

# Enthusiastic Educational Leadership

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*A qualitative research study was conducted to explore the factors relating to enthusiastic and engaged educational leadership. The methodology included interviews of successful leaders in education at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, as well as a review of related research literature. The information gathered leads to the conclusion that enthusiasm and engagement with work is related to a collaborative leadership style, a strong work ethic, and alignment of personal and organizational missions. That is, educational leaders who (1) seek to achieve progress through collaboration, (2) exhibit a strong work ethic, and (3) clarify for themselves and others how the organizational mission aligns with personal mission are more likely, themselves, to be engaged and enthusiastic, while also promoting the same characteristics among those with whom they work.*

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Engaged and enthusiastic – in the ideal world, isn't that how most people who work would want to feel every Monday morning, and in fact, every day at work? And how most supervisors or leaders would want their colleagues and co-workers to feel? One could argue that educational settings in particular should evidence a positive tone indicative of engagement and employee commitment to the purposes of the endeavor. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe those concepts that may be underlying enthusiasm and engagement with work in educational settings. In particular, the enthusiasm and engagement of educational leaders will be explored. A loose definition of the concept being examined (enthusiastic and engaged educational leadership) follows: those feelings about work that are held by people in positions of power and influence in the educational work setting, which include a significant sense of ownership, involvement, inspiration, commitment, and enjoyment.

The central question for the study was: What are the important factors influencing enthusiasm and engagement with the work of educational leaders? Sub-questions included: Why are these individuals enthusiastic and engaged with their work? What aspects about their work do they enjoy most? What motivates them? How do they hope to encourage others to be enthusiastic about their own work?

A qualitative study, using a phenomenological approach with pattern theory, was conducted on the topic of enthusiasm and engagement with work within the context of educational leadership. The study involved interviews of successful educational leaders and a review of literature specific to enthusiasm and engagement with work. The study was

emergent in nature, in that an inductive approach was used. Theory was developed rather than being pre-assumed as in the case of a quantitative study. As new information was gathered and reviewed, the course of the study could take on new directions or incorporate additional concepts.

Following Moustakas' suggested format for reporting on a phenomenological study (1994), this report includes the following components: an introduction and purpose statement with topical outline (this section), a conceptual framework and review of the literature, a description of methodology, the presentation of data, and a summary with outcomes and implications. The following review of the literature speaks to the more general concepts of work and leadership. The data presentation section will include both the stories of the interviewed educational leaders and the literature regarding the more specific concepts that emerged from the interviews.

### Conceptual Framework and Review of Literature

Much of the discussion about enjoyment of work is along the 'career guidance' model which suggests that to find enjoyment of work one should identify that which they already enjoy, and then pursue a related career. This study approaches enjoyment of work from a different angle. The underlying assumptions with this study are more along the following logic: 1) work is an important and necessary part of life; 2) work is typically a significant time commitment; 3) ideally one enjoys one's work; 4) there are conditions or factors influencing the enjoyment of work; and 5) those conditions or factors can be identified. Accordingly, the research review began with an examination of the literature that relates to the role of work within our lives and how work can elicit feelings of enjoyment and enthusiasm.

The study also incorporates underlying assumptions about educational leaders: 1) leaders may or may not feel enthusiastic about their work; 2) those leaders who do feel enthusiastic and engaged with work are more likely to inspire those around them to be enthusiastic and engaged also; and 3) enthusiastic and engaged workers are more likely to be effective and productive in their work. Hence, a review of literature related to leadership and the potential for impact on productivity is also included here.

#### *The Role of Work*

Work is one of the most basic of human activities. It is on the short list of "eat, sleep, work, and play" as constituting a central role in each of our lives. The term 'work' is well understood as meaning that which we do to earn a living, as chores or tasks needing to be completed, or as the effort expended to accomplish some objective. Students have 'homework.' There is also 'housework.' We hear references to quality 'workmanship.' Most work is purposeful, and if not, it may be called 'busywork.' Although there is a good understanding of what the term 'work' means, how each of us perceives our work may vary tremendously according to the context and our own values and preferences.

Work appears to be linked with basic human needs. Abraham Maslow (1968) theorized that humans have hierarchical needs; starting with physiological needs (food, clothing, shelter), and progressing to the need to feel safe, the need for a sense of belonging, the need for self-esteem, and finally, the need for self-actualization. Looking at work in relation to these needs, one can quickly conclude that work, in the sense of earning a living,

dramatically affects one's ability to purchase food or clothing. It can influence the capacity to achieve a safe environment as well. It can provide a sense of belonging (to the work team or as a member of an organization). It can enhance one's self-esteem as one learns and comes to excel at work-related skills or contributes to a valuable product or service. And it can relate to self-actualization; think of the writer, the artist, the musician, and the architect who uses his or her profession as a means of creative self-expression, contribution, and on-going learning.

Similarly, Henri de Man (1977) suggests that work satisfies what he labels as human instincts. For example, work can address the instincts of: (a) activity: wanting to move about, take action; (b) play: the urge for self-expression and creativity; (c) construction: building or organizing; (d) curiosity: finding new information, new cause and effect patterns; (e) self-assertion: undertaking activities which will result in enhanced self-esteem; (f) possession: building a sense of ownership and pride in work well done; (g) social community (herding instinct): wanting to join collectively to achieve some specified goal; and (h) social utility: seeing the good that results from one's efforts.

Work plays a pivotal role in each of our lives. It may range from the more ordinary task of food preparation, all the way to painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Regardless, it is important to our sense of self, important in its contributions to others, and important as a means for earning a living.

#### *Leadership: Definitions and Impact*

Leadership is an ambiguous term. We usually recognize leadership when we see it, but it can still be difficult to define. It can refer to the actions and words of the person who is in charge or the subtle nature of interaction between an influential member of a group with others in that same group. Leadership can mean the process of directing and coordinating others to attain a common goal. It can mean speaking softly and carrying a big stick. It can imply a distinction in power, or not. Leadership can be formal or informal, negative or positive, and quiet or explicit. It is not an easily captured or described phenomenon.

The organizational literature in general has long spoken to the idea that a workplace culture that is open and trusting, and where the leadership is respected, is more likely to be successful in its mission. Similarly, most leadership discussions would suggest that a leader who is positive and encouraging in his or her orientation toward supervision is likely to be more effective than a leader who is negative and punitive. Logic tells us that a leader who enjoys his or her work and is enthusiastic about that work might more easily assemble a following of those interested in moving in the same direction.

The following demonstrates the wide-ranging views on leadership, just a few of the many definitions and thoughts on the topic, especially as they may pertain to enthusiasm and engagement. Lussier and Achua define leadership (2004, p. 5) as "the influencing process of leaders and followers to achieve organizational objectives through change." Kouzes and Posner (1997) found leaders who were at their personal best "challenge the process; inspire shared vision, enable others to act, model the way, and encourage the heart." (p.3)

The description of leadership based on Stogdill's (1981) classic research about traits exhibited by leaders depicts the implicit possibilities of enthusiasm within: "The leader is characterized by a strong drive for responsibility and task completion, vigor, persistence in pursuit of goals, venturesomeness and originality in problem solving, drive to exercise initiative in social situations, self-confidence and sense of personal identity, willingness to

accept consequences of decision and action, readiness to absorb interpersonal stress, willingness to tolerate frustration and delay, ability to influence other persons' behavior, and capacity to structure interaction systems to the purpose at hand" (Hoy and Miskell, 1987, p. 273; Stogdill, 1981, pp.73-97; Vroom, 1976, pp.1527-1551).

Birnbaum's research on leadership in higher education (1992) suggests an interpretive view of leadership emphasizing "the importance of leaders in developing and sustaining systems of belief that regenerate participants' commitment." (p. 10) Birnbaum believes this approach is especially applicable at the postsecondary level because of the variance in cultures across different colleges and universities, and because shared governance modifies leadership in this environment as well. He goes on to explain, citing Pfeffer (1981), that leaders carry out this task "through the use of language, symbolism, and ritual" designed to encourage others to see the connection between the leader's values and the organizational trajectory.

Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) have published work on what they call "primal leadership." Primal leadership is based on the concept of emotional intelligence-related leadership competencies. These competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The leader who is self-aware knows his or her strengths and weaknesses, has a good self-concept, and is in tune with his or her own feelings. Self-management gives a leader emotional self-control, facilitates honesty and trustworthiness, encourages optimism, and provides the drive toward accomplishment. The socially aware leader senses others' emotions and reflects that understanding. He or she is politically sensitive (e.g. organizational politics) and recognizes the needs of the client or customer. Relationship management skills include being inspiring, using a range of tactics for influence, successfully initiating change, and cultivating bonds among the members of a group. (p. 39)

Goleman et. al. (2002) cite research to demonstrate that leaders with these skills are more effective in their roles. The case, in simple terms, states that if a leader can sense and reflect concern for the feelings of others, not become overly reactive, depict a positive vision, take action, encourage others, and build a team, he or she will be successful. Goleman and his colleagues contend that "the fundamental task of leaders... is to prime good feelings in those they lead. That occurs when a leader creates resonance; a reservoir of positivity that frees the best in people. At its root then, the primal job of leadership is emotional." (p. ix) In fact, these authors go so far as to say that based on brain research, they have concluded "leaders' moods and actions have enormous impact on those they lead." (p. ix) This almost revolutionary idea of the importance of the leader fostering a good mood and a positive working environment comes in direct conflict with years of emphasis in the workplace on being rational and linear.

### Methods

The previous examination of work and leadership sets the stage for reporting on the next part of the study; the methodology of the study per se, including the design, data collection, and analysis. A qualitative phenomenological approach corresponding to "pattern theory" was used for this study. Creswell (1998, p. 52) reports that a phenomenological approach seeks to identify the "essential, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience ..." and uses the data analysis method of

reductionism in which there is an “analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings.” Pattern theory is described (Creswell, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as one in which explanations for phenomenon, such as the one in this study (why are some educational leaders so enthusiastic and engaged?) emerge as the study is underway. The explanations show a pattern of ideas that connect the parts into a holistic picture.

The specific methodology for this study included an interview process entailing structured conversations with select enthusiastic educational leaders followed by a literature review of the concepts/patterns which emerged from the interviews.

Interviews were conducted with four individuals perceived to be effective, highly motivated, and engaged with their work. The interviewees were identified by the author through purposive sampling and included males and females; elementary, secondary and postsecondary leaders; and both Caucasian and African American representatives. This approach of selecting individuals who, to begin with, seemed enthusiastic and engaged was intentional and corresponds with the approach of “theoretical sampling,” wherein one intentionally selects participants who may demonstrate the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 1998, p. 57). The individuals were invited to participate and personally interviewed by the author. Included were (real names have been changed): Donald, a high school principal; Ed, a retired college president; Christine, an education professor who is also a school board member; and Linda, an elementary school principal.

An interview protocol was developed and used, although in the process of the questioning, at times, the discussions took different directions. The overarching purpose of the interviews was to gain some understanding as to what contributed to these individuals’ enthusiasm and engagement with their work. The main point being, is there something to be learned from effective and enthusiastic educational leaders which can help others to be more enthusiastic and engaged with their work as well? Following are some of the specific questions asked:

- What aspect of your work do you enjoy the most?
- Would you say you are passionate about your work?
- Have you thought about where (or from whom) you acquired the ‘joy of work’ habit?
- Do you convey your enjoyment of work to colleagues?
- If you won the Lottery, would you continue to work?
- To what extent does work constitute play to you?
- To what extent do you, as a leader, feel an obligation to be upbeat and optimistic in dealing with colleagues?
- How do you feel about retirement?

The data analysis included several components. The interviews were reviewed. Commonly expressed themes or patterns were identified and common items were grouped. Summaries of each individual story were prepared. Overall, this process served to reduce the data down to the concepts most frequently and consistently expressed by the interviewees.

The summaries of the individual stories are presented interspersed with the information from the literature review in the categories of the themes which emerged from both the interviews and literature. Although the topic of enthusiasm at work is not unheard of, neither does it appear to have been studied extensively.

### Presentation of Data/Findings

Following is a discussion of the three primary themes that emerged from the interviews and literature review. The three themes that came forward as being related to enthusiasm and engagement with work were: working with others in a collaborative fashion, valuing work in and of itself, and believing in the organizational mission. For the purposes of this study, those themes are being labeled as follows: (a) a collaborative leadership style, (b) a strong work ethic, and (c) personal and organizational or professional mission alignment. The underlying rationale is that there will likely be an engaged and enthusiastic educational leader at the intersection or nexus point where those concepts converge. The results of the literature review and a summary of each of the interviews follow. We begin with Donald's story which depicts the three identified themes identified previously.

#### *Donald's Story*

Donald is a secondary school principal and leader in the community. He has a time-intensive schedule, but he doesn't view his work as work. "This is my life, and I'm here to enjoy life." Donald says his job keeps him young. He enjoys working with the youngsters, being out in the hall when classes change. He says it keeps him healthy and joyful. "If you don't have a passion," says Donald, "you're not going to be effective. The way to a student's mind is through a teacher's heart. We are affecting lives."

An uncle who was key in Donald's upbringing taught him that one's happiness should be wrapped up in making other people happy. Donald lives by that credo. He takes pride in not being a "traditional" boss, and thinks of himself as the "lead teacher" at the school of 1400 students and almost 100 staff. He tries to be approachable and to convey his enthusiasm through his actions. Donald believes education is the most important profession in our society. "Public education is the foundation this country was built on. I'm glad to be a part of it."

Donald grew up a shy boy with low self-esteem. He excelled in baseball and later in debate. Those two activities helped raise his confidence. In his own life he saw how involvement led to opportunity. He is honored now when a single mother asks him to become involved with her son by serving as a role model. He is currently working on his dissertation. It will focus on the subject of role models in education for African American youth. Donald absolutely believes "every child is reachable, teachable, lovable, and save-able," and he wants every member of the school staff to believe that too. His mission, he says (almost apologizing because he thinks it sounds Walt Disneyish) is that he wants each child who walks through the doors of his school to acquire the skills he or she needs to be productive and responsible.

When asked what he would do if he won the Lottery, Donald says he would like to open an academy for African American males. "What is in place now is not working for that segment of society." In working with the school's teaching staff, Donald emphasizes the golden opportunities their mutual work offers; the chance to make a difference. He tells them, "We are molding the world we have to live in." He feels it is important that he sets the tone, "But that is not a problem for me. I'm always upbeat." When asked about the impact of his work, Donald says he sees graduates who come back, colleagues who tell him how

great it is to work with him, and staff telling him how much they appreciate the opportunities he provides for them. Work gives him peace of mind.

Donald says he has tended to serve in different work roles in approximately six-year increments, because he enjoys change. Donald doesn't even think about retirement. "That's not a thing people do in my family," he says. He intends to work till he dies, or as long as he is able: "I'm going to make a difference to the last day." He wants to teach his students that they, too, can make a difference.

### *Collaborative Leadership*

The term "collaborative leadership" is being used in this study to depict a leadership style within an organization where the formal leadership emphasizes working with the faculty/teachers/staff in an empowering, participatory fashion, as opposed to a more traditional, hierarchical, top-down model of "command and control." To elaborate, a collaborative leader would interact with and supervise the employees within his or her unit in a way that encourages teamwork, joint problem solving, and planning together towards achievement of a shared vision. Equally, shared accountability and ownership would be the norm in this scenario.

Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2001, p. 44) report that based on research conducted by the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations at Rutgers University, "...of all the elements affecting bottom-line performance, the importance of the leader's mood and its attendant behaviors are most surprising...the leader's mood and behaviors drive the moods and behaviors of everyone else. A cranky and ruthless boss creates a toxic organization filled with negative underachievers who ignore opportunities; an inspirational inclusive leader spawns acolytes for whom any challenge is surmountable. The final link in the chain in performance: profit or loss." For example, in a study of leadership in the U.S. Navy (Goleman, 2000) comparing superior to average commands, it was found the best commands were headed by "nice" people. "The superior leaders managed to balance a people-oriented personal style with a decisive command role...the greatest difference between average and superior leaders was in their emotional style. The most effective leaders were more positive and outgoing, more emotionally expressive and dramatic, warmer and more sociable (including smiling more), friendlier and more democratic, more cooperative, more likable and 'fun to be with,' more appreciative and trustful, and even gentler than those who were merely average." (p. 188) Effectiveness equated with a more collaborative leadership style.

Chrislip (2002) presents a collaborative leadership model for the broader situation of civic and community problem-solving. That model suggests a stakeholder involvement approach whereby all involved agree there is a problem, that they will work together to learn about the problem and generate possible solutions to the problem, and that consensus will be developed on implementation of the selected solution. This situation however, is not usually the typical internal organizational initiative; rather, it would often be across organizations and stakeholder groups. The leadership might be appointed to work with a volunteer group, but would usually not be the formal supervisor in an employment setting. (p. 54)

Within the educational context, the idea of a supervisory model in which the formal leader (e.g. the principal of a K-12 school) empowers the employees (the teachers and other professionals) has long been advocated through the "instructional leadership" model. This

model emphasizes the principal as not just a manager of the building, but serving in the capacity as the primary coach and cheerleader associated with leading instructional improvement and ultimately enhanced learning by students.

For example, The National Association of Secondary School Principals' most recent report on high school reform, *Breaking Ranks II* (2004), identifies collaborative leadership as one of several key strategies necessary for school reform. Collaborative leadership is not strictly defined in the report, but is referenced in discussions of: the principal providing clear vision, establishment of a structured means of involvement across constituency groups, partnerships with higher education, and decision-making in accord with democratic values. Rick Kolowski, principal of Millard West High School in Omaha, NE, and a trainer for *Breaking Ranks*, comments that collaborative leadership allows for empowerment of staff through different channels of involvement, thereby encouraging buy-in (2007).

Blase and Blase (2004, p. 11) have summarized research findings on instructional leadership and report that instructional leadership blending emphasis on supervision, staff development and curriculum development has been long accepted as important, but that "until recently little knowledge of what behaviors comprise good instructional leadership has been available in the literature." They conclude that "successful supervisory practice should no longer emphasize control and competition among teachers..." Rather, it should emphasize "the development of professional dialogue among teachers." (p.165) They advocate for teacher empowerment and teacher leadership with shared governance based on a democratic model (p.188).

Northouse (2007) has researched team effectiveness, and suggests a team leadership model that includes leadership focused on team-based problem solving, clear goals, and a collaborative climate. (p.209, 218) He believes "the critical function of leadership is to help the group accomplish its goals." (p.234)

### *Ed's Story*

Ed's story tells of one very effective educational leader who names working with others as one of the primary contributors to his enjoyment of work.

Ed is a retired university president who is now directing a community philanthropic organization. He is highly respected among the faculty and staff at the university, and among leaders in the community. He enjoys being active and typically feels that there is not enough time in the day to get everything done. When asked about how his enjoyment of work manifests itself, he tells how as a youngster he knew working was to "put meat on the table," but there was no internalization. Later he came to realize the intrinsic benefits of work.

"Once you come to see what your role is, where you fit, and what happens through your efforts, that's where the joy comes from." He likes the challenge and the involvement with people: "...working with people, planning, shooting the breeze, motivating them, and being motivated in return." He enjoys helping the organization move forward. He is happiest when those with whom he is working are happy, when they are actively engaged and purposeful.

When asked if he feels passionate about his work, Ed says he thinks the word passionate is an appropriate description of how he feels about his work. He says, "I'm not willing to forget about everything in my life for my work, but if I wasn't passionate, I couldn't get much joy from it. The two go hand-in-hand." He thinks he acquired his positive feelings about work from a mother who was very work-oriented.

When asked where he thinks his strengths lie, Ed believes others know they can count on him, that he is trustworthy and sincere. He doesn't engage in under-the-table deals. "You can't teach that in an administration class. It's not a 'skill' you learn," says Ed. "You can pick up skills of working with people, but not honesty."

Ed had retired from the presidency two years previously. He was a popular president; there was no need for him to leave at that point. Why did he choose to retire? His reasoning included several points. He felt it was better to leave a year early than a day late, that it was time for a change of leadership for the institution, that he had seen a number of his goals for the university come to fruition, and that he wanted to reduce his hours, although he didn't want to quit working completely.

Ed said he has always felt good about going to work. As president he had a workweek that averaged 60 hours Monday through Friday. In addition there were activities where the lines were blurred between work and play, such as athletic events, golf outings, receptions, and so forth. "There are many days I would rather work than play golf. I don't initiate golf."

In terms of supervision, Ed reports he doesn't know how to make someone else be enthusiastic about their work. He has encouraged people from time to time who were unhappy to reconsider their role, maybe switch from line to staff or to something they enjoyed more. But he didn't actively try to "pep up" others. He senses some of his enthusiasm for work is noticed by his colleagues, but says it is inadvertent on his part. "People can read me as a book. Most days were 'up' days fortunately...the only thing you can do is model enthusiasm."

### *Work Ethic*

The concept of a strong work ethic is generally understood to mean those values held by individuals who work hard, hold high standards for their work, and believe their contributions are in some manner important. Hill (1996) writes that Max Weber's conception of the Protestant Work Ethic entails an approach to work wherein the moral value of work in and of itself is recognized, and the traits accompanying good work are viewed to include such attributes as persistence, determination, and willingness to delay gratification. One also hears references to the Midwest Work Ethic, which may have related originally to those pioneer settlers and farmers who needed to get up early to milk the cows, work long hours under the hot sun in the fields, and generally put in a long day, with much attention to multiple farm-related chores, just to feed their families.

Bennett (1993) shares an observation pertinent to the concept of work ethic. "Happiness, as Aristotle long ago pointed out, resides in activity, both physical and mental. It resides in doing things that one can take pride in doing well, and hence that one can enjoy doing. It is a great mistake to identify enjoyment with mere amusement or relaxing or being entertained. Life's greatest joys are not what one does apart from the work of one's life, but with the work of one's life. Those who have missed the joy of work, of a job well done, have missed something very important." (p. 347)

In terms of cultivating work ethic, Buckingham and Coffman (1999) report research based on surveys by the Gallup Poll organization of over one million employees and over eighty thousand supervisors. The research indicates employee retention and productivity (possible indicators or correlates of work ethic) are directly related to the employee's

relationship with his or her immediate supervisor. Twelve core elements were identified as critical to structuring a work environment conducive to enhanced employee performance. (p.28) Several of those core elements overlap with this examination:

1. the extent to which the employee has the opportunity to do everyday what he/she does best;
2. the extent to which the employee regularly receives recognition or praise for good work;
3. the fact that the supervisor, or another at work, seems to care about the employee as a person;
4. the extent to which the employee feels their job's importance is evident in relation to the organization's mission and purpose; and
5. the fact that there is someone at work who encourages the employee's development.

Gardner (2002) added to the concept of work ethic through a focus on the moralistic aspects of work. He has defined "good" work as that which includes not only a "high level of expertise," but also a "concern with the implications and application of an individual's work for the wider world." He is trying to go beyond the idea of technical goodness, and incorporate that of moral goodness as well. In particular, Gardner examined "how individuals who wish to do good work succeed or fail" under changing conditions. He interviewed individuals from a range of professions and have concluded that although it may be challenging to stay true to one's ideals in difficult work circumstances, there are ways in which individuals have accomplished this objective. Gardner suggests that individual workers: (a) define their mission: clarify what they are trying to achieve through work, and how that work serves society, (b) identify role models within the profession and consider what it is about those role models' behavior that is desirable to emulate, and (c) review their own work and the work by others in the profession to assess the appropriateness of behavior, actions, approaches in comparison to the perceived mission of the work.

The line of conversation about work ethic seems to vary with different generations. The concept of work ethic was once a common theme in the American "rags to riches" dream. In particular, Horatio Alger, successful author of dime novels in the second half of the 1800's sold the "work hard, be honest" model as a route to success and many young men of the era were captivated. The more common rhetoric on the topic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century refers to Generation X employees, who are labeled as having a more bohemian attitude toward work, while the newest group is called the Millennial Generation; those who swing back to being task-oriented and success-driven (Howe and Strauss, 2003).

Charles Casserly, former General Manager of the Houston Texans pro football team, recently shared his views on work ethic with a college graduation audience (2005). He recounted that Lou Holtz had once said, "The ability to work hard is a skill." Casserly went on, "I think too often in life we look at the natural athletes, the intelligent people who can read a book and don't study for a test and get an A, the people who can take one round of batting practice and hit 350, the people who never have to stay after practice and yet they excel. We somehow put them up on a pinnacle and say they are better than those people who have to study all night, those people who have to stay after practice and shoot free throws, and those people who have to run the extra laps to get in better shape. We somehow hold those people in less esteem. But that's not the way it is in the real life, and you'll find that out. What I've found, and I've discussed this with other general managers in the National Football League, the single toughest characteristic to find in an employee when we

hire him is a work ethic. If we find a work ethic, we can teach him the rest. We can't teach him a work ethic. If you have a work ethic, be proud of it because you are better than those athletes out there and scholars out there who don't work. The world is full of people with talent without a work ethic. Our Pro Bowl teams are filled with people with a work ethic and some talent. If you have that ability to work hard, if you have that skill, you do have something special. If you don't have it, you'd better get it."

### *Christine's Story*

Christine's Story tells how a professor places great value on her work, puts in much time and effort, and loves every minute of it.

Christine is a professor of children's literature at a major university. She very consciously chose her profession. She reports, "My Dad encouraged me to choose a career that would excite me every morning when I went to work." So Christine thought about what she enjoyed: children, reading, writing, and language. She considered job tasks; she enjoys teaching and she researched job satisfaction ratings for professors and found professors among the most satisfied. Christine very deliberately chose the professoriate and she loves her work. She enjoys the variety and she believes her work is important. "I focus on the long term of what is positive for kids."

Christine is also a school board member. She enjoys that role because it provides her with even more opportunities to be out with kids. "Whenever I'm in a bad mood, I go out to a school." One of her favorite activities is when she serves as a VIP Reader to the children in elementary classrooms. "The kids are so happy and excited about learning things. That energizes me."

Christine says money doesn't matter. "It's just paper. It's not how I judge myself. How much money I make is never in the column of determining my success." What counts for her is being an advocate for children. Christine's daughter, when asked once what work her mother did, replied, "She reads for a living." Christine liked that response because she felt it embodied her belief in the importance of the language arts.

A sign on the wall in Christine's office says: "Be the most positive person you know." She acknowledges sometimes being called a Pollyanna. And when asked if she ever finds herself trying to appear upbeat when she doesn't really feel that way, she said the more common scenario is that she has to remind herself to look more serious. Sometimes her school board role requires a more somber approach than Christine's natural demeanor, but she tries to adjust to the situation at hand so people will not conclude that she is uncaring. She says she tries to disagree with people in a way that isn't adversarial. She assumes they share her passion (about kids and education), but that they just disagree on the "how: of it all.

Christine enjoys the teaching aspect of her job because of her love for language arts, the fact that she likes pointing out to students their strengths, and that she is skilled in listening. "When you put that all together – Ah, hah! Teacher!" Christine continues, "I get my energy from my students. They laugh at my jokes...my family monitors where we are in the academic school year and knows to be supportive of me during those times I'm not around my students."

Christine reports she likes the people with whom she works. She enjoys hearing about their projects. She likes being able to bounce ideas off colleagues. She appreciates that they too, like children.

When asked how she feels about retirement, Christine says, "I'll have the university stop paying me when I'm no longer doing a good job and the trends are passing me by. Then I'll just mentor, volunteer, and write."

She views work and play as overlapping. "There is no such thing as overloading. After a while all things connect and overlap, more so that what starts out being labeled as work, may actually come to be more like play." It all comes together as being "for the kid"; her own children, the district's children, and the children her students will eventually teach.

### *Mission Alignment*

Mission alignment refers to the extent to which an individual feels his or her work matches or corresponds to his or her own values and purpose for being. That is, do they feel their job helps them fulfill their own personal mission? This author, and those cited below, believe that employees who feel their work does have a high correlation with their own personal mission are more likely to feel enthusiastic about their work.

In Studs Terkle's classic on the topic of work (1974), the comments of an individual interviewed by Terkle, Nora Watson, who happened to be a successful editor, speak directly to mission alignment. She said, "To be occupied is essential. One should find joy in one's occupation...everyone needs to feel they have a place in the world. Human beings must work to create some coherence...I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us, like the assembly line worker, have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people." (p. xxiv, 422, 424)

Goleman (2000) believes work is best attached to meaning as well. He says, "Except for the financially desperate, people do not work for money alone. What also fuels their passion for work is a larger sense of purpose...given the opportunity, people gravitate to what gives them meaning, to what engages their fullest commitment, talent, energy, and skill." (p. 58)

Chatterjee (1998), author of *Leading Consciously: A Pilgrimage Toward Self-Mastery*, contends that "work that is not hitched to a guiding principle degenerates into a mundane chore and loses its meaning." (p. 57) He goes even further to say, "When leaders become totally integrated with their deepest urges in body, mind, and soul, their spirits are like a coherent beam of laser light—intense and irresistible. They move masses on the wings of this spirit. This is the secret of their charisma." (p.64) Chatterjee coins the term, "workship" to define work carried out in the spirit of worship. He suggests that "when work is done in the spirit of worship, the quality of work undergoes a metamorphosis. As a result, even ordinary work is transformed from a mere chore to an extraordinary reality." (p. 64)

Conger (1991) speaks to the concept of how leaders can elicit employees' feelings of commitment to an organizational vision. He suggests leaders "learn to sell themselves and their missions to 'stump' for their cause." He encourages "framing" of organizational mission such that people feel like they are working on a noble venture, feel that they are part of something bigger, feel there is meaning and value to their work. Conger describes how Steven Jobs, CEO of NEXT, described the organization's work not in terms production or sales of computers, but in terms of breakthrough software enabling colleges and universities

to create simulated learning environments, and ultimately make a real difference in the way that the learning experience happens. This is a description of a mission about which an employee can feel excited and proud to be affiliated. Such are the beginnings of enthusiasm and engagement.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) speak to the issue of visioning, as well. Their case research found “when leaders clearly articulate their vision for the organization, constituents report significantly higher levels of a variety of positive reactions such as these: job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, loyalty, esprit de corps, clarity about the organization’s values, pride in the organization, organizational productivity.” (p. 143) They concluded, “Leadership isn’t about imposing the leader’s solo dream; it’s about developing a shared sense of destiny. It’s about enrolling others so they can see how their own interests and aspirations are aligned with the vision and can thereby become mobilized to commit their individual energies to its realization. A vision is inclusive of constituents’ aspirations; it’s an ideal and unique image of the future for the common good.” (p. 143)

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1990) references Bill O’Brien, president of Hanover Insurance, saying, “Managers must redefine their job. They must give up ‘the old dogma of planning, organizing, and controlling,’ and realize ‘the almost sacredness of their responsibility for the lives of so many people.’ Managers’ fundamental task, according to O’Brien, is ‘providing the enabling conditions for people to live the most enriching lives they can.’” (p. 140) Senge thus sets the stage for discussion of how the leader influences the environment, either encouraging or discouraging those who report to him or her to be true to their own purpose through their work.

Mission alignment can be viewed both from the perspective of the leader who makes an effort to create a shared vision that people will “buy into,” as well as that of the individual employee or worker who makes an effort to determine what his or her personal mission is, and how it fits within the organizational mission. Ideally, the top-down and grass roots methods are in congruence. Kaplan and Norton (2006) use the term “human capital alignment” with reference to making efforts to assure that organizational strategy is understood at all levels of an organization. They say it is best achieved when “employees’ goals, training, and incentives become aligned with business strategy.” (p.261)

### *Linda’s Story*

Linda’s Story shows how her personal mission is that of schooling and education; a perfect match for her job tasks.

Linda is an elementary school principal. She says her enjoyment from her work stems from the students, working with people, instilling her philosophy of learning, and seeing the children grow. She enjoys her work because it gives her the opportunity to work with children and teachers. Linda thinks her love for her work comes originally from her upbringing. She grew up in a family with positive attitudes about children and schooling. Her mother had been a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse and her father had been a high school principal. Education was a way of life, and “the best profession,” as her parents referred to it.

Linda strives to look at situations from the perspective of how they can be improved. Rather than seeing problems as a negative, Linda says it’s her job to help solve problems. In addition, she tries to model for the students how to handle difficult situations. She thinks it is important that educators convey their caring for the children. Interacting with students and

staff make it all worthwhile in Linda's opinion. She has goals each day for herself and for her students. She also enjoys working with the curriculum and the diversity of the job.

Linda says her mission at school is to "...make sure students don't fail. Make sure they are challenged each day. Make sure they are good citizens and have good relationships at home." She wants to see the children develop their full potential. She sees schools as giving students the tools they need. When asked if she would keep on working if she won the Lottery, Linda says, "Oh, yes! But maybe I would cut back on my hours." She has a three-and-a-half year old with whom she wishes she could spend more time.

In terms of working with her staff, Linda feels an obligation to be upbeat. She doesn't want the teachers to see any frustration on her part. She makes an effort to visit with teachers who may be having difficulties or feeling neglected. She tries to suggest techniques that might be useful.

What rekindles Linda's own enthusiasm? She enjoys collaborating with professionals in other districts and at the university. Attending conferences and workshops is also motivating for her. She strives to learn something new everyday.

Linda is clearly goal-oriented and enjoys problem solving. Linda's love of her work seems to center around the opportunity to put her beliefs and her valuing of education into practice, and to be with the students and colleagues.

### Summary

This summary section includes a discussion of the findings in the sense of the potential for enthusiastic and engaged educational leadership when the three primary themes come together, and commentary on the implications for practice and research.

#### *Discussion of Outcomes – The Intersection/Nexus Point*

Looking at the interaction between collaborative leadership, work ethic, and mission alignment provides a structure for a work model that results in greater meaning and enjoyment; an issue with which every supervisor, principal, superintendent, department head, dean, vice-president, or president might well be concerned. As noted previously, the potential ramifications of these issues are productivity, quality, employee morale, flexibility, and enthusiasm. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of this concept; that the overlap point of collaborative leadership, work ethic, and mission alignment serve to create and enthusiastic and engaged leader:

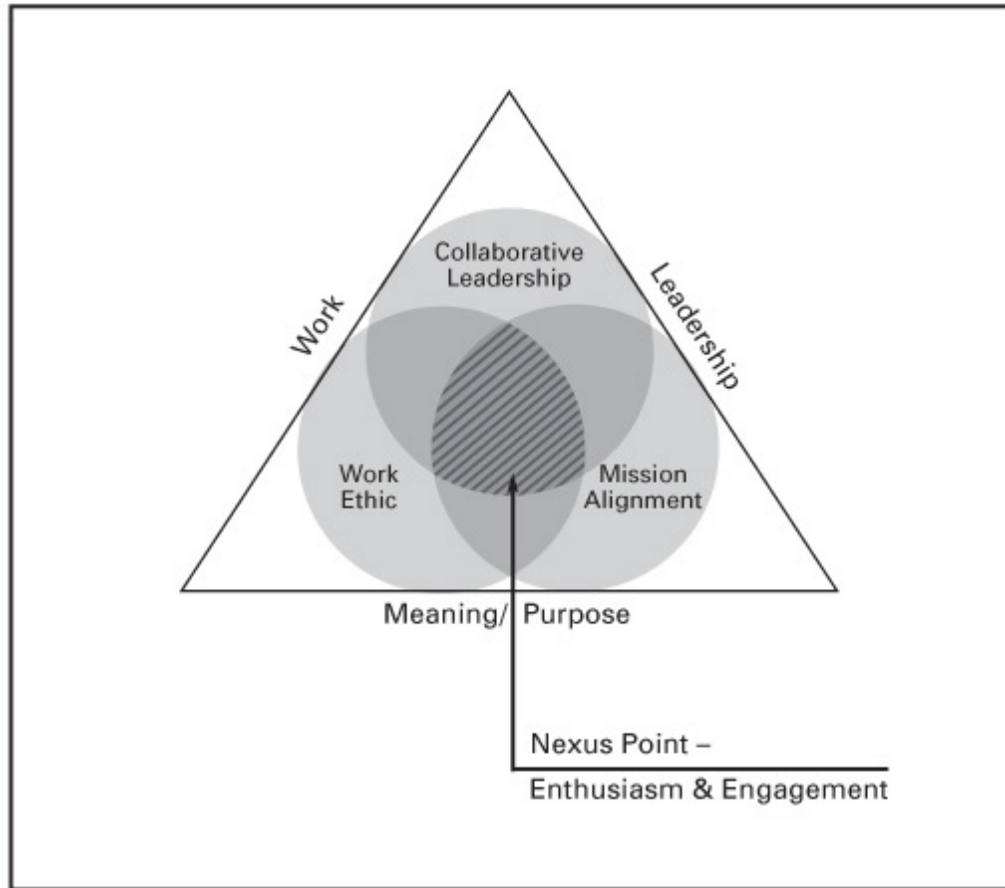


Figure 1 – Theoretical Framework, Enthusiastic Educational Leadership

Artists have long been considered to be passionate about their work. The starving artist image comes to mind. These individuals purportedly are so devoted to their work that they don't care about the lack of financial remuneration. Richards (1995) speaks to the concept of "artful work." He suggests the following parameters for artful work: the reward is in the doing; the ambition of artful work is joy; all work is spiritual work; artful work demands that the artist owns the work process; artful work requires constant and conscious use of the self; and as the artist creates the work, the work creates the artist.

Richards goes on to say that in a centered organization "joy is intrinsic to the work process. It is expected that work provides joy. The organization as a whole, and each individual, accept responsibility for discovering joyful work and for matching people with work that contains the possibility of joy." (p. 102) He concludes that the long-held Newtonian approach of emphasizing "management sciences" focuses on the physical (e.g. machines and space) and mental (e.g. ideas and processes) aspects of work, but ignores the emotional and spiritual aspects.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) coined the idea of “flow” in association with such activities as work, creative endeavors, discovery, and athleticism. Flow could be viewed as a manifestation or by-product of engagement with work. Csikszentmihalyi has defined flow as a state of being in which the individual is totally engrossed in the activity in question, and is highly productive or effective. It is described as very intense, yet is perceived by those experiencing it, as being almost effortless. Although flow is highly individualized, nine elements are considered to be a part of the commonality of the flow experience: (a) “there are clear goals every step of the way,” (b) “there is immediate feedback to one’s actions,” (c) “there is a balance between challenges and skills,” (d) “action and awareness are merged,” (e) “distractions are excluded from consciousness,” (f) “there is no worry of failure,” (g) “self-consciousness disappears,” (h) “the sense of time becomes distorted,” and (i) “the activity becomes autotelic” (intrinsically motivating). (pp. 111-113)

Flow has been described by scientists, basketball players, musicians, and writers; all types of individuals in a wide range of work. Flow is not typically described as happy, per se. Rather, it is described in retrospect as pleasurable, fulfilling, and rewarding.

It is this author’s contention that educational activities qualify equally as other areas, in terms of being eligible for flow status. For example, here is a quote from a teacher’s aide who exhibits leadership qualities in her quest to support a blind student: “While I’m doing my work, I’m not worrying or fussing...I’m on a wavelength where I just do what I need to do. It’s almost an intuitive thing, like being on automatic pilot... sometimes I feel as if I assist in miracles” (Thottam, 2005).

Senge (1999) the issue directly: “Joy in work comes from being true to your purpose. It is the source of the passion, patience, and perseverance we need to thrive on as individuals and as organizations. People cannot however, define results that relate to their deeper passions unless leaders cultivate an environment in which those passions can be safely articulated.” (p. 63)

### *Conclusions and Implications for Practice and Research*

The questions which drove this study were: Why are some educational leaders enthusiastic and engaged? What are the important factors influencing enthusiasm and engagement with the work of educational leaders? What aspects about their work do they enjoy the most? What motivates them? How do they hope to encourage others to be enthusiastic about work? A summary of the findings related to those questions follows.

From both the stories and the literature we see a pattern emerging. First, there is the idea of work being positioned to address a number of human needs. Work has the potential to satisfy a range of human needs. Work helps us to meet our basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. “It puts meat on the table,” as Ed said. Work can give us safety in various ways, including an insurance policy as a benefit. It provides an affiliation, a means of connecting with “comrades in arms,” as it were. Work can provide meaning for living. Donald told us he didn’t view work as work; it was his life.

Work is more than just the output or result, it is also a process. As people carry out their work, they gain more expertise and skill. They come to find pleasure in the conduct and quality of their work. They may enjoy sharing their knowledge with newcomers to the task or profession (the mentoring role comes to mind). Christine enjoys immensely her role of teaching children’s literature. The activity comes to be enjoyable in and of itself.

Work can be an avenue of growth. It can take you to new places, introduce you to new ideas, and place you in contact with new people. Even if monetary needs were not an issue, many who enjoy their work would still choose to carry out some type of work, although they might define it differently than a traditional job. Hence our interviewees who report they would continue to work even if they won the Lottery. Work can address multiple needs, which enhances the importance of its role in many individuals' lives.

From the vignettes we see both similarity and distinctiveness in the reasons for enthusiasm in work. For Ed, working with others to achieve mutual goals and advance the organization, came through as a strong reason for his enjoyment of work. Donald wants to serve others. He likes making others happy. Linda values seeing her philosophy and beliefs in action, and seeing the children realize their potential. Christine enjoys the activities that comprise her job fulfilling her mission of advocacy for children.

The literature also speaks to the idea that a good alignment between an individual's job responsibilities, his or her personal mission, and the mission of the organization or work unit, can lead to passion in work. That is, to the extent that a person wholeheartedly assumes ownership for the mission of the work, that work will become more meaningful and enjoyable. When the activity, tasks, and purpose of a job can demonstrably be connected in an individual's mind, to a greater good, the individual performing that job will feel better about his/her work. He or she is not, as the old bricklayer story goes, just stacking one brick upon another; rather, he or she is building a cathedral.

Collaborating with others seems to be a key factor for educational leaders in finding joy at work. All of those interviewed specifically mentioned how much enjoyment they gained from working with others, whether it is their students, those they supervise, or their peers. And in fact, working collaboratively to help those with whom one works achieve their goals and the organization's goals was mentioned frequently as a benefit of their leadership work. Linda spoke of her love for her work being related directly to the opportunity to work with the teachers and the students. Christine is "down" when she can't be with her students or the district's students and enjoys hearing about her fellow faculty member's projects. Ed says he is happiest when those he is working with are happy and they are all actively engaged and purposeful. Donald loves to be with people and make them happy. Clearly these leaders are all very people-oriented.

Effective leadership is a multi-faceted concept including both cognitive and affective aspects. As we learn to address all aspects of leadership and recognize the importance of the more emotional and spiritual aspects of work and leadership, it is likely both leaders and those who follow will benefit. We see how some of the newer literature is showing the connections between the leader's attitude and emotions and those of the greater workforce, and the importance of the leader serving as a positive role model. If, as Goleman (2000) contends, the more effective leader is one who is aware of his or her own feelings, is able to pick up on and acknowledge others' feelings, can inspire and influence, and ultimately move groups forward, all in a positive manner; then those skills are the ones that need to be taught, practiced, and modeled for leaders-in-training.

Some of us are formally appointed leaders, others are informal leaders, and still others lead by example. To the extent that a classroom, school, college or university adopts the philosophy that each employee (or student) is a leader in some fashion or another and deserves to find meaning and enjoyment through work (or learning), the organization is

moving towards empowering each individual to do his or her best for the company or organization.

Enthusiasm for work is a precious commodity. Because work is such a central component of all our lives and enthusiasm appears to support enhanced productivity, it behooves us to thoughtfully promote enthusiasm and engagement through work. That is easier said than done, however, and involves all members of an organization, not just the formal leaders, examining their own motivations and attitudes, reflecting on their organization's larger purpose, choosing to attend to others' issues and needs within the context of the task at hand, and being attuned to the vision and standards necessary for successful progress toward the vision. Educational leaders are encouraged to structure work environments and interactions with colleagues such that the enthusiasm within each individual can be tapped and applied for the benefit of all. Finding the nexus of collaborative leadership, work ethic, and mission alignment can be a challenge, but the outcomes are worth the effort.

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