



# ACHIEVING ENGAGEMENT:

## THE POWER OF DEPLOYING FRLD

By: Jeffrey W. Ganthner, AIA

### ABSTRACT

Employee disengagement within organizations is a crisis facing leaders worldwide. A lack of employee engagement leads to ineffective and unhealthy organizations. Active engagement starts with leaders themselves. It is their behavior and deliberate active participation that drives up employee engagement and organizational effectiveness. Followers will not go where leaders will not lead. Full Range Leadership Development (FRLD) advocates for leaders to focus on their behaviors with their followers to be more active, effective, and transformational. FRLD attacks head on the problem of employee engagement by calling for active and engaged leader behavior. This article discusses the need for employee engagement, defines the system of FRLD with its special emphasis on transformational leadership, compares it to several widely known leadership theories, and calls for its deployment in conjunction with other leadership theories.

**Keywords:** transformational leadership, organizational health, leadership behavior

## INTRODUCTION

President Harry S. Truman famously stated: “You know what makes leadership? It is the ability to get men to do what they don’t want to do, and like it.” Before the Apple iPhone, no one knew how much they really needed a device linked 24/7 to the Internet. However, the storytelling and charismatic founder and former CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs, successfully engaged his employees to develop a breakthrough product and at the same time win an entire client base to want an iPhone. He was best known as a charismatic leader; however, he also deployed authoritative and transformational leadership styles when needed to lead both his employees and customers (Sharma & Grant, 2011, p. 20). He proved that deploying multiple leadership theories were required to achieve the results he desired. He modified his behavior as a leader depending on his audience. He was systematic in his leadership and did not rely on picking one style, but instead pivoted as needed to lead others into his way of thinking whether they wanted to or not. In a way, he was relentless and to many, he was also a feared and hated leader. However, he seemed to always be willing to change his leadership style if not his desired outcomes. His displayed behaviors as a leader are what employees and customers responded to in mass. The following challenges the notion that a specific leadership style is best for achieving employee engagement and that leadership should be viewed more as a system of proactive behaviors than a specific theory. It introduces the system of Full Range Leadership Development (FRLD) as a primary means for succeeding in employee engagement and compares it to existing leadership theories with a special emphasis on how closely it relates to modern practices of transformational leadership. In addition, how to successfully deploy the behaviorally focused system of FRLD with other leadership theories in an organization is discussed.

## THE CURRENT LACK OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Patrick Lencioni in his 2012 book, *The Advantage*, states that “the single greatest advantage any company can achieve is organizational health” (p. 1). A healthy organization is full of engaged employees who “love their jobs, their customers, and their leaders” (Lencioni, p. 2). They prove to be successful despite market downturns and other economic woes. Their

resilience is shown by a workforce that has “minimal politics, minimal confusion, high morale, high productivity, and low turnover” (Lencioni, p. 6).

Employee engagement can be defined from a physical, emotional, and cognitive perspective. A highly engaged employee will willingly exert more effort and energy (physical), feel more connected to organizational goals (emotional), and work with a higher intensity and focus (cognitive) (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017, p. 528). An organization full of highly engaged employees is both rare and hard to beat. The result is that engaged employees produce better work, treat clients better, and are more loyal to their organization (Harter, 2020). Unfortunately, according to a recent Gallup Poll, about 65% of employees are not engaged at work with about 13% actively disengaged and looking to undermine the efforts of an organization (Harter, 2020).

With roughly a third of employees carrying the weight of an organization through active engagement, it is amazing that organizations are successful at all. Organizational leaders are constantly looking for new leadership theories and ideas that will drive up employee engagement and overall effectiveness for their organizations. Best practices and the latest leadership fads retrieved from books, internet searches, friends, consultants, and seminars are constantly being sought by leaders. However, despite the immense focus on organizational health and development over the last 20 years, employee engagement has only risen 9% (Harter, 2020). At this pace, a national workforce that reaches a 50% level of active engagement will not be achieved until 2054! This needs to change and it needs to change now.

## WHAT IS FRLD?

Leaders are bombarded with all kinds of theories on how to improve employee engagement and organizational health. They should not look to the latest theory or twist of an old idea, but think of deploying a leadership system focused on behavior modification rather than a single theory within their organization. Full Range Leadership Development (FRLD) is a “leadership training system that proposes that leaders vary in the extent to which they display a repertoire of leadership behaviors, ranging from active and more effective leadership to passive and less effective leadership” (Sosik & Jung, D, 2018, p. 2). The behavior of the leader is critical to how

they lead and how effective they are in obtaining a “proactive approach” when engaging their employees (Sosik & Jung, D, p. 2). Engaged employees are often the result of a leader who displays behaviors that are proactive and encourages employees to do the same. FRLD seeks engaged employees first by seeking engaged leaders. It is engaged leadership that is the secret to true organizational health. When leadership is engaged, then employees tend to follow and seek to become engaged themselves.

FRLD addresses the ever-increasing complexity of today’s modern workplace. Today, we have the potential for more generations working in the same organization than ever before. The Baby Boomers are not going anywhere soon and are still in relative competition with generations X, Y, and Z for the best opportunities. In their 2018 book, *Full Range Leadership Development*, Sosik and Jung state that FRLD, with its focus on different leadership behaviors, can pivot and speak well to a wide range of generations, new technologies, and perceived customs in the workplace. FRLD provides the tools necessary to empower leaders with an arsenal to first engage themselves and then their employees.

It is important to understand that FRLD is a comprehensive leadership model that shows “leadership across a range of “five specific behaviors and one attribute” (Sosik & Jung, 2018, p. 5). A behavior is an action that a leader does that is witnessed by others while “an attribute is ascribed to a person by others based on what the person is perceived to be” (Sosik & Jung, p. 5). Leaders practice both passive and active forms of leadership with effectiveness leaning towards more active forms (Sosik & Jung, p. 5). Depending on the situation, varying levels of leadership can be effective, but the style that is considered most active and effective is transformational leadership (Sosik & Jung. p. 6).

Bernard Bass who is a champion of transformational leadership and who helped inspire the development of FRLD states that an “organization member” or employee could be “developed” the best from a “transformational leader’s nurturance and vision” (Bass, 1995, p. 468). In the FRLD model, transformational leadership is not only the most active and effective form of leadership, but it stands in sharp contrast to other forms of leadership. Transformational leaders

are high motivators, “raise your level of awareness”, increase your “need for achievement”, and challenge you to put the welfare of the organization above your own (Bass, p. 469).

In the FRLD model, the lowest form of leadership is defined as not only passive and mostly ineffective but characterizes leaders as being “laissez-faire” in their approach with leaders noticeably separate and “absent” from their team and their activities (Sosik & Jung, 2018, p. 7). You then move up the scale to increasing levels of effectiveness until you reach transformational leadership. Although transformational leadership is considered the goal, FRLD does allow room for other leadership behaviors to be effective in their deployment depending on the situation. For example, “transactional contingent reward” is considered effective and is often deployed by “politicians” and “dealmakers” (Sosik & Jung, p. 9). In this form of leadership, an agreement is made between a leader and follower where the leader lays out expectations to a follower and if those expectations are met or exceeded then the follower gets a reward. “Transactional leadership emphasizes the transaction or exchange that takes place among leaders, colleagues, and followers” and, in a way, “transformational leadership is an expansion of transactional leadership” (Avolio & Bass, 2001, p. 1). This supports FRLD as a model or system where one leadership approach is similar to others around it and advances as a system towards transformational leadership for most effectiveness.

Bruce Avolio, a researcher that helped pioneer FRLD, is a major advocate for the integration of “all of the elements that constitute leadership” (Avolio, 2007, p. 25). A complete system of leadership should be available for a leader to deploy when seeking to engage employees and increase organizational health. FRLD, by looking at levels of effectiveness and active engagement, is a model for leaders to utilize with the very best seeking to activate the higher forms of transactional leadership and ultimately transformational leadership.

## COMPARING FRLD TO OTHER LEADERSHIP THEORIES

With the emphasis on transformational leadership being the goal of FRLD, it is important to expand more completely our understanding of it to form a more complete foundation for FRLD

prior to comparison of other theories. Sosik and Jung (2018) discuss what they define as the “5Is of transformational leadership” (p. 10). First, “idealized influence (behavior)” is all about achieving a “collective mission” and having shared “values, beliefs,” and “purposes” (Sosik & Jung, p. 10). Second, “idealized influence (attribute)” occurs when followers observe a leader’s behavior in line with a collective mission and shared value. Third, “inspirational motivation” or creating a shared vision for all to seek (Sosik & Jung, p. 12). Fourth, “intellectual stimulation” seeks to energize the mind and motivate “rational thinking” (Sosik & Jung, p. 13). Fifth, “individualized consideration” which seeks the individual development of followers through “listening, coaching, and teaching” (Sosik & Jung, p. 14). Thus, transformational leadership is a great choice to deploy from within the FRLD system when seeking maximum effectiveness.

Proactive leadership behaviors can be found in a variety of leadership theories, not just transformational leadership. Therefore, it is the wise leader that understands the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of theories and selects those that will model the behavior they desire to display. FRLD helps map where they belong and highlights their usefulness, strengths, and weaknesses. The following discusses five leadership theories and compares them to FRLD and its stated goal of deploying transformational leadership with engaged and active leaders.

## Comparison to Trait Theory

According to trait theory, “great leaders” have very specific and identifiable characteristics such as “intelligence, self-confidence, determination, and integrity” (Sosik & Jung, 2018, p. 15). The FRLD model does not specifically address traits and personality characteristics (Sosik & Jung, p. 15). However, within its model different leaders will be identified with specific traits that make them either strong or weak in their execution. Again, the FRLD model is highly focused on the interactions and behavior of leaders with followers. Therefore, desirable traits in a leader should be an aspiration for every leader that desires to improve and grow as a leader.

## Comparison to Situational Leadership

The behaviors displayed in situational leadership are closely aligned with FRLD. This leadership style focuses completely on the readiness of the follower.

“Situational leadership theory (SLT) seeks to match an appropriate leader behavior to various situations defined primarily by the follower’s readiness to perform a task independently. These leader behaviors shift from task-oriented to relationship-oriented or supportive leadership, and from leader-dominated action to follower-dominated action. Followers’ readiness is defined by their competence and commitment levels as perceived by the leader.” (Sosik & Jung, 2018, p. 22).

The situational leader learns to lead in a directional style when followers exhibit “low levels of competence and commitment” (Sosik & Jung, p. 22). As followers develop commitment, but still lack competence, they move to a coaching style (Sosik & Jung, p. 22). As they develop competence and remain committed, they pivot towards more of a supportive role (Sosik & Jung, p. 22). Finally, as the follower’s commitment and competence increase, even more, the leader pivots again and turns over entire operations of an organization to a follower through delegation (Sosik & Jung, p. 22). FRLD is different in its approach with its highly effective leader behaviors as exhibited by “transactional contingent reward” and “transformational leadership” and in its flexibility across different “cultures” (Sosik & Jung, p. 22). In situational leadership, a “group’s performance” is measured by the appropriate selection of a leader’s behavior and situational requirements (Vecchio, Bullis, & Brazil, 2006, p 408). It is this emphasis on situational requirements that separate it the most from FRLD.

## Comparison to Charismatic Leadership

Charismatic leadership is successful when a leader’s traits appear almost superhuman (Northouse, 2016,p. 164). Steve Jobs of Apple and Elon Musk of Tesla are two great examples of charismatic leaders. Followers of these leaders never really tried to emulate them or become them because at the heart of this leadership style it is all about the leader and their ability to convince people to trust them to take them to a place in their story that only leaders themselves can fully describe. The followers are simply asked to believe and follow fully committed to the goals and plans of the leader. Development of the followers that would be important for FRLD is not a priority and thus looks to be more transactional in its application. Charismatic leaders will transform their organizations and if followers like the plot of the story the leader paints, then they

will work tirelessly to ensure their own relevance and survival in the story. They also understand that they better prove their engagement and commitment, or they will be terminated rather than developed. This “unquestioning acceptance” of a leader marks a sharp contrast to a transformational leader that would be more open to different ideas and thoughts (Northouse, p. 165).

## Comparison to Authentic Leadership

Similar to charismatic leadership, the focus is on the trustworthiness of the leader and how true they are to their stated vision. However, there is an “explicit moral dimension” that more closely aligns it to servant leadership and transformational leadership than to charismatic leadership (Northouse, 2016, p. 206). The interactions between an authentic leader and their followers are more transformational than transactional. Thus, an effective leader that embraces the system of FRLD would first be a complete authentic leader prior to becoming a complete transformational leader. An authentic leader may prove to be too much of a realist and not be able to dream about or hope for as much change as a transformational leader would. Authentic leadership keeps its focus on the leader and thus will always be limited in how much the followers will be able to change to meet an organization’s needs.

## Comparison to Servant Leadership

Unlike charismatic and authentic leadership, where the leader is the focal point, servant leadership is all about the follower and their needs. With the emphasis on the follower, the potential for more transformation occurs both for the individuals and the organization. Therefore, it is very closely tied to transformational leadership and the active/effective end of FRLD. Servant leadership is a leadership style where a leader seeks to serve all followers first within an organization. A servant leader looks to develop even the ones that lack in ability, talent, and commitment. A transformational leader looks to develop and “elevate” followers so that they are truly transforming the organization and eventually start leading the way. In addition, “servant leaders are more likely than transformational leaders to set the following priorities in their leadership focus: followers first, organizations second, and their own needs last” (Sendjaya,



Sarros, & Santora, 2008, p. 403). In contrast, a transformational leader looks to “inspire followers to pursue organizational goals” and put the interest of the organization first (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, p. 403). Servant leadership is successful when the follower develops to the point where they can meet and exceed the stated organizational goals. Therefore, the organization will eventually benefit, but first, the followers will see the most gain through the deployment of servant leadership. It is the patient leader that practices servant leadership.

## DEPLOYING FRLD WITH OTHER LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Aspiring effective leaders need to understand the wide range of leadership styles and behaviors available to them. FRLD maps a behavioral approach from more avoidant and corrective behaviors on the passive end of the map to the more transactional, transformational, and active ends of the map. This does not mean that a leader should only focus on their behavior and interaction level with their follows, but also seek to incorporate the desirable characteristics and personality traits stressed so highly in trait theory. Leaders should also be aware of their present environment and marketplace along with future opportunities and be able to pivot their approach to their followers exhibited by situational leadership. The same is true for other leadership styles as well. FRLD is an excellent model, but by itself, it is not complete. A leader, as they develop, should strive to be active and engaged and thus transformational and effective as stressed by FRLD. However, that is not always possible, and it is important for a leader to be aware of how to deploy FRLD in conjunction with other leadership theories. Again, the goal is engaged employees which starts with engaged leaders to achieve an organization that is healthy and successful.

## CONCLUSION

FRLD focuses on achieving organizational effectiveness through active and engaged leader behavior. Unfortunately, too many organizations today are filled with absent leaders and disengaged employees. The amount of engagement within the organization by both leaders and followers is highly dependent on how active and transformational the leaders themselves are

regardless of the situation the organization is in. Therefore, it is important for a leader as they strive to be active, engaged, and transformational that they deploy the system of FRLD along with the characteristics of other leadership styles depending on the needs of the organization. A full toolbox is desirable over a few tools. Achieving organizational health comes through engagement and transformation. FRLD with its high focus on transformational leadership through the active behaviors exhibited by the leader is a powerful weapon in fighting employee disengagement and achieving organizational effectiveness.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Avolio, B. J. (2007). Promoting more integrative strategies for leadership theory-building. *The American Psychologist*, 62(1), 25-33. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.25>

Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (2001). Developing potential across a full range of leadership: Cases on transactional and transformational leadership. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bass, B. M. (1995). Theory of transformational leadership redux. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 6(4), 463-478. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843\(95\)90021-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/1048-9843(95)90021-7)

Eldor, L., & Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2017). The nature of employee engagement: Rethinking the employee-organization relationship. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(3), 526-552.

Harter, J. (February 4, 2020) *4 Factors Driving Record-High Employee Engagement*.

Gallup.com: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/284180/factors-driving-record-high-employee-engagement.aspx>

Lencioni, P. (2012). *The advantage: Why organizational health trumps everything else in business* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Northouse, P.G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008). Defining and measuring servant leadership behaviour in organizations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(2), 402-424.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2007.00761.x>

Sharma, A., & Grant, D. (2011). Narrative, drama and charismatic leadership: The case of Apple's Steve Jobs. *Leadership (London, England)*, 7(1), 3-26.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715010386777>

Sosik, J. and Jung, D. (2018). *Full Range Leadership Development, 2nd ed.* Taylor & Francis.

Vecchio, R. P., Bullis, R. C., & Brazil, D. M. (2006). The utility of situational leadership theory: A replication in a military setting. *Small Group Research*, 37(5), 407-424.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496406291560>