on the consequences of how employees feel about their designated leaders. This is surprising considering that leadership success is inextricably linked to successfully generating employee commitment and motivation.

Much attention in recent leadership research has focused on transformational leadership theory. According to Bass and Avolio, transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees, help them view their work from new perspectives, help them become aware of the 'bigger picture', and motivate them to transcend personal self-interest in the interests of their organisation. Transformational leaders pay attention to the concerns and individual needs of their employees and influence how employees feel about their organisation. In support of this connection, Shamir, House and Arthur (1993), drawing from four independent studies of more than

2,000 employees, reported a mean-corrected correlation coefficient of .46 between transformational leadership and affective commitment.

Consistent with attitude theory, it is important to acknowledge that employees' reactions to their environment play an important role in determining behaviour. Not only is it important to know what employees think about their organisation, it is also important to know how employees feel about their organisation. Although distinctions between cognitively and affectively framed assessments of organisational experience have empirical support, measures of cognitive and affective organisational experience are often highly correlated. Within the organisational trust literature, for example, McAllister (1996), Clark and Payne (1997) and Cummings and Bromiley (1995) all reported very high correlations between cognitive and affective dimensions of trust.

My research findings are based on questionnaire data collected from a large private sector organisation operating within the entertainment and service sector. Questionnaires were attached to employees' pay slips, accompanied by a cover

letter, a participant information sheet and a return envelope addressed to the researcher. Of the surveys distributed to all full-time, part-time and casual employees, 654 (25 per cent) were returned. A subset of 256 responses, drawn from full-time employees, who reported they had from "moderate" to "a lot" of contact with senior management was used in the present analysis. Full-time employees and those who have contact with senior management would be more likely to have more fully informed perceptions about the leadership climate of their organisation.

The results suggest employees are able to reliably distinguish between the leadership constructs and that the constructs can be aggregated to a climate level of analysis. Also, both the affectively and cognitively framed assessments of leadership climate were found to influence affective commitment, cynicism toward change and intention to turn over. Given that these outcomes are widely regarded as critical indicators of organisational effectiveness, the results reinforce the important role that leadership plays in determining organisational success. The results also support the increasing importance that is

being placed on researching the affective dimensions of leadership.

At a practical level the results showed that leadership perceptions influence important organisational outcomes. Both affectively and cognitively framed transformational leadership dimensions were shown to influence the extent to which employees feel emotionally committed to their organisation and the extent to which employees are cynical toward change. Clearly, senior management, who have the ultimate responsibility for initiating and managing change, will be interested to know that by managing how employees think and feel they can influence employee predispositions toward change. By assisting senior management develop a broader repertoire of leadership practices within their organisations, organisation development consultants can thus contribute to developing a work force which is more proactive, more committed and more positively predisposed toward organisational change.

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