How leaders generate hope in their followers

by Alison Richardson[*], Jonathan Cook[**] and
Karl Hofmeyr[***]

Abstract

The importance of hope in the leader-subordinate relationship is discussed and placed in the context of South African organisations struggling to overcome the legacy of the past, and trying to compete in a competitive environment. The article draws on the field of positive psychological capital and uses this as a framework to investigate the impact of high-hope leaders on employee engagement and work performance. It asks what it is that leaders do to generate hope in their followers and how their actions affect their followers' feelings and intentions. The research involved in-depth interviews with the followers of high-hope leaders, seeking to identify the traits and skills exhibited by these leaders. In addition to competences usually associated with good leaders, the high-hope leaders display additional competences which set them apart from others. The article proposes a checklist of attributes required by leaders to generate hope in their followers.

Key words: *leadership, hope, engagement, organisational behaviour*

1 Introduction

The lens through which leadership is viewed is constantly shifting. The four streams or generations of leadership theories are the trait, behavioural, contingency and transformational approaches (Helland & Winston 2005). More recently writers such as Youssef and Luthans (2007) have focused on an aspect of leadership which they call "positive psychological capital" and define as a combination of confidence/efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency. Their research, as well as that of numerous others (Burns 2003; Gardner & Schermerhorn 2004; Shorey & Snyder 2004) has begun to show that these constructs can be measured and related to performance and satisfaction. A positive approach to leadership, which underpins this article, is based on the assumption that "what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention" (Peterson 2006:4).

Hope is central to the idea of positive organisational behaviour and the point of departure in this article is that leaders who have a hopeful mindset have the capacity to generate and enhance hopeful thinking and action in followers (Helland & Winston 2005). The growing positive psychology movement is creating a new way of thinking and behaving among organisational leaders, and is beginning to influence our understanding of organisational behaviour (Luthans, Van Wyk & Walumbwa 2004). These authors suggest that the fostering of hopeful thinking appears to be necessary

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[*]   A Richardson is the Human Resources Director at Sungard Systems, Johannesburg.
[**] J Cook is the Executive Director at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria.
[***] Prof K Hofmeyr is a Professor of Leadership at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria.

not only to make it possible to break away from historical (political) influences and to help leaders create a vision for meeting the challenges they are facing in organisations, but also to move away from self-doubt to self-renewal. They argue that the role of hope is becoming increasingly significant in both nation-building and organisational performance.

According to Luthans et al (2004), hope is a psychological capacity that can be developed and managed, and it is related to leadership effectiveness and employee performance. They cite research in North American organisations which suggests that high-hope leaders have higher performing business units and more satisfied associates with lower levels of employee turnover. Adams, Snyder, Rand, King, Sigman and Pulvers (2002) also reported that firms with higher hope human resources are more profitable, have higher employee retention rates, and have greater levels of employee satisfaction and commitment. Similarly, Peterson and Luthans (2003) found that high-hope organisational leaders had significantly better work unit performance, subordinate retention and satisfaction outcomes than low-hope leaders. This study sets out to examine what leaders do to generate hope in their followers. It identifies specific local issues and the implications thereof in a South Africa context.

If high-hope leaders can produce the positive outcomes noted above, then their identification and development should be a priority in both the private and the public sectors. In the twenty years since the release of Nelson Mandela South Africa has much to be proud of. The "miracle" of the first democratic elections, the measure of forgiveness brought about by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the (mostly) growing economy, transformation of many parts of society and business, and international acceptance of the country as a relevant player in world political and economic affairs all imply that the country should be well positioned for growth and progress. However, in many areas the country faces ongoing and intractable challenges. The optimism which greeted the so-called new South Africa has been dulled, in particular by the masses of people without work and without much hope of achieving a decent standard of living. Serious problems in areas such as education, health, unemployment, crime and service delivery continue to impact negatively on the lives of millions of people. The idea of a "beacon of hope" which Archbishop Tutu used to describe the country in 2004 has dimmed.

In an African context, James (2008) stresses the point that Africa needs extraordinary leadership. The challenges of poverty, disease and conflict require leaders of vision, ability and integrity – but James is of the opinion that these leaders are the exception rather than the rule. "Many leaders, whether in government, business, or the non-profit or civil society sector in Africa are failing to rise to the extreme challenges they face" (James 2008:359).

The need for more effective leadership is underlined by the fact that in the World Competitiveness Report (2011) South Africa was ranked 52 out of 59 countries, a drop of 8 places since the 2010 report. The report (Word Competitiveness Report 2011:502) defines competitiveness as a measure of "how a nation manages the totality of its resources to increase the prosperity of its people". Key ingredients of competitiveness include creating a stable and predictable legislative and administrative environment, maintaining a balanced relationship between wage levels, productivity and taxation, and continually investing in developing and maintaining both economic and social infrastructure. These are challenges which the country needs to confront if it is to reverse the trend of its declining competitiveness. Sunter and Illbury (2011) have warned that South Africa will decline further in terms of competitiveness if the following

"red flags" are raised: the country becomes too unpredictable and violent to sustain productive trading relationships; nationalisation; poor implementation of national health insurance; a media tribunal with punitive powers; and land grabs. They refer to the need for "inclusive leadership" if the country is to reverse its worsening competitive position.

Dealing with the problems facing the country requires leadership at all levels – at the national and local level, in business and in civil society. This leadership will be needed to drive the changes required and make the tough decisions on allocation of resources and delivery. It will have to be performance-driven leadership so that measurable change occurs, as opposed to good intentions which do not materialise. At the same time it will need to take people along and motivate them to be part of the solution, so that they start to believe that improvements are achievable.

In a South African study, Luthans et al (2004) refer to the fact that various managerial methods and approaches have been tried in South Africa – from re-engineering to downsizing and outsourcing, and calls for a more sensitive and healthy organisational culture. They suggest that what is required is "new thinking" for South African organisational leaders and their development, namely thinking directed at "positivity in general and hope in particular". Their paper provides a theory- and research-based argument, grounded in positive psychology, for instilling hope, and they propose that the development of hope can start with (1) human resource development, (2) leaders who are allowed to have input into the goals they are striving to achieve, (3) self-reflection, mentoring and coaching, and (4) the use of rehearsals and experiential exercises.

This article goes a step further by seeking to identify in practical terms what differentiates high-hope leaders from others in a South African context, and what these leaders actually do to engender hope in their followers.

2   Research scope and purpose

The scope of this research was limited to South African leaders who were identified as being high-hope leaders, and who generate hope in their followers. The followers of these high-hope leaders were interviewed to determine what the high-hope leaders were doing, and to assess the impact of the leaders' behaviour on their followers. The outcome of the research is a checklist of behaviours, actions and attitudes of hopeful leaders, which can serve as a guide for other leaders who seek to increase their positive influence on followers and organisations and in consequence have a more positive impact on the South African economy.

For the purposes of the study hope was defined as a positive motivational state which embodies a determination both to achieve goals (willpower) and to find the paths to meet those goals (waypower). This implies that hope is not simply an emotion, "it is a dynamic, powerful, and persuasive cognitive process that is observable across numerous contexts including that of formal organisations" (Snyder, Irving & Anderson 1991:287).

3   Leadership and hope

What is the central role and impact of leaders and how is this related to hope in the workplace? What evidence exists that hopeful leaders are important in driving positive behaviour and outcomes in organisations? There are a number of elements focusing on a leadership style which is positive and hopeful, and which places people at the centre

of the relationship between organisations and employees. A considerable amount of research on leadership and hope has been undertaken in the past decade.

3.1 *Leadership and performance*

A central idea guiding this research is that quality of leadership has a significant impact on followers and on organisational performance.

Eales-White (2003) defines a leader as a person who rules or guides others, and a follower as a person who accepts the teachings of another. Yukl (2005) refers to leadership as a social influence process which involves determining the group or organisation's objectives, encouraging behaviour in pursuit of these objectives, and influencing group maintenance and culture. This relationship between leaders and followers has been studied intensively for many years, and continues to be the topic of much research and writing. The link between leadership and performance has also attracted considerable attention.

There is now sufficient evidence that there *is* indeed a strong relationship between leadership effectiveness and organisational performance. Erkutlu (2008) states that managers use different leadership behaviours in the work setting and these behaviours have a direct impact on employee outcomes, and may result in higher employee satisfaction, commitment and productivity.

Helland and Winston (2005) show how effective leaders are able to influence followers to achieve organisational goals. In the context of hope, their research showed that hopeful leaders have the capacity to generate hopeful thinking in their followers. They also found that without a sense of hope, followers are less likely to invest the necessary energy to complete the tasks needed to achieve organisational goals. Norman, Luthans and Luthans (2005) further point out that hope has been one of the most widely researched variables in positive psychology and that the research has produced empirical evidence that hope enhances individual performance in many settings. Davenport and Harding (2010) describe leadership as a process which entails envisioning an improved situation, determining the best path to reach the goal, inspiring and motivating followers to strive towards the objective, boosting energy and removing obstacles. Clearly leadership, and particularly hopeful leadership, is needed to achieve desired goals.

The traditional leadership role is focused on driving the "hard aspects" of business performance. These aspects include increasing bottom-line performance, creating shareholder value and ensuring the long-term viability of the business. However, current best practice has moved past the point where it is acceptable to achieve bottom-line results at the expense of people. The modern workplace and the modern employee are demanding a different kind of leadership – a duality where the focus is on both the hard business results and on the people in the organisation (Schuitema 2004). Effective leaders use both professional and personal leadership behaviours. Both aspects of leadership –- being competent and adopting an engaging style – are required for effective organisational outcomes. The accepted leadership role has evolved to a place where it is about both bottom-line performance and engaging people in the organisation at the same time. Davenport and Harding (2010) refer to research undertaken over a three-year period which tracked engagement scores of 40 global companies and correlated them with company performance. Over a period of 36 months, companies with highly engaged employees produced significantly better financial results (operating margins as well as net profit margins) than did low-engagement workplaces.

Finally, Peterson, Walumba, Byron and Myrowitz (2009) found that the positive psychological traits of hope, optimism and resilience impacted positively on transformational leadership ratings. These in turn were found to mediate the relationship between the leaders' positive psychological traits and their firms' performance.

3.2 What do high-hope leaders do?

Daft (2011) describes how high-hope leaders influence followers towards organisational goals. They do this by understanding follower expectations, inspiring followers to pursue a common vision, triggering motivation by setting goals together with followers, and providing the support needed for goal attainment. Gardner (1990:195) suggests that "the first and last task of the leader is to keep hope alive".

Kouzes and Posner (1997) say that encouragement is central to the task of a leader, and highlight the stimulation of hope as a key leadership role. The domain of the leader is the future, and the leader's unique legacy is the creation of valued and successful organisations. Kouzes and Posner created a research base of sixty thousand leaders and followers and discovered recurring patterns of leadership success – ordinary people achieving extraordinary results. They identified five elements of effective leadership as judged by followers:

Effective leaders challenge the process. They are constantly challenging why things are being done in a certain way, but are open to having their own actions challenged.

They inspire a shared vision – by knowing their employees and speaking their language. Leadership is seen as a dialogue rather than a monologue, and the leader's enthusiasm about the vision spreads to followers.

They enable others to act. They believe in the potential of others and enable people to realise their full potential.

They model the way by acting as a role model and demonstrating integrity through the congruence between their words and actions.

They encourage the followers to carry on when are disenchanted, exhausted and frustrated.

Positive leadership provides people with a sense of direction that encourages them to do their best. Even with highly motivated, achievement-oriented people, the type of leadership provided makes a difference to the performance, to the levels of stress experienced, and to long-term health (Kouzes & Posner 1997). These authors stress the need for leaders to skilfully combine both hard and soft skills, and add a third dimension which relates to providing hope and encouraging the heart of followers.

In an empirical South African study, Luthans et al (2004) draw attention to the potential role which hope can play in the development of the country's organisational leaders. They contend that South Africa's history since 1994 and the paradigm shifts taking place provide a useful context for exploring the impact of hopeful leaders. Three characteristics of high-hope leaders, namely self-efficacy (confidence), optimism and resilience, were found to be particularly relevant. These would need to be developed within a context because it is important to integrate the local economic and cultural context into the development of hope. They conclude as follows: "In sum, given its historical, economic and complex cultural contexts, we propose that hope can help South African organisational leaders address their challenges" (Luthans et al 2004:521).

3.3 *Why is hope important for organisations?*

A central assumption of this article is that having a solid and growing cadre of hopeful leaders is very important for South Africa because hopeful leadership and concomitant trust have significantly greater benefits than laissez-faire or negative leadership behaviour (Lee, Gillespie, Mann & Wearing 2010). Luthans et al (2004) remind us of the positive impact of some of the great South African national leaders who have demonstrated hope as part of their leadership style, people like Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the late Walter Sisulu.

Luthans, Van Wyk and Walumbwa (2004) argue that in turbulent geopolitical and economic times, countries around the globe have to negotiate the delicate balance between fear and despair on the one hand, and hope and opportunity on the other. A lack of hope can have negative consequences for the performance of companies, whereas a tendency towards hope can build a tolerance for negative outcomes, and the ability to manage conflict and economic downturns. People will more naturally thrive in a positive, hopeful environment than in a negative, hopeless environment (Luthans et al 2004).

3.4 *The followers' perspective*

The focus of this article is on the effect that high-hope leaders have on followers. Followers want to be in a place that resonates with their personal values and goals; they want to be able to engage in meaningful work where they can make a difference; they want to be valued and respected; and they want to be able to progress in terms of career opportunities (Schuitema 2004). Money is a maintenance factor. Employees want to be paid fairly and equitably for the work performed. Pay is not a major motivator or retention factor, as long as the employee is not underpaid (Handy 1994).

A study by DiPietro, Welsh, Raven and Severt (2007) examined the hope level of franchisees, top level executives and franchisors to add to the body of knowledge on the link between hope level and overall motivation. In general, franchisees were found to be less hopeful than top executives and franchisors. This finding suggests that ownership plays a role in engendering hope, and raises the possibility that franchisees who are the key to the success of a franchise operation may not be as motivated as the other stakeholders. In the context of educational leadership, Walker (2006) argues that hope is an essential component of leader effectiveness in classrooms and that it can be used to transform the experiences of learners and their communities.

According to the Branham (2005), there are four fundamental human needs and employees leave organisations when these needs are not met. The four needs are:

The need for trust: Employees expect the company and management to deliver on their promises, to be honest and open in all communications, to invest in staff, to treat them fairly, and to compensate staff fairly and on time.

The need to have hope: Staff need to have hope for the future and believe that they will be able to grow, develop their skills on the job and through training, and have the opportunity for advancement, accompanied by higher earnings.

The need to feel a sense of worth: Followers need to feel confident that if they work hard, demonstrate commitment and make meaningful contributions, they will be recognised and rewarded accordingly. Feeling worthy also means that they will be shown respect and regarded as a valuable asset (not as a cost) to the organisation.

The need to feel competent: Followers expect to be matched to a job which makes good use of their talents and is challenging, to receive the necessary training to perform the job capably, to see the end result of their work, and to obtain regular feedback on their performance.

This article looks at hope from the followers' perspective and sets out to identify what high-hope leaders do, in a South African context. It takes a more mindful, emotionally mature and skilled leader to effectively mix the hard and soft aspects of leadership, and apply this successfully in the workplace in a way that benefits the business and the people. The literature emphasises the importance of a leadership style which is positive and hopeful, and which places people at the centre of the relationship between organisations and employees.

4 Research objective

The purpose of this study was to determine what high-hope leaders do to generate hope in their followers, and to gain an understanding of how these actions affect employee performance and morale. The research focused on three questions:

- What is it that leaders do to generate hope in their followers?
- How do high-hope leaders' actions affect their followers' feelings and intentions?
- How do high-hope leaders' actions affect their followers' perceptions of their performance on the job?

5 Methodology

The research design was qualitative and of an exploratory nature (Zikmund 2003). Qualitative research aims to attain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour (Davies 2007). It generates an understanding of a concept, or helps to clarify a problem, rather than providing precise measurements or quantification. Qualitative research requires considerable skill, both in the design of the research and during the interview process. Content has to be carefully analysed to produce valid findings. Unlike conclusive research, qualitative studies explore a topic with a view to understanding it better. Quantitative research might be undertaken subsequently to reveal facts and to determine a course of action.

The research was undertaken in two phases. The first phase focused on identifying business leaders who generate hope in their followers. The method followed was to ask Master of Business Administration (MBA) students to indicate whether their immediate manager generates hope in them. The sample to be interviewed was taken from those respondents who answered in the affirmative.

In the second phase, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the followers of leaders who generate hope. Gillham (2005) argues that the semi-structured interview is the most effective way of conducting a research interview because of its flexibility, balanced by structure, and the quality of the data obtained. He prescribes the following framework for semi-structured interviews: Firstly, the same questions are asked of all interviewees. Interviewees are prompted by supplementary questions if they have not spontaneously answered the question effectively. Secondly, approximately equal interview times are allowed for each interviewee. A third element is that open-ended questions are asked, with probing questions being used according to whether the interviewer judges there is more to be disclosed at a particular point in the interview.

As the study was exploratory in nature, the interviewer made use of probing and clarifying techniques to gain as much insight as possible. Interviews were allowed to run a natural course, within the framework of the semi-structured topics, and the interviewer made sure all the topics were covered.

One of the challenges of qualitative research, particularly regarding the use of semi-structured interviews, is that it relies heavily on the skills of the interviewer and his or her ability to analyse and interpret the evidence accumulated (Davies 2007). The interviews were all conducted face to face. As indicated above, non-probability, judgemental sampling was used to select participants. The basis of selection was availability of participants, and geographic proximity in Gauteng.

5.1 *Data collection*

The intention of the research was to interview a sample of followers of high-hope leaders to identify what these leaders do to generate hope. The first step was to identify a sample of these leaders, and the most obvious way was to ask followers to rate their immediate manager on the dimension of whether or not they generate hope.

In the first phase of the research, a questionnaire was developed to identify MBA students who regarded their managers as high-hope leaders. The questions that were posed were:

Please rate your immediate manager on the degree to which he/she generates hope in you:
1 I come away from interactions with my manager feeling totally hopeless/without hope.
2 I sometimes feel hopeful after interacting with my manager.
3 I have not encountered any impact on my sense of hope after interacting with my manager.
4 I sometimes feel quite hopeful after interacting with my manager.
5 I almost always find myself feeling more hopeful after interacting with my manager.

The survey was conducted electronically and sent to a population of 145 students. The MBA is a part-time programme and all the students were working, mostly for private sector companies. A total of forty students responded; a 27% response. Of these, thirteen rated their leader's capacity to generate hope as a four or five.

Those who were available and geographically accessible were selected to be interviewed. On this basis, nine followers of high-hope leaders were interviewed in face-to-face interviews, and each interview lasted approximately sixty minutes. Of the followers who were interviewed, five were male and four female. Of their managers, six were male and three female. The interviews were digitally recorded (with prior permission from each participant), and extensive notes on the responses from participants were taken during the interviews. Using the recordings, interviews were typed up verbatim after completion.

The following semi-structured questions were asked in the interviews:
1 What is it that your manager does to generate hope in you?
2 How important is this (working for a high-hope leader) to you?
3 How does this high-hope behaviour make you feel?
4 What does this high-hope behaviour make you do?
5 How does this impact your perception of your performance on the job?

5.2 Data analysis

Content analysis is the objective, systematic description of the content of communication (Zikmund 2003). Ten hours of interview data were analysed on this basis. Once all the interviews had been completed, the responses from the participants were analysed by tabulating the most frequent and/or common responses to the questions. The resulting themes were grouped into categories and these were then analysed by means of thematic analysis (Davies 2007). An initial coding frame was created to analyse the interviews. This had to be flexible as the understanding of the findings evolved during the process of interpretation. There was considerable consistency in the observations made by the interviewees and findings were recorded when at least two-thirds of the interviewees made a specific observation about their leader. An independent third person also reviewed the interview notes. Her findings were compared with those of the researchers to confirm the accuracy of the initial analysis.

6 Findings

From the semi-structured interviews, and using the five questions noted above, findings were grouped in terms of the following areas:

* What is it that leaders *do* to generate hope in their followers?
* How do high-hope leaders' actions impact their followers' feelings and intentions?
* How do high-hope leaders' actions impact their followers' perceptions of their performance on the job?

6.1 What is it that leaders do to generate hope in their followers?

The thematic analysis of the survey results indicated that the high-hope managers share nine common behaviours which generate hope in their followers. The behaviours can be categorised into three dimensions:

1 Personal competence
2 Affirming followers
3 Driving high performance

6.1.1 Personal competence

The leaders have high levels of personal competence and credibility, and are personally very smart and successful

Each of the nine leaders is at an executive or partner level in the businesses in which they operate, and all are well qualified. All of the leaders have high levels of personal credibility in the workplace and the industry in which they operate. The interviewees all respected their leader for the personal success that he/she had achieved. One of the interviewees commented "He has an MBA and a BSC in Mechanical Engineering so he is very highly qualified. He is also very well read. He is capable of doing the work himself. He is knowledgeable about many aspects of the business, so he can advise you on a lot of things."

   This finding supports the research of Alimo-Metcalfe, Alban-Metcalfe, Bradley, Mariathasan and Samele (2008), which focused on the people side of leadership, but acknowledged that effective organisational outcomes are dependent on the leader being highly competent *and* adopting an engaging style of leadership. Their study

investigated the link between quality of leadership and organisational performance, and their findings showed a positive correlation between the two variables. The quality of leadership begins with being highly competent to do the job. The leaders under review in this study are also very successful individuals with high levels of credibility in the workplace, and often in the industry in which they operate. A number of the followers indicated that if the need arose the leaders could step into the role of the people who report to them and do their job. Both the literature and the interviews with the followers indicate that a key component of high-hope leaders is high levels of personal competence and high credibility. The result is that the followers respect and admire the leaders.

6.1.2 *Affirming followers*

A second dimension of high-hope leadership is the ability to affirm followers. This comprises six elements.

High-hope leaders trust their people implicitly, and refrain from micromanaging them

Each of the leaders trusts their followers implicitly to get on with their job and do what is necessary to complete tasks and deliverables successfully, without being checked up on. The trust component of the relationship with the leader appeared to be one of the key factors which generate hope in the followers who were interviewed.

The level of trust in some cases was very high in that followers had the freedom, for example, to spend significant budgetary amounts on international travel to assess new business opportunities. The freedom to operate inspires the followers to work hard and each of the interviewees reported that they would avoid letting their manager down at all costs. The followers are free to work where and when they choose. The leader does not clock-watch, but focuses instead on the delivery of results.

One of the followers commented specifically that his leader gives him a great deal of freedom. If he needs to make a decision, even one with considerable financial implications, his manager gives him the latitude to make the decision without consulting him. His manager trusts him to make key decisions and does not keep checking up on him.

The trust aspect of high-hope leadership is strongly supported by the literature. One of Kouzes and Posner's (1997) five elements of effective leadership is enabling others to act, and in this context, trust is a critical element of leadership behaviour. From the follower's perspective, Branham (2005) lists four fundamental human needs noted earlier, the first of which is the need for trust. Followers feel respected and valued when their leader places high levels of trust in them, and trust is therefore a critical component of a high-hope leadership style. From a personal leadership perspective, Mastrangelo, Eddy and Lorenzet (2004) stress that one of the key roles for leaders is building trust and acting morally. In a global workforce study Davenport and Harding (2010) identified the three factors driving employee trust as openness, work clarity and fairness. Trusted managers communicate openly, focus on the important issues, and handle performance management processes objectively and fairly.

High-hope leaders empower their people

The leaders in this study provide followers with all the resources needed to do the job. These include physical tools such as technology, opening doors to provide access to executives, and making available the financial resources needed to operate effectively. The leaders play a coaching and guiding role, and some provide input and ideas to

their followers, but the followers then have the freedom to determine the way forward by making their own decisions. Many of the followers spoke about being allowed to make mistakes as part of the learning process; there was no fear of reprisal if mistakes were made.

Interviewees commented that they felt they could try out new ideas without the risk of a negative reaction. They also felt that their leader instilled considerable confidence in them, both at work and in general. High-hope leaders provide knowledge and guidance so that interviewees feel empowered to act with confidence. One interviewee reported that his manager does not keep team members on a tight rein, but rather gives them the freedom to explore and try out new approaches. Further, he is not office bound and his manager gives him the space to get the work done.

Empowerment of followers is a consistent theme in the literature on leadership, and is another aspect of high-hope leadership that generates hope in followers. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) refer to a democratic leadership style as part of the leadership repertoire, where followers' input and participation is sought. People feel that they are part of the process and that their input is valued, and this creates a sense of hope in them. Alimo-Metcalfe et al (2008) stress the desire to co-create and co-own ways of working as one of the characteristics of engaging leaders. A further characteristic is delegation by leaders, which empowers and develops potential in people. Similarly, Conger and Kanungo (1988) argue that empowerment provides strong motivation because it meets the higher needs of individuals. In their view most people come into the organisation wanting to do a good job and empowerment enables leaders to release the motivation which already exists.

High-hope leaders are keen developers of people

The leaders have all taken a keen interest in developing their people, and all are supportive of their followers' studies. Some of the leaders appeared to have a specific ability to identify potential in followers, and then develop that potential. As a result, people in administrative roles were developed and promoted to managerial roles. The leaders in this research project willingly invest resources (time and money) in developing their people, despite the current economic challenges; they do not use resource constraints as an excuse to delay development.

One interviewee noted that her manager had afforded her numerous opportunities to develop and grow. She felt that her manager trusted her and believed in her, and was extremely supportive of her development. Another interviewee noted that his manager (the CEO of the company) was particularly open to the interviewee's learning and was keen to debrief regularly on what was being learned. One of the high-hope leaders was described as being a sounding board, generous with feedback and willing to provide guidance when it was required. A consistent theme was that the high-hope leaders constantly sought out potential and then developed that potential.

The literature stresses the development of followers as a key component of effective leadership capability. Goleman et al (2002) refer to the coaching leadership style, which is the art of one-on-one coaching. This ties together the personal aspirations of the follower with the goals of the broader organisation. From a transformational leadership perspective, the work of Bass (1990) lists individual consideration as one of the four leadership characteristics. The developmental needs of the followers are identified and then addressed through coaching, mentoring and other developmental activities.

It was clear from each of the followers that the leader's personal interest in their development was a highly motivating factor, and that it made them feel special and

valued in the workplace. This in turn contributed to their sense of hope.

High-hope leaders are accessible; they make themselves available to their people

Despite the fact that all of the leaders are executives with large personal workloads, they make themselves available to their followers. Some have regular, structured meetings with the team, and then regular one-on-ones with followers. Less formal meetings and communication also appear to be commonplace, with the leaders making large chunks of time available to talk through ideas with followers. Some of the followers commented that their manager's door was always open, and he or she would make themselves available despite busy schedules.

In the modern workplace, it is commonplace for leaders to be too busy with meetings and excessive paperwork, with no time to focus on the day-to-day concerns and development of subordinates. Goleman et al (2002) list relationship management as a key competency for the emotionally intelligent leader; this includes inspiration, influence, developing others, being a change catalyst, managing conflict well, and team work and collaboration. A further competency is self-management, where hopeful leaders ensure that they make time available for followers.

High-hope leaders believe in their people and believe the best about them

The followers interviewed were all certain that their leaders believed in them, and had their best interests at heart. The leaders had taken a personal interest in the followers, and they encouraged and championed them in the business and nurtured their development. Many leaders guide and support the career growth of their followers and having the leader as a champion behind them creates a significant sense of hope and self-esteem in the followers.

One of the interviewees stated simply that his manager believes in him and this gives him hope in the organisation. Another noted that her manager keeps her promises and that this does a great deal to make her feel important and supported. It also creates a feeling that the manager has faith in her. This aspect of believing in people is closely linked to the concept of trust. Mastrangelo et al (2004) list caring for people as one of the key roles of effective personal leadership. Alimo-Metcalfe et al (2008) similarly list having a real concern for others as a characteristic of engaging leadership.

An additional finding arising from the research was that the high-hope leaders appeared to be ordinary people doing extraordinary things in their leadership role, and their actions collectively ignite hope in their followers. It was clear from the interviews that the nine leaders were connecting with their people at a personal level.

Parsons (2002) believes that being in touch with your people and having a "common touch" opens leaders up to finding talent in unexpected places, because the leaders are comfortable with being among the people. He further explains that having the "common touch" means not taking oneself too seriously, and making a habit of treating people with dignity, whatever their status in the organisation.

In support of this, one interviewee commented that his leader was a normal, down-to-earth person. Another felt that her manager did not come across as a CEO, but as someone willing to get her hands dirty and to be part of the solution to any problems. Yet another observed that his manager was a no-nonsense person and someone who did not become side-tracked by organisational politics.

A number of the followers admitted that they become critical and even cynical at times, yet these leaders are able to generate hope in them. They also acknowledged that their leaders had flaws, but said that they did not expect them to be "perfect"

leaders. They were accepting of the leaders' flaws and tended to admire what they were doing right, rather than focusing on what they were doing wrong.

High-hope leaders are good communicators, and willingly share knowledge and information with followers

Each of the leaders in this research project makes time to communicate regularly with his or her followers, sometimes formally, but also informally. They willingly share knowledge and information with team members, so that each of the followers feels comfortable that they know what is happening in the organisation and in their business unit. The leaders also make a point of sharing personal experience and knowledge with followers, usually in the form of informal coaching. Two-thirds of the followers mentioned that the leader shares both personal and private information with them that under normal circumstances they would not be privy to. This built a sense of trust, self-esteem and loyalty in the followers. One of the interviewees commented that his manager had shared with him the fact that he was being head-hunted and had asked the interviewee for advice.

In support of these observations Goleman et al (2002) refer to a visionary leadership style as part of the leadership repertoire, where the leader shares the vision which moves followers towards shared dreams. Kouzes and Posner (1997) stress the importance of leaders' acting as role models and demonstrating integrity, with congruence between words and actions. Positive leadership provides a sense of direction, and this happens when leaders willingly and openly share knowledge and information. This behaviour encourages followers, because they are confident that they have the necessary information to perform effectively and to use the information as a basis for decisions.

The ability to affirm followers is part of the high-hope leader's repertoire, and has a positive effect on the perceptions and feelings of followers. Affirming followers includes the ability to trust and empower followers, effectively develop people both formally and informally, make time available to spend with followers, effectively share information and knowledge with followers, and then believe in and believe the best about the people who work for the leader. These abilities may be classified as "soft skills", yet there is evidence that these soft skills are some of the critical tools used by leaders who generate hope in followers (Peterson 2006).

6.1.3 *Driving high performance*

High-hope leaders relentlessly drive high performance

Despite their ability to manage the human side of leadership, it is clear that each of the nine leaders focuses strongly on results and therefore relentlessly drives high performance. Although mistakes are tolerated, there is a strong focus on performance, and followers are expected to deliver quality results on time. The leaders appear to effectively combine this business side of leadership practice with the people side of leadership, so that followers respect and admire them and the result is that they are personally successful.

Interviewees referred to the fact that that although people enjoy working with high-hope leaders; they know that there are boundaries and that the team has to deliver. Followers know exactly where they stand and are told clearly when they have underperformed. The leader sets high standards and if a team member makes a mistake, he or she is told explicitly what the problem is.

High-hope leaders inspire their subordinates to work hard, and contribute large amounts of discretionary effort

Each of the followers acknowledged that they are naturally hard workers, and that they set high personal performance standards for themselves, so they naturally perform at a high level. However, they each recognised that working with a high-hope leader inspires them to work even harder and deliver higher standards of performance, quite often outside of their comfort zone. Work is not time bound, and the followers work until the job is done, which entails working long hours, and often over weekends.

One interviewee commented that she feels inspired to do her best for her manager, particularly since the manager supports her at all times. Interviewees reported high levels of motivation. They do what is needed to meet the expectations of their high-hope leaders. These leaders have a direct influence on the performance levels of their followers. One interviewee reported that he aspires to exceed the manager's expectations; he wants to please the manager at all times. Another commented that he operates at a very high level, and he does this partly because the manager recognises good performance and values the standards achieved.

It is clear from these observations that the high-hope leaders have a positive impact on performance. The followers were not asked to work longer hours or to work harder. They did so by choice and they were willing to contribute discretionary effort. Although the leaders in this research project relentlessly drive high performance, they have also found ways to encourage the heart of their followers. These leaders inspire people to act of their own free will, and to deliver exceptional performance. Through their own behaviours, and by generating hope in their followers through their actions, they have a positive impact on overall organisational performance (Alimo-Metcalf et al 2008; Erkutlu 2008; Lee et al 2010).

6.2 How do high hope leaders' actions affect their followers' feelings and intentions?

The second question raised in the research dealt with the impact of a high-hope leader's actions. Followers were asked how their high-hope leader's behaviour made them feel and how it made them act. The followers' feelings, actions and intentions were consistently and positively affected by the high-hope leader's actions. During the interviews followers consistently reported that they enjoyed going to work and felt inspired by their leader. They also felt valued and optimistic.

From an action perspective, interviewees commented that they were happy to work long hours to complete a task and prepared to put in considerable extra effort. They did not want to let their leader down and saw him/her as a role model. In terms of intentions, the followers confirmed that they enjoyed working for their immediate leader. However, there was no clear link to retention or intention to stay. None of the followers was actively looking for a new role, but they did not indicate an intention to stay with their company in the longer term. Only one of the followers mentioned that she would find it hard to leave the team (and the high-hope leader) because she enjoyed working with the leader so much.

The hope that was described by the followers during the interviews is relevant at an individual level and also at a company level. The followers feel hopeful about themselves (the leader believes in and trusts them, and has a deep interest in their development) and their current and future role in the organisation. The leader's behaviour inspires followers' confidence not only in the leader, but also in their own abilities and potential to develop. This encourages them to be optimistic about their own

future with their current company, and about their future career. The overall result is a positive and engaged employee, who performs at a much higher level than an employee who has little or no hope. The elements of trust, inspiration, personal development and employee engagement are repeatedly supported in the literature (Davenport & Harding 2010; Goleman et al 2002; Kouzes & Posner 1997).

6.3 How do high-hope leaders' actions affect their followers' perceptions of their performance on the job?

In addition to the impact of the leader's actions on feelings and intentions, the research also examined the effect on followers' perceptions of their performance. How did feelings and intentions translate into performance?

Most of the followers admitted to being naturally high performers. They set high standards for themselves, and generally perform at a high level, irrespective of the leader they are working with. However, each of the followers described the positive impact that the high-hope leader has on their performance and acknowledged that they perform at a higher level than they would naturally.

The literature describes the high-hope leaders as approaching their leadership role from a win/win perspective, where all parties feel good about the situation and are committed to action (Covey 1992). There is a positive correlation between the impact of the high-hope leader's behaviour and the performance of followers. It can be assumed that high-hope leaders will also have a positive impact on improving the performance of average performers or underperformers in organisations, and therefore the business case for having more high-hope leaders as part of the leadership cadre is compelling.

7 The outliers and flawed heroes

In conducting the research, there were some traits and behaviours discussed which did not conform to the strict definition of a high-hope leader. The positive impact of high-hope leaders has been confirmed in this research. It was noteworthy, however, that the high-hope leaders described by their followers did not always fit the typical mould of a charismatic or inspirational leader. Each of the followers indicated that their leader inspires hope in them, that they admire the leader and aspire to be like him/her, yet they also spoke about the weaknesses and personal flaws of the leaders.

Some examples include the fact that two of the nine interviewees reported that their high-hope leaders do not go out of their way to create a fun atmosphere. The other seven indicated that their leader did this successfully. One of the leaders has difficulty balancing hard and soft power, and tends to avoid confrontation and the harder aspects of leadership accountability. One of the interviewees commented that his leader can be overly detail-oriented and even pedantic and this can be a problem when quick decisions are needed. Another felt that her leader could be naïve at times, taking events and people at face value, and this sometimes resulted in people's taking advantage of him.

8 Good leadership versus hopeful leadership

Is there a difference between being a competent leader and a high-hope leader? Are the leaders in this research project generally good leaders, or is there a real difference between their actions and those of high-hope leaders?

The leaders who form the basis of this research are personally successful, and have each been appointed to executive roles in the business in which they operate. The assumption is that they are good leaders. However, from an analysis of the answers of the 45 respondents to the original research questions, only thirteen of their leaders were identified as people who inspire hope in their followers. The hope component may be described as something extra which these leaders provide for their people. Low-hope leaders might be competent and capable at their jobs from a technical or operational perspective, yet they lack the ability to generate hope in their followers.

The high-hope leaders in this research have been shown to (a) be competent, (b) give followers hope in themselves and (c) create hope that success will be achieved. Bennis and Nanus (2003) refer to the "management of meaning" and this comes close to capturing the core competence of the high-hope leader.

It can be concluded that there is a difference between leadership that is good on the whole and high-hope leadership. High-hope leaders have the ability to inspire the heart of their people; they know how to energise their people to excel, and they care about their people. All this is evident from their day-to-day actions. Low-hope leaders would almost certainly lack these abilities. Our research raises further questions which could be pursued to increase our understanding of hope as a key attribute of effective leaders. Are there leaders who achieve good results, over a period of time, but who do not inspire hope? Are there high-hope leaders who do not achieve consistently positive outcomes? Do we need to understand more about high-hope followers, alongside high-hope leaders? These questions are areas for future research.

9 A checklist for high-hope leadership in South Africa

One aim of this research was to produce a checklist of the personal attributes and competencies exhibited by high-hope leaders. The list below differentiates between what type of person the high-hope leader is, and what he or she does in order to generate hope in his or her followers.

Table 1
A checklist for leaders

This is what they ARE	This is what they DO
Personal competence and credibility	Trust their people implicitly
• They have achieved personal success	• Trust their followers to get on with the job
• Highly qualified	• Trust leads to freedom to operate
• Knowledgeable about most aspects of the business	• Measure outputs rather than inputs
	• Enable followers to act
Believe in their people	
• Followers are certain that their leader believes in them	Refrain from micromanaging
• Leader encourages and champions followers in their development	Empower their people
• Guides and supports career growth	• Followers are provided with the tools to do the job
	• Leader plays a guiding and coaching role
	• Followers can make their own decisions
	Keen developers of people
	• Ability to identify potential
	• Leaders invest their own time in developing others
	• Followers feel special and valued

This is what they ARE	This is what they DO
	Accessible and available
	• Despite large workloads they find time to be available
	• Open door policy
	Relentlessly drive high performance
	• Strong focus on results
	• Tell people where they stand, supportively
	• Set high standards
	Good communicator, willing to share knowledge and information
	• Lots of formal and informal communication
	• Leader shares personal experience and knowledge
	• Communication builds trust, self-esteem and loyalty
	Inspire subordinates to work hard
	• Leader ensures followers deliver highest standard work
	• Followers motivated to achieve what the leader expects
	• Followers feel motivated, inspired, passionate

10 Conclusions

High-hope leaders skilfully balance both hard and soft leadership capabilities. They focus on managing the hard business results - the balance sheet, the bottom line, market share, revenue growth and the building of shareholder value. At the same time they focus on the people side of business, and they do this well (Peterson & Luthans 2003). The interviews with the followers of high-hope leaders explain what they are doing right: the leaders are credible and competent, they trust and empower their people, they deliberately develop their people, they make themselves available to their people, they believe in their people and they keep them informed. All of this results in an inspired group of followers who work very hard and contribute large amounts of discretionary effort. There is no magical element in this formula for successful, hopeful leadership.

It may well be asked why we do not have more high-hope leaders in South Africa. Why did so few of the original sample indicate that they work for high-hope managers? Perhaps the leaders do not have the skills or knowledge to be hopeful leaders. They may not be aware of what high-hope leaders do to generate hope in followers, or of the corresponding benefits and positive business impact. Alternatively, perhaps they choose not to be high-hope leaders. They may be more comfortable with managing the hard aspects of business. If they have come up through the ranks and have an accounting or engineering background they may possibly, but not necessarily, be more inclined to use a command-and-control style of leadership.

Finally, the "soft skills" are undoubtedly becoming a critical component of success in the "hard" field of business. One of these soft skills is the ability to generate hope in followers at both a personal and an organisational level – to cheer them on, inspire them and keep them going when they are exhausted and demotivated.

The point of departure in this article was the relatively new area of research and practice known as "positive psychological capital". It underpins the notions of authentic leadership, spiritual leadership and servant leadership which are gaining increasing acceptance. These approaches begin with the need for leaders to understand themselves and to consider issues of "personal mastery". There has been too much emphasis on leadership skills, and insufficient attention has been paid to the need for leaders to spend time clarifying their values, personal strengths and weaknesses, and finding out who they are. Badaracco (2006) states the case clearly when he says that "The difference between success and failure in leadership is not skill, technique, credentials, networking, or even experience. It is the clarity about who one is. This self-knowledge is often the critical factor enabling leaders to do their work, meet their responsibilities, and live rewarding and useful lives." It is this starting point which will enable the leader to become self-aware, to leverage positive psychological capital, and to be the kind of leader who manages people well and generates hope.

Cooper (2005) stresses that in future leaders will act rather like coaches to their followers, and will be positioned alongside rather than above followers. The effective leader will work with his or her followers, acknowledging their concerns, ideas and aspirations. Leaders will be judged on both employee turnover figures and sales figures. It takes a mindful, emotionally mature and skilled leader to effectively mix the hard and soft aspects of leadership, to generate hope in followers, and apply this successfully in the workplace in a way that benefits the business and the people. South Africa needs many more high-hope leaders in places of influence, to help reshape and build this brave new world.

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