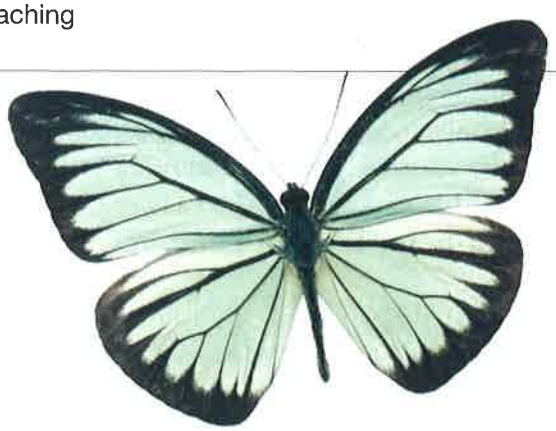
Creating the conditions for transformational change

Paul Browning says adaptation should feature in modern teaching



As a Head of Department you may have a vision to create a 'flipped' classroom, or as a Principal you may envisage a school that is a learning community for all, not just students but also staff and parents. Alternatively, the vision may be as simple as needing to successfully introduce the Australian Performance and Development Framework. How do you create the conditions to enable vision to become reality?

A key difference between management and leadership is vision; management implies maintenance of the status quo, while leadership is a process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005). The concept of *transforming leadership* was first coined by Burns in 1978. The theory was further developed by Bass (1985) to become *transformational leadership*, defined as articulating a compelling vision for followers. Transformational leadership energises people by providing them with an exciting vision for the future rather than providing them with rewards and punishments (Bartram & Casimir, 2007).

Bass (1985) describes four components, or attributes and behaviours that have been isolated by numerous survey research analyses that describe transformational leadership from the perspective of a leader's colleagues: charisma or idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectually stimulating, and individually considerate.

Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman and Fetter (1990) also offer a transformational leadership framework. After an extensive review of the literature and completion of their own research, they expanded Bass's original four component framework to offer six transformational leadership behaviours or factors:

1 **Identifying and articulating a vision.** Behaviour aimed at identifying new opportunities for the organisation, and developing, articulating and inspiring others with his or her vision of the future
2 **Providing an appropriate model**. Behaviour that sets an example for employees to follow that is consistent with the values the leader espouses
3 **Fostering an acceptance of group goals.** Behaviour aimed at promoting cooperation amongst staff and getting them to work together toward a common goal
4 **High performance expectations.** "Behaviour that demonstrates the leader's expectations for excellence, quality, and or high performance on the part of followers" (p. 112)
5 **Providing individualised support.** "Behaviour… that indicates that he/she respects followers and is concerned about their personal feelings and needs" (p. 112)
6 **Intellectual stimulation.** "Behaviour… that challenges followers to re-examine some of their assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed" (p. 112).

Bass' (1985) four components and Podsakoff, *et al.'s* (1990) six factor framework imply that a strong relationship needs to occur among all participants, a relationship that needs to be built around trust to be truly effective (Jung & Avolio, 2000; Kotter, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Trust is the foundation, the bedrock of all positive human relationships. Many a marriage has failed because trust has been broken; many a leader has come unstuck because they haven't attended to the very basics of leadership, trust. The creation and facilitation of an environment of trust between the transformational leader and his/her staff is necessary for leadership-driven learning to occur (Taylor, 2000). Staff members need to trust the leader in order to feel positively about them and to exert the extra effort to perform and achieve the vision (Bartram & Casimir, 2007). Staff need to trust their leader because of the uncertainty inherent in changing the status quo.

My recent PhD study examining transformational school leadership and trust revealed an inextricable link between the two: the more a leader is trusted by his/her staff the more they are able to bring about transformational change in their school. The condition for transformational change therefore, is the creation of trusting relationships between the leader and his/her staff. While trust is essential in bringing about transformational change, it is nonetheless interesting that it has far greater implications for schools.

The benefits of trust

An analysis of Ofsted results in the UK completed by Barber, *et al.* (2010) showed that for every 100 schools with good leaders, 93 will have good standards of student achievement; and for every 100 schools that do not have effective leadership, only one will have good standards of achievement. Good leadership means building trust. Certainly Kouzes and Posner (2003) affirmed this statement when they said "before people will be willing to follow a leader's vision or act on a leader's initiatives, they must trust their leader. This trust cannot be demanded. Leaders must earn it before they can expect their diverse constituents to accept and act upon their messages" (p. 110).

Trust is a critical ingredient of the social context of schools not only for leadership, but also because it improves cooperation (Putnam, 1993; Tschannen-Moran, 2001), it enhances openness and health in a school climate (Hoffman, 1994; Hoy, *et al.*, 1992), and perhaps most importantly, it facilitates student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard, *et al.*, 2001; Hoy, 2002).

Bryk and Schneider's (2002) study revealed a vital element in those social relationships as being *relational trust*. They discovered that schools that reported strong positive relational trust levels were three times more likely to be categorised as improving in reading and mathematics than those with very weak reports. Schools with strong positive trust reports had a one-in-two chance of being in the improving group. Of these schools, virtually all teachers reported a strong, positive relationship with their principal. They typically described their principal as an effective manager who supported their professional development, had concern for their welfare and placed the needs of the students first. In contrast, the likelihood of schools with very weak trust reports to improve was only one in seven. The most telling data showed that schools with weak trust reports had "virtually no chance of showing improvement in either reading or mathematics" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 111). Teachers at these schools reported minimal, or no trust in their principal. They did not feel respected and did not feel comfortable confiding in him or her.

Anecdotal evidence collected during my study supported Bryk and Schneider's findings. Each of the four schools that participated in the study was consistently producing high levels of student achievement as shown by their NAPLAN and Year 12 results. Two of the schools were consistently ranked in the top 10 performing schools in their state as indicated by their Year 12 results.

Trust therefore, is not only the condition needed for transformational change, but also has significant benefits for student achievement. The question then is how as a leader do you effectively establish and maintain a relationship of trust with your staff?

Creating and sustaining trust in leadership

My research project was undertaken in two phases. The first was the selection of four highly trusted transformational school leaders. The second phase was a case study of each of those leaders, looking for key practices in the behaviour of each of the Heads that engendered the trust of their staff.

The study differed from many others in that it examined the concept of trust from the perspective of the people from whom it was offered, the staff members. Atkinson and Butcher (2003) claimed that it is virtually impossible to have a universal definition of trust since it is a socially constructed phenomenon. My findings supported the assertion made by Caldwell and Hayes (2007): *Each staff member understood the concept of trust from the lens of their life experience, the way that they view the world because of their past experiences.* The experiences, and the way a staff member viewed the world, then determined the practices that engendered his/her trust in the Head. For example, if trust was defined as keeping confidences, then keeping confidences was a practice that the person identified. As each person has his/her own life experience and understanding of the concept of trust, no one practice alone will engender the collective trust of a staff. Employing a range of practices will engender a greater number of people's trust. One practice may be of value to one person but have no value to another.

A cross-case analysis of the four highly trusted transformational leaders revealed 10 key practices:

1 Openly admits mistakes
2 Offers trust to staff
3 Actively listens
4 Provides affirmation
5 Makes informed/consultative decisions
6 Is visible around the school
7 Remains calm and level-headed
8 Mentors and coaches staff
9 Cares for staff
10 Keeps confidences.

Data collected during Phase One of the research showed that there is little correlation between a Head's length of 'tenure' and 'trust in the leader'. This finding suggested that leaders who are not well trusted do not necessarily become more trusted as time goes by. There was likely a disparity in what each of the leaders was doing that was impacting the level of trust in each school. It is therefore important that school leaders develop behaviours and practices that engender, build and sustain trust rather than hoping that they will become more trusted as time goes by.

The 10 key practices identified have been used to develop a *Trust and Transformational Leadership Assessment Rubric*. This rubric can be used as a self-reflection tool or even as an appraisal tool. Asking a leader's staff to provide feedback on his/her practice using the rubric will provide helpful direction for future leadership growth. It could also be used as a referee check.

Rubric for assessing trust and transformational leadership practice

Admit mistakes	Never displays vulnerability nor admits his/her mistakes or accepts responsibility for poor decisions; blames others.	Rarely displays any form of vulnerability; acknowledges when a poor decision or mistake has been made but doesn't take any personal responsibility or act to resolve it.	On occasions displays vulnerability; accepts responsibility for his/her own errors and poor decisions but doesn't apologise; admonishes others for their mistakes and poor decisions.	Displays professional and personal vulnerability; admits mistakes or poor decisions; apologises publicly; is willing to accept responsibility for other's mistakes; actively rectifies mistakes.
Offering trust	Micro-manages staff; controls or interferes with staff members' decision-making responsibilities; ordering, directing, or commanding; feedback is primarily corrective, or limited, general.	Allows staff to perform their role to an extent, monitors and sometimes influences decisions and regularly checks on work; feedback is primarily in the form of advice.	Allows staff to perform their role and make decisions that affect their work with minimal interference; provides supportive feedback when asked.	Treats staff as professional colleagues by implicitly trusting them to perform their role; willingly provides mentoring and coaching when asked.
Active listening	Speaks far more than he/she listens; is easily distracted when a person is speaking; shows little interest; does not show empathy; is only keen to share his/her point of view.	Gives time for the other person to speak before he/she shares their point of view; can allow distractions to interrupt the conversation; demonstrates a level of understanding.	Balances listening with speaking; is not easily distracted; demonstrates that he/she has heard and understood what the person has said by summarising their main points.	Listens far more than he/she speaks without distraction; asks clarifying questions; demonstrates empathy; can articulate succinctly what the person is feeling and what they have actually said;
Affirmation	Never or rarely gives staff members affirmation or thanks.	Provides affirmation to staff members on occasions either publicly or privately for significant contributions and successes.	Regularly recognises contributions staff members have made and provides affirmation either publicly or privately.	Actively seeks ways to affirm and thank staff members either publicly or privately; affirms not just the significant contributions but also the little things staff do.
Decision making	Either makes decisions with no consultation or consideration of its impact or rarely is able to make a decision; doesn't communicate a decision nor provide justification or explanation for it.	Makes considered decisions; superficial consultation that works to enact an agenda; enacts the decisions.	Seeks staff input using consultative decision-making process; makes decisions and enacts them; communicates decisions to staff.	Values staff input and views; uses consultative or collaborative decision-making processes; makes timely and informed decisions and enacts them; communicates the justification for decisions.
Visibility	Rarely seen around the school; mainly confined to his/her office or is away from the school; does not regularly attend assemblies, chapel services, events, etc.; not accessible to staff.	On occasions can be seen around the school; attends assemblies, chapel services, etc.; on occasions attends school events; staff can make an appointment to see him/her.	Often seen around the school speaking with students, staff and parents; often attends assemblies, chapel services and other school events; accessible to staff.	Regularly seen on the grounds speaking with parents, staff and students modelling and reinforcing expectations; attends assemblies, chapel services and other events; is very accessible to staff.
Demeanor	Is unpredictable; prone to losing control of his/her emotions in different situations; primarily focused on his/her agenda rather than the staff member.	Responds emotively to different situations, expressing their feelings accordingly; displays concern for both him/herself and the staff member.	Is able to keep his/her emotions in check; shows a level of restraint in difficult or challenging situations; demonstrates respect for the staff member.	Is consistent and predictable, always remaining calm and level-headed no matter the situation; always respectful of the staff member.
Coaching and mentoring	Displays little interest or support for staff professional development; feedback is primarily corrective and judgmental.	Supports staff professional development programs; feedback is primarily in the form of advice, or is limited or general.	Takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers; provides supportive and honest feedback when asked.	Maximises staff members' potential and career growth through coaching or mentoring; provides immediate, specific and accurate feedback aimed at promoting growth.
Care and concern	Does not display empathy for staff members; has little interest in knowing people as individuals.	Displays an interest in the wellbeing of staff members; knows staff members and their role in the organisation; claims to know how others feel.	Considers staff members' needs and wellbeing; displays empathy; knows staff members professionally and personally but knows where to draw the line.	Extends a genuine care and compassion for individual staff members by offering practical support; invests time to get to know staff members as people.
Confidentiality	Does not keep a person's confidences when they come into possession of sensitive information; rumours occur on a regular basis.	Keeps information confidential when specifically asked by the member of staff.	Keeps the confidences of staff members; will make a professional judgment as to whether that information should be shared.	Keeps the confidences of staff members when he/she is entrusted with sensitive information; only shares information with permission.

While the practices were identified in a study of school principals, they nonetheless have value for any leadership position, or for any person aspiring to be a leader, particularly those who wish to bring about transformational change in their organisation.

Concluding comments

Politicians operate in a political economy where the currency is the vote. The corporate sector operates in a commercial economy where the currency is the dollar. Heads of schools operate in the people economy where the currency is trust.

The topic of trust is both intriguing and elusive. The concept is hard to define but we certainly know when it is missing. Baier (1986) noted "we notice trust as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted" (p. 234) but it is the condition that enables a leader to bring about transformational change. Bryk and Schneider (2002) discovered this when they concluded that schools which reported strong trust levels were three times more likely to be categorised as improving in reading and mathematics than those with very weak trust levels. Barber, *et al.* (2010) showed that good leadership has a positive impact on student achievement. My study added to this literature by identifying specific trust engendering practices of highly trusted transformational leaders that enhance a culture of trust in a school.

If schools are to adapt to an ever-changing world, they must have effective transformational leadership. Without it our students will not be afforded the educational opportunities to prepare them for tomorrow's living. Understanding how trust can be generated will give rise to brave new possibilities for our schools.

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Dr Paul Browning is currently the Headmaster of St Paul's School, a Pre-Prep to Year 12 coeducational Anglican School located in northern Brisbane. Prior to this he was the founding Head of Burgmann Anglican School in the ACT. Dr Browning earned his PhD through QUT, examining the practices that high performing school leaders use to engender trust between themselves and their staff and Chair of governing body.

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