

KUDZU LEADERSHIP  
RESEARCH-BASED PRESENTATION

A Capstone Project submitted to Southern Utah University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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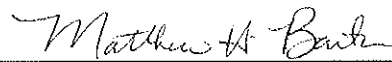
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**Approval Page**

We certify that we have read this project and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Communication.

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### **Abstract**

This project was developed as an avenue to take social science research that has been conducted throughout the years and deliver key concepts into the hands of leaders. The objective of sharing this information was accomplished through development of a presentation that can be given to leaders in various organizations. The purpose is to assist leaders in helping those they lead experience professional development. Research conducted included finding relevant communication-related theories that would be useful for leaders. Information regarding Leader-Member Exchange theory, Victor Vroom's decision-making research and Motivation-Hygiene theory were studied for the presentation. Concepts from each researcher made up the model. Key components of the research were shared and assignments given to the participants to illustrate/demonstrate use of the concepts. Utilization of the Kudzu vine as a visual element in the presentation provided a basis for tying research theories together. The Kudzu analogy allowed memorable imagery for the leaders as they took the information back to their work groups. The presentation was tested once and evaluated in completion of this project.

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## **Introduction**

As a senior at Southern Utah University in 2001, I was given the opportunity to complete a research project for two final credit hours in preparation for graduation. I was offered some latitude to work with my advisor to come up with a subject for the project. With the approval of my advisor, it was easy for me to settle on a topic for the project. I chose to research several companies and put together case studies that illustrated whether each company was a good or bad example of relations between management and employees. I spent hours researching companies and specific situations that showed their overall relationships with employees. I put together a project that reflected my fascination with the complex relationship between leaders and subordinates. The paper also included my suggestions for how management could have handled situations differently based on public relations research at that time.

I reflect on that experience now upon completion of my graduate degree in the SUU Master of Arts in Professional Communications program, because I recognize that my undergraduate project is closely related to my capstone. This is significant because it illustrates how long this topic area has been of interest to me. In truth, I have always studied leadership, management and morale as it relates to the corporate world. I continually read news articles and case studies on what companies are doing in regard to their employees. My specific concern is learning what is known to be effective and which tactics prove ineffective. Because this is a topic of interest to me and my formal and informal research of it has been ongoing, I chose to develop a research-based training/presentation regarding leadership as my capstone experience. One key difference between my undergraduate project and this capstone project, is that the capstone is one

that can benefit real leaders working in corporate America today. The information contained in Kudzu Leadership is based on sound research conducted over decades and in the hands of leaders can improve the working environments within their organizations.

### **Objectives**

From the beginning, the objectives of the project were as follows:

- Develop a growth leadership model based on the plant Kudzu. Kudzu is a vine that grows rapidly in the southern United States. The visual and mental Kudzu tie will create a valuable impression for the participants regarding working towards growth. Using Kudzu for the presentation illustrates that leading others to rapid growth is possible with established leadership principles.
- Create the presentation so that it can be given in front of groups that include management only, team organizations (where the specific group has one main purpose) or groups of managers and employees together. Research shows that leadership and management are not synonymous terms. “Anything that is larger, swifter, or stronger than another creates a natural hierarchy. But natural hierarchies are based on talent or skill, while organizational hierarchies are based on power and status” (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002, p. 83). Develop a presentation that will appeal broadly and work for both types of hierarchies. Make it work for those organizations that would want their employees at large trained in leadership. The presentation will be valuable to companies that may find the information more useful to managers only. Cloke and Goldsmith revealed that traditional vertical management structures are giving way to visionaries, leaders and coaches. Therefore, the Kudzu presentation is valuable



in a team setting as well. The project includes visual elements, including video, activities and Keynote presentation.

- Give the presentation in front of at least one professional organization before defense of the project.
- Receive written evaluations from the audience(s) after the presentation to determine strengths, weaknesses and ways to improve.

My inspiration for the use of Kudzu came from my time living in South Carolina. Kudzu is a vine that is native to the Far East, but according to Janet Lembke (1999) in *Despicable Species*, was brought to the southern states in the late 1800s in an attempt to control erosion. Since that time it has grown over top of more than 7 million acres and expands its footprint by more than 120,000 acres per year. It is commonly called “the vine that ate the south” by people in areas affected by the plant. An individual vine can grow by more than a foot a day during the peak-growing season.

I became fascinated with Kudzu vines, upon moving from the desert climate of Utah to lush South Carolina. Kudzu engulfs broken down cars, trees and even abandoned buildings. In the south it is a menace, but I believe for my purposes, the visual of unrestricted growth suits my presentation nicely. One thing I believe about effective leadership is that people in leadership positions should always be teaching leadership skills through formalized presentations and by example. I want this presentation to provide information that employers and employees can use to identify areas of leadership that are being used effectively and specific areas the company can improve. With this information, people who witness leadership examples within their organizations can choose to use those skills to become effective leaders themselves. This idea of growth

and moving employees in an organization toward greater things is a key component of the presentation.

The objective of having a presentation applicable to different types of audiences is important to me because each organization has different needs. The research used does not change from presentation to presentation, but specific presentational elements can be altered to emphasize aspects of the training most valuable for that organization.

Therefore, teaching managers and employees alike can be effective because the research cited will apply across the board. The needs of individual organizations will be researched ahead of time to know which sections of the presentation to emphasize for the purposes of the specific group.

The other aspect of the presentation that is adaptable is the amount of time I take depending on the group and its training needs. The presentation can be trimmed to an hour. The purpose of the hour version is to introduce some of the research and to provide the group tools to do further study on its own. It also can be presented for half a day as a stand-alone training or in a conference setting. The longer version includes more interactive portions and more multi-media elements. Another effective way it can be given is in three 1-hour sessions. Each session can be given with about a week in between, giving participants an opportunity to work on the assignments and reflect on the information between sessions.

To accomplish the goal of giving the presentation at least once, I worked with my friend who is employed by jetBlue Airlines in Salt Lake City. He was able to assist me in scheduling a training session with an audience of managers and directors at the Salt Lake City office on the afternoon of April 26. Once the Kudzu presentation was given,

evaluation of the work was a valuable tool for learning about what I did well and what areas can be improved.

One reason Kudzu principles work for a presentation regarding a topic as broad as leadership is the uniqueness of the Kudzu hook itself. Using it as my base, I developed an appealing presentation that is different from other leadership presentations. As I mentioned before, relationships between employees and employers have long been an interest of mine. I believe that the very core of leadership lies in those relationships. It is the role of management to foster healthy, productive interactions with the employees they supervise.

A couple of interesting examples from my work experience come to mind that speak to varying leadership styles. My first job after graduating from SUU with a bachelor's degree in communication was as a reporter at the *Richfield Reaper* in Richfield, Utah. I loved my time at the *Reaper* and continue to have positive interactions with the editor and associate editor at the newspaper. However, while I worked there, I felt the management style was overbearing in regards to daily work accountability. An environment of constant criticism with little praise existed. One specific experience I recall that illustrates the company attitude toward employees occurred when my colleague David Anderson (also an SUU communication alumnus) and I redesigned the quarterly sports insert. The redesign represented the first time I had been given the lead on a major assignment. Dave and I spent hours working on the project with no additional compensation. The work resulted in the best-looking sports section the *Reaper* had ever published.

The day after we wrapped up the project, it came off the press early in the morning before the editor and publisher arrived. I was greeted that morning with an unplanned staff meeting that featured, me, Dave, the editor, publisher and general manager. Before I had even gotten inside the building, the head pressman had given me an ominous warning: “You’re big in trouble.” When I walked into the office area, I was called into the meeting and confronted with my big mistake. Inexperienced in the publication of supplements, I had formatted the dates on the top of the page incorrectly. The dates were correct, but included formatting that didn’t mesh with a couple of our advertisers. After listening to supervisors berate me for a few minutes, I finally asked what this meant. I thought based on their reactions the end result would be a complete reprinting of the insert or, potentially, that we wouldn’t get paid for a couple of full-page color ads in the insert. Of course, those are both very expensive options. However, the supervisors explained that the mistake would result in us having to send two letters to advertisers explaining the error. When I realized we were never in any danger of not getting paid for the ads, I got up, threw my company-issued cell phone on the table and walked out. I was furious that my hard work had been rewarded with an inquisition and not so much as an “atta boy.” Not many negative experiences stick out in my mind about my time at the *Reaper*, but one thing that I believe could have been improved is the daily and constant micromanagement regarding very small details.

My next job opportunity took me from the *Reaper* to the *Ketchikan Daily News* in Ketchikan, Alaska. To say that the culture developed by management stood in contrast to the *Reaper* would be a huge understatement. I spent six years at the *Daily News* and participated in perhaps a dozen staff meetings. Twice in six years we passed a newspaper

around the newsroom for each member of the staff to look at and circle any errors or formatting issues that could be improved. However, the papers never made it past the editor's desk, and as a staff we never discussed the marks made by others or how we could improve the product. There was minimal direction from the top down. As a corporate experiment, I decided that I would see how many days I could go without producing a single story before the editor or publisher would reprimand me (not an experiment I am proud of, but I believe it illustrates a point). After two weeks – 10 full business days – I could no longer handle the slothfulness and began again producing stories. No one ever called me on my lack of production. Reflecting back on that experiment, I recognize my culpability of being a rebellious employee, but I also believe the culture established by leadership holds its share of blame in the experience.

I share these narratives as examples of my observance of management styles and to illustrate that my life experiences are valuable for the presentation. I employ experiences and narratives from both newspapers and my current employment to show how managers can confront specific situations and how they can develop day-to-day practices that will lead to productive and motivated employees.

### **Literature Review**

Research on the topic of leadership alone is extensive, and it would be impossible for a researcher to complete an exhaustive review of everything available. However, for the purposes of this presentation, there are a few themes contained within the literature that are more helpful than others. Three primary themes identified for this project are communication, decision-making and morale. Each of these themes was selected based on my review of research regarding leadership.

## **Communication**

The decision to include communication as a major theme is personal based on my experiences. As I reflected on work experiences shared earlier, I realize I haven't always effectively communicated my own frustrations with management. However, I have often reflected on my mistakes and the errors I perceived from people in authority above me regarding communication breakdowns. I believe that every organization would benefit from increased training in and appreciation of the communication process. Because it is a personal decision to include communication as a major theme does not mean that there isn't research and documentation explaining the importance of communication within organizations. One simple example of the need for communication comes from the definition of leadership by Engleberg and Wynn (2011): "Leadership is the ability to make strategic decisions and use communication to mobilize group members toward achieving a common goal" (p 253). Based on this definition, leaders must communicate to move them toward organizational goals. Studies have shown that there are more and less effective ways for leaders to communicate with subordinates. One study used Narrative Paradigm Theory (NPT) to show that stories are an effective means of communication. "By using NPT, organizations are meeting the communication needs of most internal and external employees using the same communication device, thereby reducing miscommunication and all the problems that result" (Barker & Gower, 2010, p. 309). The research also suggests that storytelling can be a valuable cross-cultural tool for avoiding misunderstandings. One approach discovered in my review of pertinent literature came from a discussion regarding what was termed a "communication efficiency gap." The research included discussion on how leaders need to approach this

gap. “Effective communicators will more likely make effective leaders because they understand the need to place quality effort in communicating with their followers” (McFarlane, 2010, p. 7). The author included information about how leaders need to effectively converse face-to-face with followers in addition to using technology for communication channels. Narratives and “quality effort in communicating” (p. 7) both play important roles in the presentation.

The Leader-Member Exchange theory provides the foundation of discussion about communication in the final project. In ongoing studies regarding the theory, researchers found that the better the communicators in organizations, the better the relationships within those organizations. “Subordinates who are communicatively apprehensive tend to have lower quality (Leader-Member Exchange) relationships with their superiors than to those employees who are less apprehensive” (Madlock et al., 2007, p. 460). The study went on to suggest that high quality Leader-Member Exchange relationships lead to better morale and job performance. Another study regarding Leader-Member Exchange revealed that effective communication can benefit every organization. “High-quality communication and information that subordinates receive from their supervisor may result in the subordinate having a higher commitment to the group” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 651). The Leader-Member Exchange theory is a prime example of theory that supports the need for communication being a major theme in this project. All organizations can benefit from more effective communication and the project includes discussion of some ways to improve that communication.

As a major theme of the presentation, communication is shown to be a vital aspect of leadership. Significant research has been devoted to teaching leaders to communicate

effectively. Baird and Bradley (1978) identified five elements of managerial communication style that led to job satisfaction. They included showing concern, communicating comfortably, being attentive, listening carefully and being friendly.

Researchers have also developed curriculum regarding leadership from a communication perspective. “The leadership communication course allows instructors the opportunity to more fully explore the complex relationship between communication and leadership” (Hackman & Johnson, 1994, p. 50). With entire courses devoted to the connection between leadership and communication, it is only fitting that the Kudzu model also includes some discussion about the topic.

This topic of communication dovetails nicely with the morale aspect of the presentation. “Managers who communicated in ways emphasizing group goals, participation, teamwork, and intermember relations usually had highly cohesive groups working under them” (Baird & Bradley, 1978, p. 55). In general, work environments that include these highly cohesive groups have leaders who establish themselves as good decision-makers and communicators. “When leader attributes and behaviours match or fit with the culturally implicit understanding of leadership, the link between leader attributes/behaviours and leader acceptance and effectiveness is likely going to be stronger” (House, et al, 2010, p. 115). Discussion about aspects of effective leadership communication helps with a transition into discussion about how change can be implemented through effective decision-making.

### **Decision-Making**

The second major theme of decision-making was chosen because of the effect good and bad decisions can have on the entire company. One anecdotal example of the



effects managerial decision-making can have on an organization comes from the world of sports. In 1984, the Houston Rockets selected Hakeem Olajuwon with the first pick in the National Basketball Association draft. The Portland Trailblazers had the second pick, and they selected Sam Bowie. Finally, with the third pick, the Chicago Bulls selected Michael Jordan. During the course of his career, Olajuwon won two NBA championships with the Rockets, justifying his selection at number one. Sam Bowie played for 10 years with three teams, but was never selected to an all-star game. Portland experienced only moderate success with Bowie. As the third overall pick, Jordan went on to become one of the best basketball players in history, winning six NBA titles with the Bulls. Each of the three organizations experienced varying levels of success based on the decision-making of the people at the top of the player-managerial chain.

Along with anecdotal references to the importance of decision-making on leadership, research also illustrates the value of decisions within organizations. “People at all levels of a company make decisions every day that affect the firm’s success. ... Day in and day out, managers take actions, wittingly and unwittingly, that determine how and how well the people around them decide” (Yates, 2003, p. 3). Yates’ writings verify that decisions made throughout an organization affect the overall performance of that organization. Therefore, a discussion of decision-making will be vital for each of the selected audiences.

Review of literature revealed that Victor H. Vroom has authored or co-authored various studies regarding decision-making among managers and leaders. He established guidelines for making decisions based on an adaptation of a previous model by Tannenbaum and Schmidt. Vroom’s five alternatives for leadership decision-making

include the following: decide, consult individually, consult group, facilitate and delegate (Vroom, 2000). The objective of effective decision-making is to move the organization forward. “An effective leader is one who explicitly tailors his or her style to demands of the immediate problem at hand” (Vroom, 2000, p. 84). The original goal for the decision-making research was to create a model that would help managers maximize potential for success of a decision.

One element of the model that is useful for the Kudzu presentation is that of a 10-point scale that shows areas of “freedom for the group” and “influence by the leader.” The 10-point scale sits above the leader’s five alternatives mentioned previously for allowing participation in decision-making. Each of the five alternatives includes two points of influence for the leader or the group. Vroom identified “decide” as the primary source for influence by the leader. “Decide” encompasses 1 and 2 on the 10-point scale. In that state of decision-making the leader makes, then announces the decision, and seeks buy-in from the group. The middle alternative is to “consult” those affected by the decision as a group. In that stage, the leader still has the final say, but seeks input. In the “delegate” stage, the leader turns the decision over to the group – perhaps with some prescribed limits – but the group then makes the final decision. This stage represents the greatest area of freedom for the group (Vroom, 2000). It is represented on the 10-point scale as numbers 8 and 9. “Decisions made in accordance with a decision tree on which we were working at the time were almost twice as likely to be successful as were decisions that were inconsistent with the model” (Vroom, 2000, p. 89). Discussion of decision-making will allow leaders to see research-based means to include participation for decisions among their work groups.

In a study of the Vroom-Yetton-Jago leadership model, researchers found that the primary reason for the model was “in response to the need to balance the beliefs and characteristics of two distinct approaches to leadership: traditional management theory and participatory management theory” (Genrich, et al, 2001, p. 21). The model explores whether leaders can be taught to appropriately involve those within their stewardships in the decision-making process.

Research suggests that leaders who use a participative style of decision-making have followers who have reduced stress levels and greater levels of support for the leaders (Paul & Ebadi, 1989). While the Vroom-Yetton-Jago model in its entirety does not fit into the Kudzu presentation, the value of decision-making and determining the proper path for leaders to make decisions is a key element.

### **Morale**

One prominent author on the subject of morale is Frederick Herzberg. Searches on academic search sites regarding Herzberg and Motivation-Hygiene theory garner dozens of results of academic articles in response to his works, which began in the 1950s. His research began with the question “What do workers want from their jobs?” (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959, p. xiii). Using morale as a major theme in the presentation is appropriate because of the prevalence of Herzberg’s work and the continued use of his theory in organizational research. Also, as long as there are jobs, there will be people asking what they want from their work. Therefore, exploring and explaining why morale is important is beneficial in this work.

Morale contributes to many aspects of work life. Another term that is often used to indicate morale is job satisfaction. A broad definition of job satisfaction is appropriate

for this work. A definition established in research is as follows: “This approach explains job satisfaction as the total body of feeling an individual has about his [sic] job, this feeling being made up of both job-related and environmental-related factors” (Brockman, 1971, p. 186). Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene theory established a notion that “the opposite of job satisfaction is not job dissatisfaction but, rather no job satisfaction; and similarly, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is not job satisfaction, but no job dissatisfaction” (Herzberg, 1986, p. 9). Another researcher studying Herzberg’s work likened morale to happiness. “Happiness is more than the absence of unhappiness” (Sachau, 2007, p. 378). Motivation-Hygiene theory discusses in detail how job dissatisfaction is created by extrinsic factors and can’t lead to an internalized motivation for the employee.

Herzberg identified factors that led to satisfaction: achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and opportunities for growth – in that order. Herzberg found that those are the primary factors that lead to employees experiencing morale and being satisfied with the work they do. He also identified other factors that led to dissatisfaction, including company policy and administration, supervision, relationship with the supervisor, work conditions, salary, relationships with peers, personal life, relationships with subordinates, status and security – again, in that order (Herzberg, 1986).

The higher the motivator, the more power it has to keep an employee motivated. “Personal growth is the end goal of the motivators, while achievement is the starting point for any personal growth” (Herzberg, 1974, p. 20). In research conducted during the infancy of the Motivation-Hygiene theory, Herzberg found that the positive effects of

good job attitudes last longer than the negative effects of low attitudes. “Job attitudes are a powerful force and are functionally related to the productivity, stability, and adjustment to the industrial working force” (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959, p. 96).

Discussion during the Kudzu presentation focuses on achievement and recognition, giving leaders tools to establish practices that lead to lasting feelings of satisfaction.

One of the myths of motivation Herzberg found is that salary is a motivator. His research shows that basic needs for salary must be met, but once a person is able to reach a certain point in his/her compensation, more money doesn't motivate an employee to do better work. I witnessed first-hand an example that illustrates Herzberg's point. When I first became a supervisor for the State of Utah in the Juvenile Justice Services, I noticed that one of the employees who worked in my department was clearly superior in her work habits compared to others in the department. I promptly nominated her for an incentive award. During an awards event, she was given a \$400 incentive award for the way she performed her day-to-day duties. She continued to do an admirable job. However, a year later during the awards outing, incentive awards were handed out, and she was left out (they are typically one-time awards and employees are nominated for them). After the ceremony, I could tell something was bothering her, so I asked what was wrong. She explained that the \$400 she had received felt like a bonus, and she was disappointed that she didn't receive the compensation again. In my example, the employee did not lose motivation to work, but the one-time money did nothing to motivate her further and actually added a bit of dissatisfaction when the money wasn't received. Sachau (2007) asserted that “(m)anagers who use hygiene to motivate employees may eventually find that employees only care about hygiene” (p. 382). As a leader, I needed to continually

find ways to motivate this employee and should have used motivators as much or more than hygiene factors.

Since his original work, numerous articles have been written by Herzberg himself and various other authors exploring aspects of the theory. In one of his own studies, Herzberg (1974) researched six profiles of organizations and how they can face various hygiene and motivation problems within their companies. Others have used Herzberg's theory to study job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among staff at a community college (Trueell et al 1998), in a church worship context (Katt & Trelstad, 2009), among students in a classroom setting (Katt & Condly, 2009), and among non-academic employees in a university setting (Smerek & Peterson, 2006).

One criticism of Herzberg's theory was that, as it developed, there were too many versions (Gardner, 1977). For example, when studying the theory in a classroom setting, researchers identified some motivation and hygiene factors that applied, but they found some that did not. The researchers also identified new factors that apply to a classroom setting but not in a work setting (Katt & Condly, 2009). With so much research to support Motivation-Hygiene theory, it will be a legitimate source of information to use in a presentation regarding leadership.

One of the ways that morale fits nicely into the Kudzu model is that having satisfied employees is one of the key factors to getting them to have a desire to grow within the organization. "Motivation is a function of growth from getting intrinsic rewards out of interesting and challenging work" (Herzberg, 1986, p. 14). In their work regarding leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2007) identified a step of "encouraging the heart" as a means to "uplift the spirits and draw people forward" (p. 22). Research has

shown that this step of encouragement, which is directly related to morale, leads to employees doing their jobs. “Encouraging the heart ... has the highest correlation with productivity” (Loke, 2001, p. 199). Productivity won’t be directly emphasized during the Kudzu presentation, but it will be discussed as one of the positive consequences of leaders who establish a work group that is satisfied with their employment.

Research already completed in the three areas of communication, decision-making and morale provides a solid foundation for the Kudzu Leadership presentation. The principles discovered through thoughtful study of the theories available have given me a sound knowledge in pertinent leadership tools that are effectively married to make the Kudzu presentation. Throughout preparation of the presentation, the idea of weaving the research into a memorable discussion-based training led me to develop the tie into the plant Kudzu. The following is a full transcript of the Kudzu presentation that describes how current research findings, can be used by leaders. I believe the principles taught haven’t previously reached audiences that can benefit most from use of this information.

### **Full Transcript for Kudzu Leadership**

#### **Introduction**

Thank you all for allowing me to be here with you today. I treasure this opportunity to discuss with you a topic that has always been of particular interest to me. The topic of leadership fascinates me and my main area of interest is how it pertains to the relationship between leaders and those they lead. This presentation is the culmination of my pursuit of a Master’s Degree in professional communication at Southern Utah University. At the end of the program students select a project, an internship or write an original thesis to illustrate they have mastered the concepts.

My first idea was to write a thesis. I planned to study the link between employee and employer perceptions of morale. I desired to learn if employees and employers within an organization perceive job satisfaction within the organization in similar or different ways. The research question would have been: “Do leaders and subordinates perceive morale in the same way and do they agree on the causes of good/bad organizational morale?” Conducting research that would help an organization understand what was happening within and provide leaders information to recognize morale levels within the company fascinated me.

Each time I took a class that required a research paper I studied a morale-related topic. I prepared all of these papers using other people’s research and realized there are thousands of pages of research available about job satisfaction and leadership that never reach leaders of the companies. Predictably, some research is scarcely worth mentioning, but the more I studied, the more I realized some of this research needs to reach today’s leaders. We don’t need more studies hidden in academic journals on the corner shelves of a handful of libraries. Someone needs to take current research and present it outside academic circles.

## **Leadership**

So, what qualifies me to preach the gospel of leadership to people who have been working in their respective fields for years? Very little, besides a strong desire to teach what I have learned. As I mentioned before, I have long been fascinated with the intricacies of the employer/employee relationship. I have studied it formally and informally for most of my adult life. Leadership is a tricky concept for which there is no solid agreement about what it really means. I found the following tidbit in an article



written by a pair of academics who have studied leadership their entire careers: “Despite years of leadership research and thousands of studies, we still don’t have a clear understanding of what leadership is and how it can be achieved” (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 220). I come to you as a leadership enthusiast. My purpose: To present legitimate research about specific leadership concepts. I have studied these concepts for hundreds of hours. I believe they can lead every organization to experience healthy, meaningful growth.

The notion of growth that I want to discuss comes from various sources of research. First of all, I believe that leaders should be concerned with the growth of their employees. Managers should desire to help their employees experience more than punching in to start their shift and punching out at the end of the day. One of the theories that we will discuss in detail has that concept at its core: “(Leader-Member Exchange) is more focused on individual outcomes such as personal growth and career development” (Smriti, et. al., 2011, p 318). We’ll talk in detail about personal growth among the employees and how to help them feel a sense of moving forward within the organization. Other researchers have discussed growth in employees from the perspective of their participation in organizational progress: “When communication is used to involve (subordinates) in the definition of an initiative, their motivation and commitment grow stronger” (Rogers, 2011, p. 9). Some of the discussion will focus on how helping employees learn the corporate mission and make decisions that benefit the entire organization will help the individuals direct company growth in an appropriate manner. Research has warned against not allowing employees to feel this sense of personal growth at work. It has been found that, when growth isn’t available at work, employees

turn elsewhere. “The hobby cannot give the complete sense of growth, the sense of striving towards a meaningful goal, that can be found in one’s life work” (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959, p. 130). Asked in 2006 about the best moment of his presidency since taking office, President George W. Bush responded, “I would say the best moment of all was when I caught a 7.5 lb. perch in my lake” (BBC, 2006). He was criticized in part, because he didn’t name a moment during his presidency relating to his work. Using this example only, one could claim that Bush allowed the hobby to become his source of growth because the job didn’t provide that opportunity.

### **What do people want?**

One theory we will discuss in some detail began when researchers asked, “What do people want from their work?” (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959, p. xiii). I used that focus as I planned this presentation. As I reflect on my own career, I often ask myself what causes unhappy times at work. I recognize that for me, I get tired of a job or an organization when I stagnate individually. When I feel there is no more personal or professional growth available, I check out. I worked in the newspaper industry for nearly a decade. I first worked at a weekly paper that is part of a chain of about 30 newspapers of varying size. After working there for a couple of years, I approached my boss and stated that I appreciated the opportunity to cut my teeth at his newspaper, but it was time for me and my family to move to the next stage. I was ready to work at a daily newspaper. I told my boss I would like to stay with the parent company if there was a position at one of the bigger newspapers and I would love the opportunity to entertain a transfer. He responded that the company doesn’t do that and that I should be pleased with the opportunity to continue working with his newspaper.

I appreciate a boss wanting to keep a good employee (which of course I am) within his or her work group, but I immediately began the process of “psychologically leaving” (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959, p. 88) that organization. In my young mind, I had started to stagnate in my personal growth at that job. I desired the pace and deadlines of a daily newspaper. Growth was no longer occurring as a result of my day-to-day work. I needed something to stimulate me again. My supervisor heard transfer and didn’t offer that option or any other growth potential. Company leaders with vision realize that an employee’s attitude can improve if that individual feels like he or she is making full use of his or her potential (Baird and Bradley, 1978). Today, I will teach important research-based ideas to aid leaders in helping employees toward continued and rapid growth within the organization.

### **Kudzu**

I lived for a couple of years in South Carolina, and during my time there, I discovered the wonderful world of Kudzu. As a native Utahn and one who hadn’t traveled a lot before moving to the South, I had never heard of Kudzu. For those of you not familiar, Kudzu is a creeping vine that grows in several southern states. It was introduced to the United States from Japan in 1876 and first used as an ornamental plant. Kudzu can grow up to one foot per day during the peak season. Its roots can be seven inches in diameter and grow 18 feet below the surface. Single vines have been measured at over 100 feet long (Bergmann and Swearingen, 2005).

Initially, farmers and ranchers used it for animal feed and to control erosion. The Civilian Conservation Corps planted thousands of acres of Kudzu. Over time, farmers realized the leaves were difficult to harvest for feed and once the plant began its

progression it was nearly impossible to stop (Lembke, 1999). The U.S. Department of Agriculture declared the plant an invasive species in 1953, and it's no longer a permissible plant for erosion control (Bergmann and Swearingen, 2005). I couldn't legally get a live sample to bring with me for the purposes of this presentation.

My intrigue for the plant was instant upon moving to the South. I loved studying Kudzu as it dominated the landscape. Riding around South Carolina became a life-sized game of *Where's Waldo* as I searched for the objects engulfed in Kudzu vines. Signs, vehicles, utility poles, even houses and barns succumbed to Kudzu's rapidly advancing vines. Experienced Southerners viewed Kudzu as a nuisance taking over their yards and fields. It had become impossible to control. To me, Kudzu was beautiful and offered many life lessons in persistence.

I have drawn my inspiration for today's presentation from those days riding around South Carolina and viewing the wonderfully lush, green landscapes created by Kudzu. My belief is that Kudzu can act as a model for any organization wishing to develop growth in employees and the organization in meaningful and rapid ways.

### **Three main concepts**

I will begin with a discussion of communication. I will describe how communication serves as the roots of all growth within organizations.<sup>1</sup> I was amazed when I pitched this project to my graduate committee how aggressively they questioned

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<sup>1</sup> Each participant was given an 18-page booklet that had graphics of presentational elements that were more difficult to understand. The purpose of the booklet was to provide visual elements to aid understanding of concepts and the Kudzu analogy regarding the roots, branches and leaves. Assignments and activities also were included. The booklet in its entirety was not included in this capstone document because of intellectual property rights. Use of the booklet will be included in future Kudzu Leadership presentations.

my inclusion of communication as one of my three main points. Communication is the fundamental component to establishing relationships (Bakar, Dilbeck and McCrosky, 2010) and high-quality relationships result in workers willing to grow and go beyond minimum job requirements (Madlock et. al., 2007). Because the committee forced me to defend communication so adamantly, I did hours of extra research seeking the right theory to build the foundation of Kudzu Leadership. The payoff was huge. The information I found can help leaders develop communication patterns that will build relationships with each and every employee. We will discuss communication from the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) perspective. It illustrates how leaders establish and maintain relationships with their subordinates. Communication roots can be deep and healthy or shallow and stagnant. LMX shows us how to plant and nourish healthy roots.

Moving from the ground up, emerging from the soil are the vines that determine the direction the Kudzu will grow. For today's presentation we will have discussion about how decisions made at each level of the organization determine the manner in which growth will occur. Using Kudzu as a visual element doesn't come without challenges. I want to ensure that managers don't view Kudzu as a menace. I've never experienced cultivating an actual Kudzu vine, but I was once charged with taking care of my stepdad's 50-year-old climbing fern for a year and a half. As I tended the vine, I enjoyed the way I could weave the plant around its trellis and send vines in the direction I wanted them to go. Older branches that had outlived their usefulness could be trimmed back making way for new vines to progress. I manipulated vines in the direction that made the fern reach my objectives of health and aesthetics for the entire plant.

As I studied communication theories, I realized that one link shows how appropriate communication and information exchange within organizations leads to better decision-making and well-informed, successful employees (Sias, 2005). As I discovered this connection, I determined the second portion of my presentation needed to address organizational decision-making. As if manipulating Kudzu vines, companies can use this skill to mold individuals and work groups to meet organizational objectives. Decision-making patterns within the company are like the vines of a Kudzu plant. Only through careful cultivation and management does the growth take place in the desired direction.

Researcher Victor Vroom has spent a lifetime developing theories regarding decision-making. He has helped organizations tailor decisions to the company's particular mission. As we discover the vines of the Kudzu model, we will discuss how using current research methods can help leaders direct employees in ways that will mold the vines and result in healthy directional growth.

Kudzu's most striking features – the attributes that make it fit for ornamental use – are the wonderful green leaves and the tiny purple flowers that spring forth for all to behold. Once an organization establishes healthy communication and decision-making patterns, a genuine emphasis can be placed on employee morale. Employee morale and happy, productive people throughout an organization is what clients and customers see. Morale is the piece that makes an organization beautiful for everyone to behold – like the leaves of the lush green Kudzu plant (see Appendix A).

The final theory I have chosen to highlight comes from Frederick Herzberg. He is a researcher who worked some of his career at the University of Utah. Herzberg started

his work on employee job satisfaction in the late 1950s. He is the one who introduced the question posed earlier: “What do workers want from their jobs?” We will discuss key points of the Motivation-Hygiene theory that can aid employees in gaining a sense of purpose in their jobs and help them blossom as they grow consistently in their positions and careers.

I truly believe that leaders who follow a few basic concepts presented here today can become more effective. Establishing Kudzu principles will help leaders guide their groups to rapid meaningful growth.

### **Communication**

Kudzu’s key to persistence comes from its ability to take root and establish itself under the ground where no one is looking. Individual roots can grow as far as 18 feet below the surface and can weigh up to 400 pounds. The best way to control Kudzu is through persistent root eradication efforts. (Bergmann and Swearingen, 2005).

Communication works in a similar way within organizations. Clients and customers often don’t witness the day-to-day communication happening between leaders and employees. In fact, many organizations go to great lengths to keep communication out of the hands of the public and their competitors. What happens within the organization is not directly observed, but many a company has stagnated in its growth, withered and some even die because of an inability to effectively communicate.

Research shows a complex, but vital link between leadership and communication (Hackman and Johnson, 1994). Leaders who ignore the effects of their communication on their followers and on their organizations fail to develop leadership skills in fundamental ways. “The most effective leaders of the day appear to be those who are the most

cognizant and competent communicators” (Hackman and Johnson, 1994, p. 60). When I teach the Communication 1010 course at SUU I take a little time during a class in the beginning of the semester to define communication. I give each class the opportunity to develop its own definition. I bring with me several examples of definitions from research and textbooks, but then give the students freedom to write the definition based on what they believe meets the needs of the class. Today, I want to take a few minutes to define “quality communication” and get your input on what that is and how it can be achieved. With this discussion, we can make sure we are all on the same page in regards to what quality communication is and what it looks like. So, what are your ideas about what it takes to be a quality communicator?

### **LMX Theory**

Hundreds of communication theories exist in the social sciences. Many such theories come, of course, from the field of communication others from the study of psychology. Many researchers have spent their careers looking at the effects of communication on the human condition. When I discovered the Leader-Member Exchange theory, I knew these principles had everyday applications. Leaders can benefit greatly from the work done within this area of the field of leadership. Researchers George Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien are two academics most closely associated with LMX. As theories become accepted as plausible explanations of human behavior, many, many studies regarding the theory generally follow. I have one binder with 200-plus pages devoted to the study of LMX. Much of the research is academic jargon, I wouldn't dare incorporate into a presentation if my objective is to inform and entertain. However, much of the research is beneficial information that leaders can actually use. I offer today those



interesting portions of the research that will give you the opportunity to make your communication more effective.

LMX began when researchers studied work groups and provided leaders and followers within those groups the opportunity to answer questions about the relationships leaders had with the followers and vice versa. The study looked at leadership and communication from three different domains: leader, follower and relationship. Sometimes the beginning results of research aren't all that exciting. Results produce nothing more than a "no-kidding" moment. We've all read a news story and asked ourselves, "Did we really need a study to discover that truth?"

The early research conducted on LMX revealed a "no-kidding" observation. The findings – leaders establish different relationships with each of their subordinates (Bakar, Dilbeck and McCroskey, 2010). Not really something that needs to be shouted from the rooftops for people to realize its truthfulness. However, the early groundwork was vital to develop more information about relationships and their effects on organizations. Further research found that leaders and subordinates put different levels of effort into these relationships. Relationships develop quite early when individuals work together and the quality of each relationship begins to develop at differing levels (Anand, et. al. 2011). More research revealed that work relationships progressed based on communication exchanges and quality communication generated more quality relationships. Leaders develop better relationships with followers by putting more effort into the relationships, by having regular contact and by showing genuine interest in the work and lives of their subordinates (Madlock et. al. 2007). All of this information is important, but much of it still feels like common-sense stuff to me. Researchers used this information to state that

quality communication and relationship building likely results in more participation, more freedom, higher levels of competence and more energy in the organization (Darvish & Farzan-dokht, 2011).

One key component of all this research is the notion that leaders with higher quality relationships with their followers more effectively exchange information within the work group. Information works as a vital natural resource for employees who want to perform their jobs effectively. The leader-follower information exchange results in better progress and growth toward the organizational goals for the group (Sias, 2005).

### **Relationship Stages**

After recognizing common-sense things like relationships are different, and they can develop into higher and lower quality, further research can finally provide some real insight. Research suggests that employee/employer relationships fall within three stages. First relationships are in the “stranger phase.” During the stranger phase, communication exchanges are purely economic. The leader and the follower relay necessary information to get the job done. Communication doesn’t go too far beyond that. One portion of this graph I want to point out is that the time for the reciprocity is immediate. The communication exchange would be, “Johnson, I need that report on my desk in the morning.” With the response, “Yes, boss.” There is no discussion of goals or objectives. It is simply a task-oriented exchange. The fact that a relationship is in the stranger phase is not necessarily a bad thing. It is impossible to establish a working relationship without a stop at this stage. These relationships are categorized as low-quality LMX and are not ideal, (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) meaning a leader and employee wouldn’t benefit from keeping a relationship in this stage.

Once a boss and an employee have worked together for a time, the relationship has the opportunity to develop into the “acquaintance stage.” This is the time when leaders determine if this was a good hire or not. Conversely, employees start to decide if they are going to love or hate the boss. This is a testing state for both parties to determine how strong the relationship will be. In terms of LMX, these are medium-quality relationships. If you look on the chart, the reciprocity in this stage is role-making. The leader determines the employee’s role within the work group and the employee discovers what the role of quality work will be within their lives. This is a crucial stage of the relationships, because those that don’t progress to the next level will fall back into the stranger phase, where they are likely to stay (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). We will discuss in a moment more details about how organizations benefit from having more quality relationships between their leaders and subordinates. It is important to recognize that low-quality relationships lead to stagnation in personal and organizational growth.

The stage that indicates a high LMX between leader and follower is when the pair reaches the “mature partnership.” This stage features a high level of trust, interaction, support and self-disclosure. One of the key factors you see on the chart is that relationship building phase is “role implementation.” In this situation, the employer and employee both recognize what the role has become, and both can manage the aspects of that role in day-to-day work. The communication between the two can become less about the task and more about what can and should be accomplished. The follower and the leader practice a type of exchange that makes the roles of both easier and more rewarding (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995).

As we go through this information, I want you to think about individuals within your work group and the types of relationships you have with each. Identify relationships you have developed into mature partnerships. Also, consider the ones that fall within the stranger phase. If you have solid relationships with everyone in your group, then congratulations are in order. However, if you are like most leaders and need to further develop relationships, then there is hope.

### **Personality**

LMX research suggests that the responsibility for strengthening relationships falls upon the leader. There also is evidence that high-quality LMX relationships often are built between people who have similar personalities (Anand et. al., 2011). When you share interests, such as hunting, sports or family with other people it is easier to develop good relationships. The challenge then is to discover what you share in common with each person within your work group. My oldest brother and I are six years apart – close enough that I remember him being around when I was a child, but far enough apart that he headed out on his own before I really got close to him. He now lives in Alaska and so opportunities to see one another are pretty rare. To keep in touch we exchange e-mail and try to talk on the phone once in a while. Scot is a man of few words and talking on the phone with him is often brutal. I remember attempting to talk on the phone with him once when he lived overseas. The whole time I was thinking, “Why are we spending this kind of money to blink at our respective phones from across the world?” When I get ready to call Scot, I always make a mental or sometimes actual list of topics that I can address so that we don’t end up just staring at our own walls while holding a phone. Scot trades stocks, so I often research a little bit about companies that are trading up or down. This

gives us an avenue so that we can discuss some of his trades. I know he likes to talk about the market, so I use that to keep the communication flowing. That is one thing each leader can do to help develop their relationships with those in their employ. Find out what makes them tick and have a mental list of topics that can be broached during a communication exchange. Of course, the interest shown from the side of the leader must be genuine.

### **Activity**

For the next few minutes, I want each of you to find someone in the room that you know very best. Pair off with someone that you might be in the mature partnership or at least the acquaintance stage of your relationship. Take this list of questions and ask your partner one question that you do not know the answer. Use this time to find out something that you did not previously know about the person. Ask at least three follow-up questions regarding this topic to gain further insight into the other person. The questions are designed to give you an opportunity to talk about something that would be comfortable for most work situations. Try not to dive too deeply into the personal life of someone who may not welcome that type of interaction. Of course, if you are all strangers, you can pair off based on who looks the coolest or whatever. Once one partner has asked his/her questions, change roles from interviewer to interviewee and allow the other individual to ask a different question from the list. To simulate real world work exchanges we will have to do this quickly, so please be efficient in your communications.

*(Allow approximately 5 minutes for the entire activity).*

How many of you found out something new about this person you work with?  
Tell me about what you found out? How many of you wanted more time to discuss the

topic or have more questions you could ask about the topic if given the time? How many of you could use what you learned about the other person to establish another conversation in the future? You could say, for example, “How’s your rugby league going?” While this is a pretty simple example, this is the type of activity that can be used to progress into higher-quality LMX relationships. Along with personal information and personality-type traits, you can and should be talking with your subordinates about what makes them tick at work and what can make them better employees and you a better leader.

### **Relationship Quality Effects**

Now that we understand some of the basics of how employee and employer relationships work, we need to look at some of the overall effects these relationships have on the individual, the work group and the organization as a whole. Research shows that the quality of LMX affects a variety of different aspects of the employees’ work. Among the things that are strong for an employee with high LMX with their superior are job performance, overall citizenship behaviors, job satisfaction (notice that this one of the major components of the Kudzu model), turnover intentions, organizational commitment, openness to change, and information exchange (something we’ve already talked about), (Anand et. al., 2011, Bezuijen et. al. 2010, Sias, 2005). So employees with high-quality LMX more positively exhibit these aspects of work life, while those with low-quality LMX have a more difficult time.

One of the more interesting parts of LMX research is what the quality of individual relationships does to the work group when there is a relationship disparity among the members of the group. I call it the “teacher’s pet” effect. Research shows that

it is rare that leaders establish a similar quality LMX with everyone in their work group (Anand et. al., 2011). Everyone here knows that there are people who work for you, that you like better than others. Research suggests that leaders distribute resources differently among the workers based on the quality of the relationship. Therefore, someone who has a high-quality relationship with the bosses has more information and other resources to do a better job (Sias, 2005). In some organizations, studies showed that there was an “in-group” and an “out-group” established between those who had stronger relationships with the boss and those who had weaker relationships with the boss (Anand et. al, 2011).

The way the teacher’s pet effect works is that people who appeared to be favored or given preferential treatment from the bosses, ended up being disliked and had reduced communication with their peers (Anand et. al., 2011). A reason for this is leaders tend to assign more meaningful tasks and participate in more goal-setting activities when they have higher quality relationships with an individual (Madlock et. al., 2007). Thus, the “out-group” stands on the outside looking in and resents employees who share more interactions and projects with the boss. For a time, I was a supervisor at the youth detention facility at which I am currently employed. I had two employees who I perceived as standouts for doing the work and having an enthusiasm for getting tasks accomplished. Based on my efforts to get to know these two staff members, I quickly formed better relationships with them than with other members of my work group. As a result, I delegated more tasks to Jessica and Steve than I did to the other employees. One thing that I should point out is that the members of my crew worked graveyard shifts. The tasks I assigned to them were things like deeper cleaning of the restrooms and stocking items from the warehouse into the living area. One night, I needed a display shelf of

pamphlets cleaned and organized. Jessica and Steve both had the night off, so I asked Jeremy to clean up the shelf. He made some sort of under his breath remark like, “I thought you only gave extra work to the chosen ones.”

With the benefit of hindsight, I see that the other members of the group felt slighted by not getting assigned even menial tasks, while Jessica and Steve always had plenty to do. One effect of LMX quality in this instance is that of retention. Jessica now holds the supervisor job I vacated for another position. Steve is a counselor in the work unit housing the most stable of the facility employees. Jeremy left for a position elsewhere in the Juvenile Justice System, a position that doesn’t offer the potential for advancement as the one at our facility. In an exit interview with Jeremy, he candidly told me that he never really felt like he belonged or was a valued member of the team. I personally must take responsibility for not making efforts to build a better quality LMX with Jeremy when the opportunity presented itself. I recognize that all employees are not equally willing or able to do the work. Social science research utilizes generalities and trends and cause and effect cannot be stated in absolutes. However, in the case of Jeremy, he was every bit as capable as Steve and Jessica, but because of personality differences, I ignored Jeremy too much. He may have had more opportunity to experience growth if I would have provided those opportunities. Any of this research that you use in your work groups might be highly effective with some employees and ineffective with others. I am providing tools for you to try. For the followers these principles do not work with, you will have to seek other avenues to help those individuals progress.



**Assignment**

I hope that everyone is ready and willing to accept an assignment for participation in this meeting. What I am asking you to do is plant and cultivate the roots of your work group Kudzu vines. What I would ask each of you to do is write down the names of the people in your work group. Determine what stage you believe your relationship is in with each person. For every relationship in a mature partnership, pat yourself on the back. Commit yourself to keeping relationships in that stage. For every relationship in the acquaintance stage, think of two of his or her interests. Write down one thing you know the person likes outside of work and one aspect of this job that excites that individual. When the opportunity arises, talk to the individual about the interests. By finding out more about people in your employ, you will find ways to advance the relationships. For every relationship in the stranger stage, write down two things you appreciate about each person's work. For example, if that individual is always on time, discuss with the employee the reasons it is important and thank that employee for diligence in getting to work at the assigned hour. Opening dialogue about work likely will lead to you finding out more information about each employee personally. For each relationship within the stranger phase, give those individuals an assignment that will help your work group move forward. Research suggests that people can experience job dissatisfaction by not having enough to do. "Workers complained of too little work more than of too much" (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959, p. 74). Try as hard as possible to find something that will give stranger-phase employees a sense of involvement and accomplishment. Don't forget to follow up with the assignment, providing praise and correction as necessary. Assess

each of the people in your group and determine whether the assignments are balanced. If not, balance the workload and try to protect your group from the teacher's pet effect.

Monitor the results and take notes about how well the roots of communication grow. Continually plan to build relationships at every stage. The alternative to the teacher's pet effect is the parent's favorite effect. A blogger who goes by the handle Alaska Steve stated how the parent's favorite effect differs from the teacher's pet effect. "I know I had a different relationship with Mom than my brother and sisters - I think we all thought we were Mom's favorite as that was her special genius" (Northern Apex, 2006). That is the role of a good leader to establish a sense among the workers that they believe each one is the favorite. Good luck as you practice and perform effective leadership communication that will help the roots take hold and result in a beautiful Kudzu plant.

### **Decision-Making**

Kudzu experts say the best way to eradicate the plant is by consistently attacking the roots over a long period of time. If you look at your organization through a lens of Kudzu leadership principles, I believe you will find that holds true. A constant onslaught of poor communication at each level can ruin a business. Earlier we discussed what you as a group, believe makes for quality communication, this concept of poor communication includes infrequent and ineffective exchanges. Once the communication is managed, the surface problem with Kudzu is the vines growing beyond control and overtaking everything in their path. Entire houses occasionally succumb to the plant that can't be stopped. Kudzu would still be seen as a useful marvel of agriculture, if the vines were controllable. The reason I liken the vines to organizational decision-making is that

once roots are established, managing growth and moving in a controlled direction is a real challenge leaders face.

Does everyone remember New Coke? New Coke represented a directional change for the Coca-Cola Company. In 1985, the company introduced the product and announced that “Old Coke” would be taken off the market. The removal of Old Coke from the market lasted only a few months. It went off the market in April and was returned to stores as Coca-Cola Classic in July. Leaders in the company changed the direction its vines were going to combat stagnating growth and challenges from Pepsi. However, the leaders quickly realized that the new direction wasn’t what they desired, either, and took the company back the other direction. Some actually accused Coke of a conspiracy as the Classic experienced a huge jump in sales after returning to the market. President Donald R. Keough was quoted as saying, “The truth is we’re not that dumb, and we’re not that smart” (Grace, 2006, p. 1). The example of New Coke illustrates how decision can change the way a company is perceived and that no matter how well thought out, the effects of the decision can’t always be predicted. Everyone needs to understand how to make a decision that will support the mission of the company. A decision that takes the group in the correct direction “depends on the goals of the potential participants, particularly on the extent to which group or team members support the organizational objectives embedded in the problem” (Vroom, 2000, p. 85). As leaders, you can educate your workers to understand the organizational objectives better and help more effectively with decisions.

When Kudzu goes dormant, it is intriguing to study the web of vines stretching across the landscape and wonder how they got to that point. How did the owner of that

old pickup allow the plant to climb over the hood and let the vehicle to become forever entombed in a maze of woody vines? Most organizations do not go dormant in the winter, so there is little time to reflect on how growth gets out of hand and goes in directions that do not support the overall operation of the business. If every leader within an organization commits to making decisions that support the overall mission and grow their stewardship in the appropriate direction, then the vines can gracefully weave upward. I realize that every organization does not experience uncontrolled growth, but the Kudzu principle applies universally. Recognizing the need for careful direction of decision-making will keep growing organizations focused.

### **Vroom's Research**

Victor Vroom is one researcher commonly tied to organizational decision-making. He has spent his career working on leadership theory at Yale University. He led research for the Vroom-Yetton Model of decision-making. The matrix gives leaders an opportunity to break down necessary decisions based on research questions. Leaders can then determine if the highest quality decisions can be made by the leader, the followers, or some combination of the two. Vroom has taught five-day seminars to leaders on how to use the matrix. Because we do not have five days, I have read through much of Vroom's research and found some of the key elements that will help leaders consider the amount of participation needed as they make decisions that affect their work groups and/or organizations.

One concept widely available in popular research is the notion of moving from management to leadership (Sagie, 1997). Many forward-thinking organizations already have fostered this concept for a generation of workers. An example is the design and

innovation firm IDEO, based in San Francisco, California. IDEO's founder David Kelley allows all employees the opportunity to participate in decision-making process throughout the company. In a report from Tischler (2009) about Kelley's best lesson taught to employees, David's brother and coworker Tom Kelley claimed one of David's greatest lessons was, "The greatest responsibility of any leader is to make new leaders. David knew that neither he, himself, nor any one person has all the answers. He empowers others to do stuff" (p. 2). For many organizations, there still is work to be done to move management to leadership. That is why I believe as we talk about decision-making and weaving the vines of the organization in the desired direction, we must include the idea that leaders need to find ways to involve their reports in the process. Participation fosters the necessary communication and empowers employees and gives them a sense of accountability (Genrich et. al. 2001). One question leaders need to ask themselves before every decision is, "Who masters the required knowledge?" (Sagie, 1997, p. 393). When people in the group – not the leader –master the information that will lead to a more quality decision, then it is in the best interest of the entire organization to involve the group.

Vroom identified the number one objective of participation in decision-making as the quality of the decision (Vroom, 2000). Vroom suggested that "an effective leader is one who explicitly tailors his or her style to demands of the immediate problem at hand" (Vroom, 2000, p. 84). He also discussed how in many management circles we are taught the notion of "autocratic" and "participative" managers. However, his assertion is that leaders should be more concerned with "autocratic" and "participative" situations.

(Vroom, 2000). The greatest task of the leader when it comes to decision-making is determining how the problem is to be solved (Vroom, 1973).

When subordinates are unaffected by a decision, an autocratic process works perfectly (Vroom, 1973). There is no reason to waste the time and resources required by participation. However, some of the instances an organization benefits from a participative style include:

- When the decision is highly significant for the group:
  - When the leader needs group commitment for the decision to be effective:
  - When the leader lacks expertise (as we have discussed):
  - When the likelihood of commitment from the group is low:
  - When the group's expertise is high:
  - When there is a history of successfully working together on a decision
- (Vroom, 2000).

## **Participation**

Vroom poached another researcher's graphic and fit it into his decision-making model. Identified are five styles that leaders can utilize to make decisions affecting the group. The five styles to consider are (1) Decide, (2) Consult Individually, (3) Consult Group, (4) Facilitate, and (5) Delegate. The chart is broken up into an Area of Influence from the leader and an Area of Freedom for the group. Decisions can be made anywhere on the spectrum depending upon the process that is most effective for the situation (Vroom, 2000).

In support of the notion of participation, research has found that “(m)any high-quality decisions have been ineffective because they were not effectively implemented”

(Vroom, 2000, p. 85). A recent situation I encountered at my work had to do with the way employees are allowed to bank hours when we work 40 hours during a holiday week. As a 24-hour-a-day secure lockup facility, my work does not always translate into individual employees getting holidays off from work. I know people in the airline industry can empathize with that predicament. The way compensation for working on holidays has worked within our division is that when we worked our entire schedule during a holiday week, we were paid for working and we banked eight hours of excess time to be used at our discretion. One benefit of spending eight hours at work on Christmas Day was that I could string together a few holidays at work and then have a week built up to take off when I wanted. I liked this, because I could then get away from work without dipping into my allotment of annual hours.

However, everyone in the division received a memo from the director of Juvenile Justice Service that stated we were no longer allowed to bank more than 16 hours of excess at any time. In addition we have to use excess within 90 days of it being banked and we have to request permission from the facility director to work 40 hours during any holiday week. The memo gave the facility director a charge to track excess hours for all of the employees within his/her stewardship. When the facility director presented it in our team meeting, she was no more impressed with the new policy than I. She presented it with an attitude that was less than accepting of the change. My direct supervisor actually read a portion of the memo: "The earning of excess hours is not a right." He stated that it sounded like "lawyer-talk" designed to keep the masses from any sort of pushback. The bad attitude from my superiors fed my bad attitude regarding the policy shift.

There was never any indication of why this new policy took effect. I have since found out it was an accounting issue. A coworker explained that if employees build up large amounts of time from one fiscal year to the next, it would be difficult to plan for the amount of money necessary to pay it out. I do not know if that explanation was hokum or exactly right, but it did not matter to me. My feeling is that the requirement to work holidays did not disappear, but now administration dictates when I must take my days off.

I will gladly give administration the benefit of the doubt that this decision or some version of it was necessary. I have often thought about how they could have more effectively implemented the decision so the line staff could have gotten behind the change. There are three ways to implement change: Tell, Tell and Sell and Collaborate. Administration chose “Tell” for this situation and I believe another tactic would have been more effective. First of all let us consider the notion of a participative versus autocratic situation for this policy shift. The division director decided to go with an autocratic process. We discussed that those types of decisions work best when subordinates are unaffected by the decision. That definitely did not apply with this change.

Let us return to the list of participative situations and ask a few questions about my excess time.

- Is the decision highly significant? Maybe not highly, but it will affect every employee.
- Does the decision need group commitment? When it's a mandate, the level of commitment is almost irrelevant, but a lack of job satisfaction can result in policies that are unpopular.



- Do those making the decision lack expertise? They hold all the information on the accounting needs for this decision, but I would argue that they lack expertise on how excess time is being used and how the benefit is perceived by line staff.
- Is the likelihood of commitment low? Yes. There aren't many ways to present this that will not result in a low commitment level from the majority of staff.
- Is the group's expertise high? Again, the group's knowledge of the importance of the ability to bank excess hours is much higher than the administrators. Administrators don't work in the 24/7 portions of the facility and therefore do not routinely give up their holidays for work.
- Is there a history of working together? Since I'm still employed with the division I am going to refrain from answering that question. In all honesty, there have not been many times this administration has reached out to employees for decision-making assistance.

### **Resources and Time**

Two other huge factors that play into decision-making process are resources and time. Researchers acknowledge that it takes up both to employ a participative style of decision-making (Vroom, 2000). I don't want you to think I forgot about that as I discussed my excess-hour gripe from the Division of Juvenile Justice Services. Do I really believe that the director could have involved all of the 1,200 employees and found a solution we all accepted? Not for a second do I believe that was a practical course of action for that particular problem. But what if she would have found a way to involve the

25 or so facility directors? What if they worked together on a plan for meeting the accounting needs for the excess-hour pool? What if the directors had met and come up with exactly the same solution? Then one representative from every facility would have known exactly why this method needed to be adopted. When they went into the individual team meetings to pitch the new system, they may have been able to do so with a better attitude and with more information. “Increasing participation leads to greater ‘buy in’” (Vroom, 2000, p. 85). I have never met the division director who handed down the mandate. Notice it is a stranger phase low-quality LMX relationship. I love our facility director. She has personally done a lot for me during the course of my career. So we have a high-quality mature partnership LMX relationship. If my facility director would have presented the new plan with any sort of enthusiasm, I would have been more likely to have taken the directive with some level of acceptance. If she would have supported the change and explained to me its reasoning, I would have felt better about its implications. This method would have been more of a Tell and Sell approach.

One additional point that is made about inviting participation in decision-making is that participation contributes to individual and team development (Genrich et. al., 2001; Vroom, 2007). One problem with the work I do with incarcerated youth is that we have to make many, many decisions for them for safety and security reasons. We tell them when to wake up, when to clean their rooms, even when to go to the bathroom. We make so many decisions for them that transitions back to real life often are difficult for them. They lack decision-making development they should have experienced during their formative teenage years. Participative decision-making at the organizational level will help develop employees into stronger individuals and into a stronger group. That’s one

way this links to the Kudzu principle of controlled directional growth. When the members of the group are given the opportunity to help make decisions, they can help dictate the trajectory of the growth. Participation gives leaders an opportunity to open dialogue and discuss the needs for each decision. Individuals will learn how some choices follow the company mission while others do not. They will then be equipped to make decisions in congruence with the company mission.

### **Activity**

Now everyone gets to practice decision-making abilities based on the Kudzu principle of controlling the direction of organizational growth. College basketball wrapped up its season earlier this month and the NBA is now into the playoffs. College stars who made a name for themselves in the recent NCAA tournament are now preparing for a big payday as they get ready for the NBA Draft. For this exercise, each of you will put yourself in the position of an NBA general manager for a team trying to rebuild. Your objective: Get the best player available at your turn. You will consider on-court performance most heavily. I understand the amount of information you have is only a fraction of what would be available if drafting a real player. From the available stats, rank these players from #1 to #5 on your list of who you would draft given the opportunity. Remember the quality of this decision will affect the entire organization. You are picking early in the draft, so this player is someone you plan to build your franchise around for the next decade or more. Make the right decision and it will lead to years of success. Your entire operation – from the owners to the concession vendors at your arena – will become more profitable. Make the wrong decision and you will get

another opportunity to pick high in the draft, because your team still stinks. There will be little organizational growth with the wrong decision.

For the first few minutes of the exercise, I want you to look over the bios and determine the rank by yourself. Don't cheat off your more knowledgeable neighbor. On Vroom's graph, you have determined this decision is a zero and you own the knowledge to decide. After everyone has had the opportunity to rank their players, then I want you to come together as a group. The person with the birthday closest to August 10 is going to act as the leader and determine what position on Vroom's chart is the best for this decision. So who is the leader? If the leader determines he/she is the best qualified in the room to make the decision then that individual can decide and tell the draft order to the group. Otherwise, the leader can determine where on the chart is best for this decision and the group can work together. Your time will be short. Like a real draft, you are on the clock. Any questions about what is expected during the activity. Go to work.

*(Allow 2 ½ minutes for the individuals and 5 minutes for the group)*

What did you come up with? Did anyone know who the potential draftees were based on the information given? How many of you recognized that others might master the knowledge better than yourself? The decisions you made today were the decisions NBA general managers faced in 1984. Here are the players you debated and in the order they were actually selected. How did each of these decisions affect the franchises involved? Which teams made the right choice? Which teams botched their picks? The Chicago Bulls were highly successful during Jordan's run, and he is renowned as possibly the best ever.

**Assignment**

The assignment for this section of Kudzu Leadership is to build a trellis. As discussed earlier, growth is one of the objectives, but uncontrolled growth can lead to many pitfalls. For Kudzu, a trellis is a way to direct the growth. A gardener can manipulate the vines and cut away the errant branches. Within your work groups, leaders are tasked to manage outcomes of decisions. Everyone in the room cannot write corporate policy and cannot direct the overall mission of the company. However, each of you is assigned to direct the growth of the people you oversee. Your stewardship is the direction your group is growing in relation to the overall company mission. To build a trellis, you need to be certain that your work group understands the direction. Unless you want to operate at the zero level of Vroom's model and decide everything, you need to ensure that your group knows where to grow. Work with your group and answer these questions. What does our group need to accomplish each day to be of value to the company? How do our short-term and long-term objectives support the mission of the company? How can I as the leader direct our group objective and emphasize the mission of the company? How does participation in decision-making help the work group grow? What can I improve to help the growth of the group move in healthy directions?

**Morale**

This is the area of the presentation I am the most excited about. Morale has always been the real interest for me when it comes to my fascination with employee/employer relations. I have always believed that if a supervisor understands how to foster morale in each individual, then an organization has the opportunity to experience unbelievable growth. Research shows that motivated employees experience growth.

“Motivation is a function of growth from getting intrinsic rewards out of interesting and challenging work” (Herzberg, 1987, p. 14). As I discuss some situations from my current employment, I don’t want anyone to get the impression that I am a disgruntled employee. This is my second time working at this particular youth corrections facility. I have spent five years with the division. I use narratives from my work because I witness them first hand. I really do enjoy my work and the people who work with me. I would love to present these Kudzu principles to leaders at my work, to give all of us the opportunity to improve.

### **“Different Over There”**

In my current working situation, we have two distinct work groups; we call them secure and detention. The units are headed by different supervisors. The work performed by each group varies slightly, but is similar enough that the work itself shouldn’t be a major factor in the morale. The styles of the supervisors couldn’t be more different. The secure unit I work in has a generally happy, stable staff. We get along well as a team and communicate quite effectively. Almost every day during breaks detention staff members come to our side of the building to soak up the atmosphere. Sometimes the detention staff will declare what a drag work is that day. The last two times positions opened in secure, detention staff sought lateral transfers to join our work group. I don’t remember the last time an employee sought a transfer from secure to detention.

At the facility, we have a volunteer who comes in and spends about an hour a week with secure youth and staff and about 45 minutes with detention youth and staff. Recently, upon completion of his time in secure the volunteer said to me that he really did not want to cross the hall to detention. He said, “It’s different over there.” He went on

to explain that not just the attitudes of the youth bothered him, but also negative behaviors displayed by the staff. The volunteer said that he could tell the staff does not want to be there and while they are friendly, there is a feeling they just do not care. If lack of employee morale resulted in the youth not wanting to come to our facility, then we would be on to something special.

This is a volunteer who comes into our facility and while there he dominates the discussion. The volunteer gives a lesson and staff's only role is to stand as security back up. The volunteer shares a few exchanges per week with staff members. However, it has been enough to notice, "It's different over there," to the extent he would rather not spend time in the other unit. Imagine this scenario from a business perspective. What happens when the morale of employees who deal with clients and customers is low enough that the clients do not want to spend time with them? The worst thing possible in business, the clients go elsewhere.

That is why I liken the morale piece of Kudzu Leadership to the leaves and flowers of the plant. It is the morale or the job satisfaction of the employees that is available for everyone to see. Attitudes of workers are what make an organization beautiful. Leaves of the Kudzu plant gather sunlight and give the vines necessary resources to grow. Employees offer a similar function. They assist in gathering clients and building the customer base to make operational growth possible. Even employees who do not deal directly with the consumer provide vital support that makes growth possible. Morale at every level is vital for the organization to thrive.

In the example of job satisfaction among the employees in the detention and secure units, it is easy to observe what the least common denominator is in determining

morale. The leader of each unit is the driving force behind what creates an environment where employees thrive or wither.

### **Herzberg's Work**

When I started the master's program, I was preparing to write a paper about the morale implications of our division director's newsletters sent out to every JJS employee. I planned to analyze what the tone of her correspondence said about her leadership style. One of the top three goals of her administration is: "Improve the safety, security and morale of JJS youths and employees" (Burke, 2013, p. 1). Because she regards job satisfaction so highly for the employees, I wanted to see if her communication to us supported that mission. Her newsletter is my only experience with her and therefore the only direct influence she has on my job satisfaction. As I was seeking a way to write this research paper, the Communication Department head suggested I look at Frederick Herzberg's research. Herzberg's theory instantly intrigued me.

I had always believed that you either have morale or you do not. But what Herzberg presented is completely different. He discussed two different dimensions of job satisfaction and it makes complete sense to me. Herzberg's research has endured for 60 years. At least one researcher from the field of positive psychology has called for a wide-ranging resurrection of Herzberg's work (Sachau, 2007). Understanding these concepts can increase a leader's ability to recognize ways to foster morale throughout a work group.

### **Different Spectrums**

Herzberg's research and findings are called the Motivation-Hygiene Theory. His assertion is that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are not different ends of the same



spectrum, but rather operate on two separate spectrums. Some factors in the workplace operate to create job satisfaction or good feelings about work, while some factors create dissatisfaction or bad feelings about the job. Herzberg identified several factors that work as motivators bringing improved morale to companies. He then listed several factors that work as hygiene factors detracting from good feelings or satisfaction within organizations.

One question commonly asked as I present his theory is “why are they called hygiene factors.” People relate hygiene to showering, keeping the dirt out from under their fingernails and other aspects of cleanliness. People don’t understand how hygiene would relate to the work environment. Some of the companies Herzberg consulted made him change the terminology to eliminate the notion of hygiene. I believe his explanation of his use of the word makes perfect sense. He wrote, “Hygiene operates to remove health hazards from the environment of man. It is not a curative; it is, rather a preventative” (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1959, p. 113). So as we discuss motivators versus the hygiene factors, think of the hygiene tactics utilized to prevent low morale, but do not operate to improve job satisfaction.

### **Motivators**

Herzberg’s chart looks like this. On top are factors that work to give an employee job satisfaction and make him or her feel good about what he/she accomplishes 8, 10, 12 hours a day or more. The most common factor that gives workers a satisfied feeling about their jobs is achievement. The second most common is recognition (Herzberg, 1987). When people have a sense of a job well done, they become satisfied with what they do. I witnessed this first hand in the newspaper business for nearly a decade. At both of the

papers I worked there was at least one dedicated reporter. I left the business because I was not committed to the story anymore. I could no longer put up with the tedium of small-town reporting. This is not the case for David Anderson at the Richfield Reaper and Scott Bowlen at the Ketchikan Daily News. Those two men continue to do their jobs diligently because reporting offers an instant sense of achievement built into the job.

Scott and Dave remain committed to the newspaper business for the purpose of telling the public meaningful stories. They care about what happens in their communities. When the paper hits the street – weekly for Dave and daily for Scott – they get a personal sense of accomplishment by looking at the front page, seeing their names atop an article. Scott is one of the least ego-driven people I have ever met. He once told me he still gets a charge from seeing his name on a well-researched and well-written article. Along with that internal sense of achievement they allow for themselves, Scott and Dave also get recognition of others. Richfield and Ketchikan are pretty small towns, and many people can identify the local reporters. No matter the topic of a story, someone is bound to believe the story needed to be told and recognize that the reporter provided a service by writing it. Inevitably people will approach small town reporters around town and offer their opinion about the hot local story. One real payoff of recognition for a reporter comes when people who have completely different opinions about a story's approach and compliment the writer for a job well done.

For Dave and Scott, who have sat at the same desks for more than 10 years each and covered the same types of events over and over, job satisfaction comes from intrinsic motivating factors. The other motivators Herzberg identified were the work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth (Herzberg, 1987).

## Hygiene Factors

On a different spectrum, Herzberg identified the hygiene factors that exist and make job dissatisfaction a real possibility. The number one factor that can cause people to have bad feelings about their jobs is that of company policy and administration (Herzberg, 1987). One anecdotal piece of evidence I have of this phenomenon is the excess-time situation described earlier. Banking of excess hours is a company policy. When the new directive was introduced, I experienced a bad feeling about my work. The new policy functioned to give me some level of dissatisfaction toward my job. In my opinion, the way administration handled the change compounded the bad feeling. However, even before the change created my bad feeling, excess hours never had the power to give me good feelings about my job. The ability to bank them was a nice benefit, but I never thought, “I’ve banked 80 excess hours, therefore I am satisfied in the work that I do.” That particular policy only has power to give me bad feelings or a neutral attitude. It couldn’t make me feel good about going to work.

The next highest factor on the list of hygiene is supervision, which has to do with the way the whole group is managed rather than an individual. When the researchers established this category, they took the interpersonal relationships out of the equation and looked instead at willingness to delegate, willingness to teach and other factors (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959, p. 47). You will note that relationship with supervisor is the next factor that can create job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1987). On the subject of supervision, you will remember we talked about the two units at my current employment. My supervisor is masterful at letting the group participate in the work. He is a competent communicator and keeps the staff happy by making sure our needs are met.

He emphasizes the importance of the work we do. Astutely he keys on the motivating factor of the work itself. We have the responsibility to positively affect the lives of young people and my supervisor makes sure we know that what we do is important. His counterpart in the detention unit doesn't have a solid grasp of utilizing motivators. I am one of the employees who transferred units when the opportunity arose. When I worked for the detention supervisor, I can recall instances when he came to me and discussed details of rule breaking by other employees. He always is looking for ways to police every rule in its strictest letter of the law way. While I support following policy, his focus always seems to be company policy and administration. He constantly emphasizes a hygiene factor and neglects motivators that could make his employees satisfied with their work.

Hygiene factors Herzberg identified, other than those previously discussed, are work conditions, salary, relationship with peers, personal life, relationship with subordinates, status and security (Herzberg, 1987).

### **Salary**

That's correct, Herzberg identified salary as a hygiene factor and not a motivating factor. Salary is a bit trickier than other factors on both spectrums. Notice on the chart that salary crossed the middle line by a greater percentage than other factors and is almost as far on the motivator side as it is the hygiene side. The reason for this salary anomaly is that people need to reach a level of salary that meets their basic needs before it stops being a motivator and becomes a hygiene factor (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959, p. 117). If I were working for \$10 an hour and do not get paid time off for vacation and my kid needs new braces I am going to be motivated to go to work and work to a

level that I can keep that job. If I see a possibility that productivity will result in a higher salary, I will be motivated to produce. However, once my salary reaches a level that I am able to make ends meet, get my kids braces, put some in savings and have some left over for recreation, more pay no longer motivates me to do better work. If picking up road kill on the side of the interstate paid a \$1 million per year I would be willing to do that job for the rest of my career. However, no amount of money would make me jump out of bed and be excited to go to work. One of my favorite quotes from this field of study is, “The normal, healthy, adult reaction to boring work is boredom” (Sachau, 2007, p. 382). Work that doesn’t include some inherent intrinsic motivators doesn’t have the power to create a high level of job satisfaction.

Research shows that “Wealth ... is unrelated to long-term life satisfaction” (Sachau, 2007, p. 386). That’s why we read stories about Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett giving away millions of dollars they spent their careers amassing. They aren’t going to give away enough they can’t still live beyond most people’s imagination, but they have found that just having it doesn’t make them happy. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation functions to help people in developing countries have better lives. “From time to time we should step back and celebrate the achievements that come with having the right goals-combined with political will, generous aid, and innovation in tools and their delivery. It has certainly deepened my commitment to this work” (Gates, 2013, p. 3). Hence they are dispensing a hygiene factor in pursuit of a motivator.

### **Movement versus Motivation**

One thing people need to recognize as they study the motivation-hygiene theory is that hygiene factors are a necessary part of any working situation. There is no way to –

nor is there a suggestion that you should – eliminate company policy and administration. However, emphasizing hygiene factors in day-to-day interactions amounts to what Herzberg called movement. With movement employees have extrinsic reasons to move and fear punishment. They react because they have no choice. “Be on time every day or you will be fired.” The feelings that working only with hygiene factors produce are fear, frustration, jealousy, anger and rage (Sachau, 2007).

In contrast to movement, Herzberg identified that working with motivating factors results in motivation. With motivation, employees experience intrinsic reasons to progress and grow. They behave to benefit the entire organization. “I need to be on time to work today because I have a responsibility to my work group and I love the work I do.” Feelings experienced by employees when their leaders utilize motivators are pride, freedom, work flow and fascination. Motivators fit the employees need for creativity and goal-directed activity (Sachau, 2007). Motivation is a function of growth. “Personal growth is the end goal of the motivators, while achievement is the starting point for any personal growth” (Herzberg, 1974, p. 20). Learning to utilize the motivators and particularly achievement will help leaders enhance growth for their team.

### **Good News**

Herzberg’s theory is very good news for leaders who want to foster productive environments and offer their teams solid morale. More money for bonuses and salary increases to keep moving people forward is not always available. However, there are always means of giving employees a sense of achievement and recognizing the good work they are doing. Lord Stanley’s Cup is an example of achievement and recognition that works as a motivating factor for NHL hockey players. Each year after the NHL

championship, members of the winning team have the opportunity to spend a day with the Stanley Cup. Players have described the day with the cup as a “religious experience” among other things. Many players take the cup to their hometowns and allow their fans to revel in their success. There’s no extra salary directly related to a day with the Cup, but players talk about it in terms of the best thing about playing in the NHL. In an article about moments with the Stanley Cup, Compton (2011) shared Boston Bruins Defenseman Andrew Ference’s feelings after winning the Cup in 2011, he claimed “I’m never going to get higher than when I lifted it on the ice, or in the locker room with the Cup” (p. 6).

I have taken this theory and put it to work in my family. We have this silver coin and it is the reward for excellence in the week’s family goal. My wife and I work together and set a goal that each one in the family can work toward. The goals are things like, most time on the treadmill, cleanest room each day, first one done with their homework, most pages read or anything else we want to emphasize that week. Whoever does the best with the goal gets the coin for the week. The only two rules are do not spend it and do not lose it. It’s amazing what my kids will do for a week with the family coin. It is kind of a silly example, but it works. At the end of the week when we hand the coin from one person to the next, the new owner gets a sense of achievement and recognition for doing well with the family goal.

Remember at the first of the presentation we talked about one thing each of you are going to do is build relationships through communication. An aspect of this relationship building is setting goals and giving assignments. When those goals are achieved you will have a built in way to give recognition and a sense of achievement for

a job well done. The average American worker spends more than 100,000 hours on the job during his/her lifetime (Truell et. al., 1998) and the best leaders provide whatever motivators possible to help those employees grow (Herzberg, 1974).

### **Assignment**

The assignment for this section of the Kudzu Leadership Model is to discover the motivators and hygiene factors you feel in your work every day. In the first assignment, you planted the roots with a communication assessment of each member of your team. The second assignment dealt with manipulating the vines and you addressed questions to group members determining the direction the group is growing. To help you develop morale you need only to do a personal assessment of where your job satisfaction stands. Are your leaves green and lush for all to see? Ask yourself the question, “What do I want from my job?” Reflect on that question and make sure your current situation is providing what you want. I am in no way suggesting you leave your position if you find your morale lacking. Herzberg compiled his research by asking employees to think of a time when they were extremely satisfied with the work they did. He found that “the stories were vivid, and, in most cases showed evidence of deep emotion” (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959, p. 20). The best way to get back a good feeling about your work is to reflect on the successes you have had in the organization. Think of those times when this job was the best thing going and then find ways to recreate that feeling. I am hopeful that you discover that you love it here and your job satisfaction has never been higher. As you continually improve your own morale, the ability to provide motivators to your work groups will come naturally and your employees will feed off your enjoyment of the work.



Let me share one quick story about how the work itself affects the people at my current employment. We recently have had a string of experiences where the youth we work with have been paroled and gone back to their criminal behaviors almost immediately. It takes its toll on morale as we try to make sense of what we did wrong trying to help individuals change only to find out they could not stay out of trouble. However, in the middle of the reports of youth making choices that will lead back to jail, there was a different type of story about one youth who spent a year or so in our care. During his stay staff members experienced frequent headaches trying to show him how his behaviors were destroying his young life. This youth created problems in the facility for some time, before he suddenly experienced a change of heart. He began obeying the rules and doing the work. Upon departure from our facility, he enrolled in high school to pursue his diploma. He tried out for and made the varsity track team. Suddenly he was surrounded by a group of peers who encouraged and displayed healthy behaviors. One Saturday, some of our staff attended a track meet and watched as he excelled in his events. The following day staff members attended his baptism into one of the local churches. Joining a church illustrated to staff that he had committed himself to a higher objective and was putting his destructive behaviors behind him. While these are his choices and behaviors, it is moments like this when our staff experiences the motivation to keep trying with other youth and see the beauty in our work.

### **Conclusion**

I recognize that there are hundreds of leadership books and theories that can be used by every leader and that sometimes it feels as though we are bombarded by the different opinions on what makes good leadership. Kudzu Leadership isn't the only way,

but I believe that these theories and the commonsense approach to leadership presented in this research can lead to great things. I realize that I have painted something of a utopian picture of what happens in the work groups. I know that you are not just going to be able to walk up to an employee in the stranger phase and say, “Hi, Jane how’s the knife throwing act coming?” and magically have a perfect relationship. But consciously thinking about ways to improve relationships cannot hurt. I understand that leaders have only so much influence on whether or not their employees will be productive. However, for employees who want to work and want to be successful Kudzu will help you lead them to amazing results.

The roots of the organization really are the communication among its members. Without effective communication, organizations stagnate and wither. Once those roots are planted and healthy, leaders can direct organizational vines in ways they need to go by participating in decisions that support the company mission. Finally, with the roots taking hold and vines climbing the trellis, leaders can focus on building group morale and allowing leaves and flowers to blossom for all to see. Kudzu Leadership is a beautiful thing and I know that healthy exciting growth is possible with these principles. Thank you so much for your time. I have loved being with you today.

### **Presentation Evaluation**

Working through my friend, Danny Cox, I gained an audience with leaders from jetBlue airlines on April 26. The meeting took place at jetBlue’s corporate offices in Salt Lake City, Utah. The event was scheduled for one-hour beginning at 3 p.m. on a Friday. Cox and I both knew that the time would offer some challenges for attendance because of the presentation’s timing in relation to the start of the weekend. Also, at jetBlue, Friday is

a work-at-home option day for many of its leaders, and therefore fewer people are in the offices. The purpose of the Friday afternoon time was to allow Bonny Simi, the company's vice president of talent an opportunity to attend the event. She is based in the company's corporate offices in New York. It was beneficial for me personally to have the opportunity to meet one of the company's vice presidents, therefore, the Friday afternoon time slot worked well.

Twelve people attended the presentation. Along with the vice president, there were also supervisors, managers and directors in attendance. All of those who took part have at least 15 direct reports and most have at least one more level of subordinates under their direct reports. The make up of the audience and number in attendance made for a very comfortable setting for me as I formally presented the information for the first time. The room included seating for all of the participants. The front of the room included podium and video screens that displayed the Keynote presentation on either side of the podium. The set up worked well and allowed me to comfortably move around the front of the room. I knew that if I moved in front of one screen, the other would still be visible for all attendees to view the information on the Keynote slides. Along with the slides projected on the screen, each participant was given a booklet with information regarding the three sections of the presentation. The pages highlighted some of the more technical aspects of the information that were difficult to present entirely verbally or display in their entirety on the screen.

Before I began the presentation, Cox warned me that the "laid back" nature of the jetBlue office would make it difficult to start on time. He stated that some attendees might come in after I started. After a brief introduction from Cox, I started presenting the

information at 3:10 p.m. One participant came in after I began and only missed the first two or three minutes. I knew I would need to finish up as close to 4 p.m. as possible, because many of the attendees would be anxious to leave work for the weekend. I closed the session at 4:17 p.m. Therefore, I went over my targeted time of 60 minutes by seven minutes. Simi had to catch a flight back to New York and left before the event was over. She is the only attendee who didn't stay for the duration of the presentation. My personal interactions with participants following the presentation were largely positive. Each of those who took part shook my hand as they left and most expressed some sort of "thank you" for the time and information.

### **Survey Monkey evaluation**

The booklet materials handed out before the presentation included two pages for a "Kudzu Leadership Evaluation" (see Appendix B). I instructed the participants that the paper evaluation in the book was there for the purpose of their reference and that I would offer them an electronic means of filling out the evaluation after the completion of the event. On April 26 around 7 p.m. I opened a survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/kudzuleadership](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/kudzuleadership). I sent an e-mail out to the participants thanking them for their attendance and requesting they go to the page and fill out the survey. I closed the survey from further responses on Friday, May 3. During the week it was open, 10 of the 12 participants filled out responses to at least some of the questions. Therefore, the survey received an 83-percent response rate from the jetBlue participants.

The survey included 12 Likert-scale questions regarding aspects of the research information, the presenter and the presentation materials. Also included in the evaluation were three essay questions that allowed participants to provide open-ended responses

regarding their opinions about the presentation. The Survey Monkey program allows for the survey designer to control a maximum length for the essay question responses. I allowed for 8 lines of text with a maximum of 80 characters each for a total of 640 characters allowed on any single essay question response. Most of the responses for essay questions were one or two sentences. However, one respondent's writings approached the maximum allowable characters on the final question of "Is there anything else you would like to share about the Kudzu Leadership presentation."

### **Essay question responses**

One of the things I appreciated personally about the evaluation response to the presentation was that there were people who gave critical feedback about what they perceived were the weaker parts of the presentation. One of the essay questions was "Overall, what did you dislike most about the information presented?" Eight of the respondents answered that question. Two of the respondents addressed the issue that the Kudzu analogy itself was flawed. "The vine analogy was a stretch and not very clear." One issue I will discuss in more detail later is the amount of time allowed for the jetBlue presentation. I believe that the time allowed created a situation where I had to choose between emphasizing the research information or the Kudzu analogy. I chose to emphasize the research and the Kudzu tie-in sort of got in the way. More time to present would allow for greater development of the analogy. In an informal "raise of the hands" question near the beginning I asked how many were familiar with Kudzu. Three participants raised their hands. Describing Kudzu as a good thing created a difficult visual for at least one participant who wrote, "Having driven through a great deal of the South, I have seen the all-consuming (and destructive) nature of Kudzu first hand."

Initially, it was difficult for me to think positively about the analogy drawn between Kudzu and leadership.” I knew that could be an issue. Kudzu Leadership might be an even more difficult sell in the Southern United States. However, I believe that the Kudzu analogy is relevant and has the potential to provide the perfect visual background to discuss leadership and specifically as it relates to growth.

My objective will be to minimize the negative connotations through the introduction and continued inclusion of the analogy throughout the presentation. In 1998, Spencer Johnson published a book titled *Who Moved My Cheese*. The main characters in his book were mice in a maze searching for cheese. In my work, we have used that book as a treatment assignment and asked the youth to liken themselves to the mice. I believe other organizations have used the book in similar ways. Mice are less than desirable creatures. I recently was asked by a coworker to rid her office of a dead mouse, before she was even willing to enter the room. Johnson successfully took a rodent and made it the hero of his book. I believe a similar result is possible for me through the use of Kudzu. I will need to find better ways to illustrate the beauty and give people the opportunity to suspend their notion of the destructive power for the purposes of Kudzu leadership.

Nine of the participants offered responses to the essay question, “Overall, what did you like most about the information presented?” Four of the responses centered on the Leader-Member Exchange and communication portion of the presentation, which was the first section of the Kudzu model. One response read, “I liked the portion about creating deep roots and creating relationships that are mature and can help further develop the Crewmembers.” Two of the responses focused on the decision-making

portion of the presentation, while only one mentioned the Motivation-Hygiene Theory and employee morale. It might be significant that responses regarding positive feelings about each main section were more positive for the first section and less positive for the final section, because the presentation became more rushed toward the end. The other two responses to the question expressed satisfaction with the presentation as a whole. One participant stated, "I like the concept and thought it made sense." The other respondent said, "The material was extremely interesting and I especially liked learning about the individual who conducted the research as well as the conclusions that were established. I feel confident that the various concepts of the presentation can be easily applied to leadership/direct report situations in our organization." I was personally flattered by that response. I used several narratives from my own career and life experiences giving participants a glimpse into my life. Research shows that stories are a valuable way to share information. "All forms of human communication are best relayed as stories" (Barker, 2010, p. 299). I have frequently utilized narratives in my teaching, from Communication 1010 classes to treatment groups. I believe the use of stories about my work were effective in the Kudzu presentation.

### **Likert-scale questions**

Some of the highlights from the Likert-scale questions had to do with my personal presentation style. I was pleased to see that most of the responses were favorable. The question from the survey stated, "How would you rate the presenter of Kudzu Leadership?" All 10 of the respondents answered the question. One chose the option "extremely good," while seven of the respondents said "very good," which was the second most favorable option. Two of the respondents chose the third option of "slightly

good.” The other options for response to the question were “neither good nor poor,” “slightly poor,” “very poor,” and “extremely poor.” I don’t believe my relationship with Cox created a situation where the participants would give me a more favorable evaluation based on our friendship. When he introduced me to the group he talked about how we attended undergraduate classes at the same time at Southern Utah University. He discussed how he had followed my career in the newspaper business as a frequent reader of the stories I wrote. Cox didn’t mention our lifelong friendship, emphasizing instead our professional involvement in each other’s lives.

All of the responses to a question about the presentation materials fell on the positive side of the scale. The question was, “The visual elements and handouts used during the presentation appeared professional.” The responses were five on the “strongly agree” option and five on the “agree” option. The other possibilities were “no opinion,” “disagree” and “strongly disagree.” Presentation materials were developed in the final days of preparation before the jetBlue event. Mary Jo Chatelain, an intern at SUU’s Speech and Presentation Center, worked with me as a consultant on my Keynote presentation. The bulk of her involvement came in designing the background for each slide and helping me put together a background for the text portions of the presentation. Sage Platt and Jonathan Holiman at the SAPC also reviewed various aspects of the Keynote and offered suggestions for improvement. The booklet totaled 18 pages. I produced it entirely on my own. Because I was on a tight deadline to get it printed in time for jetBlue presentation, Andrea Goulding, my wife, was the only other person to view it before the event. She proofread the booklet for grammatical and spelling errors and offered input on the overall design. I had the booklets printed at Staples. After the



presentation, one of the directors requested extra copies of the booklet to distribute at a meeting with company vice presidents at a later date. I gave him five additional copies for distribution to people not in attendance.

A Likert-scale question regarding the analogy between the Kudzu vine and leadership was, “How easy was it to follow the tie between the Kudzu vine and organizational growth?” One response was “mildly easy,” while three of the participants selected “fairly easy.” Those were the two lowest selections chosen. The option that would indicate the most difficulty was “not easy at all.” Other responses to the question were four “very easy” and two “extremely easy.” The nature of these responses validates that the Kudzu tie can be useful. With some revision, I believe I can strengthen the analogy to remove confusion from those who only found it “mildly” or “fairly easy” to follow. With some finding it “very” or “extremely easy” there must have been some success in utilizing the visual of Kudzu.

Each of the three sections had a question regarding the information presented in that section. The questions were structured in this manner, “How useful was the information presented regarding (specific theory and main topic) to you as a leader?” The response options were, “extremely useful, very useful, somewhat useful, slightly useful, and not useful at all.” The leader-member exchange theory and communication was seen as the most useful information presented. One respondent chose “extremely useful,” while five chose “very useful.” The decision-making piece of the presentation received two “extremely useful” and three “very useful” responses. Four selected “somewhat useful” and once chose “slightly useful.” With the permission of its sender, Cox shared an e-mail with me from Meredyth Powell, jetBlue’s crew support manager, to the

supervisors who report to her. Powell sent the correspondence on Monday, April 29, after attending the Kudzu presentation. She outlined the five-point decision-making process described in Victor Vroom's research. She stated that she had seen the Kudzu presentation and would like to offer the supervisors an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process more actively than they previously had done. Powell wrote, "I'd like to recommend we delegate and have the supervisors work together to come up with what each step looks like and then propose it to us for our sign off. Since they're the ones who will be having these conversations and holding their Crewmembers accountable, by increasing their participation in the process, it should lead to greater buy-in." The notion of leading to greater buy-in was directly from Vroom's research highlighted on one of the slides presented in the Kudzu Keynote. Regarding the motivation-hygiene theory, the response "somewhat useful," dominated with six of the 10 respondents choosing that option.

### **Objectives evaluation**

I would like to mention how the final version of the presentation accomplished each of the objectives established earlier in this document and discussed before major work on this capstone project began. Each one remained relevant and important during development of the project.

#### **Develop model based on Kudzu**

The final presentation centered on the idea of growth and how organizations can move people forward with the simple steps supported by research. In all of the graphic elements I attempted to utilize visual depictions of Kudzu and the color green to create a consistent theme.

As discussed earlier, the effectiveness of the Kudzu analogy received mixed reviews and wasn't the strongest portion of the presentation. However, I believe the consistency of having the theme running through the presentation was accomplished. Further development of how the three main points of the presentation – communication is the roots, decision-making is the vines and morale is the leaves and flowers – is something that should be accomplished before further presentations.

### **Adapted for time and audience**

This is the area of the presentation I have reflected on the most since sharing the information at jetBlue. I spent time in the days leading up to the presentation, attempting to cut portions of the presentation to make it fit into the 1-hour time frame allowed. I did cut out several stories and concepts that I had planned to share during the presentation. Before the event, I practiced the presentation all the way through twice with small audiences of friends and family. Following the practices, I knew cuts would still be necessary. One respondent to the survey pointed out the time issue as one of the biggest weaknesses. The participant wrote, "Time management was a challenge. The presentation was scheduled for 60 minutes, but is best done for 90 minutes."

Under most circumstances, I believe the 1-hour limit would be a real challenge. However, I believe that with a little more organization and planning, I could make Kudzu worthwhile as a 1-hour presentation. Knowing that 60 minutes is a challenge, I believe that for future events I will attempt to schedule a minimum of two hours. That amount of time would allow for full development of the Kudzu analogy and give a short break if necessary. During the jetBlue event, we skipped one of the two activities planned for the presentation. The communication exercise where two people were assigned to ask each

other questions was very successful. I had a hard time getting participants to stop their conversations and come back to the presentation. One pair of participants had known each other for nine years. When asked during the presentation if they had learned anything new about the other person, they were enthusiastic about the new information they had discussed. More time could be allowed for that activity in future presentations. The activity regarding decision-making and NBA draft order did not come to pass, as we had to move to other parts of the presentation.

If I can find the right situation and organization, I would like to try presenting the Kudzu Leadership model in three 1-hour sessions. The first session would include introduction and the communication section of the presentation. Because each section includes an assignment, I would then give the participants a week to work on aspects of the assignment. The second session, approximately a week later, would feature discussion of the previous assignment results and the decision-making section. Finally, on the third week we could discuss the decision-making assignment and the morale piece of the Kudzu presentation. This format would allow plenty of time to develop the analogy, allow time for discussion and time to share ample information from the research.

This project objective also included an element about appealing broadly to various types of audiences. In its current format, Kudzu works best for groups of people who have supervisory duties and employees who report directly to them. The presentation is underdeveloped for work-group situations that include the supervisor and the subordinates he/she oversees. I believe the format could be changed to suit that type of audience, but additional work is needed to accomplish this portion of the objective.

**Give the presentation**

I have discussed at length the results of giving the presentation to at least one professional organization. jetBlue represented an incredible opportunity for me to share the presentation in front of real professionals who work every day in leadership roles. I am grateful for networking and the opportunity I had to give the presentation based on my relationship with Cox.

**Receive written evaluations**

As discussed previously, each of the participants was asked to fill out a survey based on opinions regarding the Kudzu presentation. The 83-percent response rate impressed me, and I am grateful participants felt strongly enough about the information to fill out the survey. Unfortunately, design of the survey took place near the presentation date, and I didn't have time for any professional researcher to look over the evaluation tool for validity and accuracy. For future presentations, I would prepare in advance to make sure that someone with more research experience than me could offer assistance in creating the evaluation tool. I don't believe the survey used for the jetBlue event was invalid, but I know there were weaknesses that could be addressed.

It was in the evaluations that I found the most motivation to continue developing the model and seek additional opportunities to present the model in the future. One respondent wrote, "We receive a lot of really fantastic training at our company, so to walk away from a presentation feeling extremely impressed takes a lot. This definitely has the potential, but could be pushed up a level in my opinion. I'm so appreciative of the time spent and research. Again, it's a really great concept, I'd keep pushing forward with it if I were you! Best of luck!!" This and other feedback will help as I seek other

organizations that will benefit from learning, discussing and practicing Kudzu Leadership principles.

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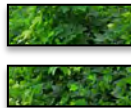
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## Appendix A

Kudzu Leadership uses an analogy that weaves throughout the presentation and compares individual parts of the kudzu plant to the individual themes used in the training. The following is a visual depiction of that relationship and the key components that are used in the comparison between leadership and kudzu.

### Roots

- ◆ Kudzu roots grow deep and are the key to healthy plants.
- ◆ Eradicating kudzu is most effectively done through attacking the roots.
- ◆ Cultivating healthy kudzu plants would begin with providing ideal ground conditions for roots to thrive.



### Communication

- ◆ In order for organizations to grow, healthy communication is the key.
- ◆ Without effective communication, groups struggle to thrive or survive.
- ◆ Communication through Leader-Member Exchange provides conditions for organizations to cultivate growth.

### Vines

- ◆ Vines of the kudzu plant grow rapidly and will engulf anything in their path if not controlled.
- ◆ Kudzu vines can be controlled with constant care and attention to the direction they are growing.
- ◆ A person managing a kudzu plant has the responsibility to ensure it doesn't grow in directions that are unhealthy for the plant or its surroundings.



### Decision-Making

- ◆ Organizations that experience growth are in danger of moving the wrong direction if growth isn't managed.
- ◆ Decision-making that constantly supports the overall mission is the only way to control directional growth.
- ◆ Leaders are responsible to ensure that employees understand the desired direction. Leaders can then allow more participation in decision-making.

### Leaves & Flowers

- ◆ The leaves and flowers of healthy kudzu plants are what make it beautiful and fascinating.
- ◆ Landscapes that include healthy kudzu are inviting and attract photographers and others to partake the beauty.
- ◆ Kudzu provides the valuable function of erosion control and can be used as an interesting ornamental plant for those willing to manage it.



### Morale

- ◆ Organizations that are able to focus on morale, establish happier and more productive employees.
- ◆ Job satisfaction among employees is what attracts clients and customers to an organization.
- ◆ Leaders who emphasize motivating factors will give employees the tools to function in a way that will benefit them individually and the group collectively.

## Appendix B

**KUDZU Leadership Evaluation****1. Overall, how would you rate the Kudzu Leadership presentation?**

Extremely good   Very good   Fairly good   Mildly good   Not good at all

**2. Was the information presented helpful to you as a leader?**

Extremely helpful   Very helpful   Fairly helpful   Mildly helpful   Not helpful at all

**3. How well organized was the presentation?**

Extremely   Very   Somewhat   Slightly   Not at all

**4. Was the tie between the Kudzu vine and organizational growth easy to follow?**

Extremely easy   Very easy   Fairly easy   Mildly easy   Not easy at all

**5. Was the information presented regarding Leader-Member Exchange and communication helpful to you?**

Extremely   Very   Somewhat   Slightly   Not at all

**6. Was the information regarding decision making helpful to you?**

Extremely   Very   Somewhat   Slightly   Not at all

**7. Was the information regarding Motivation-Hygiene Theory and employee morale helpful to you?**

Extremely   Very   Somewhat   Slightly   Not at all

**8. Overall, what did you like most about the information presented?****9. Overall, what did you dislike most about the information presented?**

**10. How would you rate the presenter of Kudzu Leadership?**

Extremely good   Somewhat good   Neither good nor poor   Somewhat poor   Extremely poor

**11. How likely are you to recommend Kudzu Leadership to a friend?**

Extremely likely   Very likely   Moderately likely   Somewhat likely   Not likely at all

**12. Were the assignments given at the end of each section practical for your organization?**

Extremely   Very   Somewhat   Slightly   Not at all

**13. How likely are you to follow through on the assignments given during the Kudzu presentation?**

Extremely likely   Very likely   Moderately likely   Somewhat likely   Not likely at all

**14. The visual elements and handouts used during the presentation appeared professional?**

Strongly agree   Agree   No opinion   Disagree   Strongly disagree

**15. Is there anything else you would like to share about the Kudzu Leadership presentation?**

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