

Remembering Apple CEO Steve Jobs as a “Transformational Leader”: Implications for Pedagogy

Marlane C. Steinwart

Assistant Professor

Department of Communication Valparaiso University

Jennifer A. Ziegler

Associate Professor

Valparaiso University

Author Note

Marlane C. Steinwart and Jennifer A. Ziegler, Department of Communication, Valparaiso University. Correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to Marlane Steinwart, Department of Communication, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383. Email: lanie.steinwart@valpo.edu. A previous version of this paper was first presented at the 98th Annual Convention of the National Communication Association, Orlando, Florida, November 2012. The authors are grateful to graduate student James MacCrea for assistance with early data analysis.

Abstract

This paper explores the implications of using Apple co-founder and former CEO Steve Jobs as a “paradigm case” of transformational leadership by comparing the practical metadiscourse of remembrances published at the time of his passing to the theoretical metadiscourse of transformational leadership. The authors report the frequency of transformational leadership characteristics that appeared in characterizations of Jobs in the months after his passing in October 2011. Results show that people do remember Jobs as a leader, and as one who possessed three key personal characteristics of a transformational leader: creative, passionate, and visionary. People also remembered Jobs as an innovator, which is not typically associated with transformational leadership but which does reflect the discourse of the consumer electronics industries upon which he had an impact. However, the results also show that two important interpersonal characteristics of a transformational leader were absent in the remembrance discourse: empowering and interactive. The authors discuss the implications of the two missing terms for pedagogy and theorizing, including how problematizing Jobs as a paradigm case might lead to fruitful discussions about the importance of a transformational leader’s engagement with followers.

Keywords: innovation, Steve Jobs, leadership pedagogy, practical metadiscourse, theoretical metadiscourse, transformational leadership

“I first found out about the death of Steve Jobs, appropriately enough, with my iPhone.”

–Steve Smith, Editor-in-Chief, This Week in Consumer Electronics.

Steve Jobs, former CEO, Chairman, and co-founder of Apple, Inc., passed away on October 5, 2011, after a protracted battle with pancreatic cancer. Many Apple customers likely learned the news as Smith did, through some type of Apple device that Jobs had a hand in bringing to the marketplace. After his passing, Jobs was eulogized in the popular press through newspaper and magazine articles, blog postings, and even outdoor billboards (Turner, 2011). In these remembrances he was compared to other inventors such as Henry Ford (Dotto, 2011; Goldberg, 2011) and Thomas Edison (Dotto, 2011; Hart, 2011; Goldberg, 2011; Matthews, 2011; Stone, 2011). He was also mourned as a dramatic public figure in a manner with comparisons made to the deaths of Princess Diana (Casey, 2011) and John Lennon (Petriglieri, 2011). Many reports in the days that followed discussed his impact on technology (“Apple co-founder,” 2011; Keizer & Shah, 2011; Hart, 2011; McCullagh, 2011; Cassidy, 2011) and business (BizEd, 2011; Farmer, 2011; Bersin, 2011; Shaw, 2011), and reflected on his legacy (Tabakoff, 2011; Smith, 2011; Cusumano, 2011; Casey, 2011; Dotto, 2011; Goldberg 2011; Isaacson, 2001.). A few articles explored his leadership style (Petriglieri, 2011; Ullas, 2011), which is commonly referred to as transformational.

A simple internet search reveals that Steve Jobs’ name often comes up in popular discussions of exemplary transformational leaders. When assessing Jobs’ leadership style, analysts also tend to characterize his leadership style as primarily transformational. To the extent that Steve Jobs becomes a “paradigm case” (Berg & Robb, 1992) of a “transformational leader,” the memory of his life and work stands to shape how we think and talk about transformational leadership. According to Craig’s (1999a, 1999b) metadiscourse theory, that means it also stands to shape how we teach and theorize about transformational leadership.

Although Jobs may be called a transformational leader, this paper examines the extent to which the key characteristics of a transformational leader were actually ascribed to Steve Jobs in the popular discourse after his passing. The results indicate that while people tend to highlight personal characteristics of Jobs that align with other transformational leaders (such as creative, passionate and visionary [Hackmann & Johnson, 2009]), they do not necessarily remember him for the interpersonal characteristics that are so important for transforming the lives of followers (namely, interactive and empowering [Hackmann & Johnson, 2009]). The implications of these results for theorizing and for teaching the concept of transformational leadership using Jobs as a paradigm case are discussed.

Background on Steve Jobs

Steve Jobs was born in San Francisco in 1955, and was raised by adoptive parents in Mountain View and Cupertino, Calif. After high school, Jobs briefly attended college before going to work for the upstart Atari computer company. He soon left Atari to backpack across India. After he returned to California, Jobs struck up a partnership with Steve Wozniak, and in 1976 the two founded Apple Computer in Jobs’ parents’ garage. After releasing the successful Apple II computer, Apple Computer went public in 1980. Four years later, the company launched the Macintosh. As Apple Computer grew, Jobs’ vision for the future of computing came into conflict with that of then-CEO John Sculley,

and Jobs was removed as head of the Macintosh team. Jobs resigned from Apple Computer in September 1985 (“Apple co-founder,” 2011; Isaacson, 2011).

After his departure from Apple Computer, Jobs founded the computer company NeXT in 1986. He also purchased Pixar, which was the graphics-arts division of Lucasfilm. A decade later, in 1996, Apple purchased NeXT, and once again took on Jobs as an employee (“Apple co-founder,” 2011). At the time, Apple Computer was in dire fiscal straits, with its market share down to 3.8 percent during the second quarter of 1997 (Kanellos, 1997). Over the next decade, Jobs helped to revive Apple Computer and to reestablish it as a market leader. The newly renamed Apple, Inc., eventually challenged ExxonMobil as the most valuable company in 2011. Among other things, under Jobs’ leadership, Apple pioneered the iMac, which debuted in 1998; the opening of the Apple Stores; and the iPod, which debuted in 2001. Most recently, Jobs helped to launch the iPhone in 2007 and the iPad in 2010. As a result of these innovations with NeXT and Apple, Jobs is thought to have revolutionized at least seven industries: personal computers, animated film, music, telephones, tablet computing, digital publishing, and retail stores (“Apple co-founder,” 2011; DeCarlo, 2011; Isaacson, 2011).

In 2004, Jobs fell ill with a rare form of pancreatic cancer. Through multiple surgeries and treatments in the years that followed, Jobs kept battling the cancer. In August 2009 he wrote a letter to the Apple Board of Directors and the Apple community where he explained, “I have always said if there ever came a day when I could no longer meet my duties and expectations as Apple’s CEO, I would be the first to let you know. Unfortunately, that day has come” (“Letter from Steve Jobs,” 2011). Jobs returned to Apple in 2010 to help launch the iPad and continued working off and on until August 2011, when he officially handed over CEO duties to Tim Cook. Jobs died in October 2011 of respiratory arrest as a result of the cancer (“Apple co-founder,” 2011; Isaacson, 2011, Metz & Donald, 2011). By the time of his death, Jobs was remembered by C/NET, an organization dedicated to providing its followers with information and reviews of technology, as “an iconoclast who changed the way we do everything, from how we listen to music and watch movies to how we teach our children” (“Apple co-founder,” 2011).

Transformational Leadership

The concept of *transformational leadership* can be described as a theoretical trajectory beginning with early authors such as James MacGregor Burns (1978) and culminating in the research and writing of Bernard Bass (e.g., 1998) and coauthors. Transformational leadership raises transactional leadership to the next level. That is, transformational leadership goes beyond satisfying current needs through reward to moving followers toward achievement and growth (KK & Kumar, 2004); it is not about sustaining the status quo, but aims at constant improvement at both the personal and organizational levels.

KK and Kumar (2004) characterized transformational leadership as beginning with the leader’s own self development and progressing to coaching and developing others. The self-improvement part of this journey reflects the self-awareness element of Goleman’s

(1998) emotional intelligence research. But an especially important aspect of transformational leadership is the engagement with the follower. The leader and follower may have been brought together by separate but related reasons, but those reasons become fused when engagement occurs. Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as a potent force where the leader recognizes and capitalizes on the needs and demands of followers. Leaders examine followers' motivations to find growth opportunities. The mutual stimulation that results from the transformational leader environment can turn followers into leaders (Burns, 1978). The engagement is reciprocal and iterative, as leader and follower raise one another to higher levels of development and performance (Burns, 1978).

Researchers suggest that transformational leaders expect high performance from their employees while articulating an attractive vision for the future and stimulating followers intellectually by infusing work with meaning (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012). According to KK and Kumar (2004), the benefits of transformational leadership reach far beyond the bottom line. Organizations that include transformational leaders recognize the full value of the individuals, relationships, and networks that provide the energy of the enterprise. Transformational leadership commits to providing workers with tools and resources, both extrinsic and intrinsic, which allow them to flourish (KK & Kumar, 2004).

The role of teams, so popular in today's business world, fits closely with transformational leadership. Reich (1987) saw the need to pay more attention to work teams and less to self-serving leaders. KK and Kumar (2004) described the modern era of organizations as one focused on groups and teams comprised of active followers. In such teams, the leader is not the center of the organization; activities do not revolve around him or her (KK & Kumar, 2004). Instead, the development of the team is the focus. Bass (1998) cautioned that some leaders may appear to exhibit transformational qualities, but are mostly focused on their own self-interests. Unlike transformational leaders, who should be morally uplifting, these pseudotransformational leaders are "self-concerned, self-aggrandizing, exploitative and power-oriented" and "believe in distorted utilitarian and warped moral principles" (p. 15).

Today, transformational leadership is among the canon taught in leadership curricula in academic and practical leadership settings. In their popular text, Hackmann and Johnson (2009) describe transformational leaders as being distinct from other leaders. The authors characterize transformational leaders as being known for their unique personal abilities such as creativity, for their unorthodox methods such as rejecting the status quo to pursue a vision, and, in particular, for their exceptional interpersonal abilities that inspire followers to become invested in that vision as their own. They are "masterful communicators able to articulate and define ideas and concepts that escape others" (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 111).

The Practical Metadiscourse of Transformational Leadership

As a theoretical metadiscourse (Craig, 1992a, 1992b), transformational leadership theory presents an abstracted, idealized description of a certain kind of leader. Once we begin to discuss specific examples of transformational leaders, we enter the realm of practical metadiscourse. As Craig explains, practical metadiscourses and theoretical metadiscourses exist along a continuum of talk and mutually shape one another. Taking a critical communication perspective, it is possible to examine the extent to which a practical metadiscourse of leadership lives up to the ideals embedded in the original theoretical metadiscourse it purports to actualize. Ziegler and DeGrosky (2008), for example, used a critical communication perspective to assess the extent to which the ideals of the German military theory of *Auftragstaktik* had been preserved in a translation to the U.S. Military as “Commander’s Intent,” and then transposed to wildland firefighting as “Leader’s Intent.” In that case, they found that Leader’s Intent preserved the ideal *Auftragstaktik* image of the follower as someone who is allowed a certain space of action to realize the leader’s vision, but they also found that the privileging of “command presence” as a kind of personal force eclipsed the original German emphasis on cultivation of shared mind among leaders and followers.

In the Ziegler and DeGrosky (2008) study, the concern was about the extent to which the emancipatory potential of the original theory was being realized in practice. On the other hand, the current study takes a critical communication perspective to explore influence in the other direction: namely, how a commonplace practical application of leadership can impact the understanding, development, and teaching of a specific leadership theory going forward. In particular, when a certain human figure (such as Steve Jobs) becomes associated with a certain leadership theory (such as Transformational Leadership), the memory of the person can become a mental shortcut for understanding the theory. It is necessary to continually assess the fitness of that individual example for the extent to which it accurately represents the theory, to note any divergences, and to explore the implications of those divergences for theorizing. Divergences could take two forms: the paradigm case might be an inaccurate or only partial application of the theory; or, conversely, the theory might not do enough to capture the noteworthy dimensions of the person’s leadership. Both divergences have implications for transformational leadership pedagogy.

Steve Jobs as a Transformational Leader

Never is more written about a famous figure than at the time of his or her passing. Deceased prominent people are often eulogized not only by friends who knew them personally but also by those with whom they worked. When Steve Jobs passed away in 2011 after his lengthy illness, much was written about his life and particularly his leadership at Apple and in various personal electronics industries. As noted above, Steve Jobs is a figure who is frequently described as the ideal example of a transformational leader. On the other hand, some accounts characterize him as temperamental and

secretive. If Jobs is to be remembered as an ideal transformational leader, it is important to assess the likely impact his leadership has on our understanding of a transformational leader.

The purpose of this study was to examine the discourse surrounding the passing of Steve Jobs (i.e., the practical metadiscourse of his transformational leadership), and compare it to received understandings of transformational leadership theory (i.e., the theoretical metadiscourse of transformational leadership). The results of this study have implications not only for how we remember particular leaders like Steve Jobs, but also for how we understand, continue to theorize, and teach transformational leadership going forward.

Method

The authors undertook a systematic search of the popular press to identify a representative set of remembrances about Steve Jobs at the time of his death in October 2011. The goal was to collect a sample that would be representative of the dialogue occurring at the time of Jobs' death regarding his leadership. Initial searches on "Steve Jobs and leadership," "Steve Jobs and legacy," and "Steve Jobs and death" were conducted through a collection of 38 article databases accessible through an academic library website, including LexisNexis Academic for news publications. Articles were then selected based on two key considerations: relevance and time of publication. Articles considered most relevant were those that addressed Jobs' leadership style, followed by articles that reported the news of his passing, specifically those that looked back on Steve Jobs, his career, and his legacy. The most relevant search window was determined to be articles published between October 2011 and March 2012. Article length was considered initially, but dismissed as it became clear that some of the timeliest pieces published shortly after his death were limited by deadline and space constraints.

The collection was ultimately narrowed to 26 articles that appear in Table 1. The sample contains tributes, commentaries and analyses of Jobs' impact on business and technology, including personal quotes from celebrities, contemporaries and other executives who worked with Jobs, and two transcripts of interviews with Jobs biographer Walter Isaacson. The articles were entered into the qualitative software analysis program NVivo.

Table 1

Articles Remembering Steve Jobs

1. *Apple co-founder, chairman Steve Jobs dies.* (2011, October 5). *CNET.com*. Retrieved from http://news.cnet.com/8301-13579_3-20116336-37/apple-co-founder-chairman-steve-jobs-dies/
2. Bersin, J. (2011). How Apple retains its core. *Chief Learning Officer*, 10(12), 14.
3. Bilton, N. (2011, November 18). One on one: Walter Isaacson, biographer of Steve Jobs. [Web log post]. *The New York Times Blogs (Bits)*. Retrieved from: <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/18/one-on-one-walter-isaacson-biographer-of-steve-jobs>.
4. Casey, N. (2011, October 7). Apple founder's death leaves void in the tech world. *San Francisco Chronicle*, p. A1.

5. Cassidy, M. (2011, October 7). Steve Jobs' death underscores the rise of the iGeneration. *San Jose Mercury News*.
6. Cusumano, M. A. (2011). The legacy of Steve Jobs. *Communications of the ACM*, 54(12), 26-28. doi:10.1145/2043174.2043184.
7. Dotto, S. (2011, October 19). The legacy of Steve Jobs. *North Shore News (British Columbia)*, p. 14.
8. Editorial: Steve Jobs' legacy [Editorial]. (2011). *BizEd*, 10(6), 75.
9. Editorial: Steve Jobs' passing is a sad milestone. [Editorial]. (2011, October 6). *San Jose Mercury News*.
10. Farmer, P. (2011). Lead. Inspire. Innovate. *Planning*, 77(9), 3-4.
11. Ferguson, A. (2011). The Steve Jobs snow job. *Commentary*, 132(5), 80.
12. Goldberg, A. (2011, December 28). YEARENDER: The year of Steve Jobs leaves his legacy open. *McClatchy News Service*.
13. Hart, P. (2011). Steve Jobs and the cult of the CEO. *Extra!*, 24(12), 11-12.
14. Keizer, G. and Shah, A. (2011). Steve Jobs remembered. *Computerworld*, 45(18), 6.
15. Matthews, L. (2011, October 5). Steve Jobs death: Apple's rival Samsung says he was an 'innovative spirit'. *International Business Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/225989/20111005/steve-jobs-death-apple-rival-samsung-iphone-4s-microsoft-new-york-michael-bloomberg-galaxy-tab.htm>.
16. McCullagh, D. (2011, October 5). How Steve Jobs reshaped the tech industry. CNET.com. Retrieved from http://news.cnet.com/8301-13579_3-20116345-37/how-steve-jobs-reshaped-the-tech-industry.
17. Newman, R. (2011, October 21). How Steve Jobs can save the economy. *U.S. News Digital Weekly*, 3(42), 21.
18. Petriglieri, G. [McKay, Z.: Contributor] (2011, October 10). How Steve Jobs reinvented leadership. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insead/2011/10/10/how-steve-jobs-reinvented-leadership>.
19. Russell, R. (2011, October 19). Steve Jobs put life and death in their place. *USA Today*.
20. Shaw, M. (2011, November 14). Profound effect that Steve Jobs has had on my life. [Web log post]. *Nottingham Evening Post*. Retrieved from: <http://www.thisisnottingham.co.uk/Profound-effect-Steve-Jobs-life/story-13844956-detail/story.html>.
21. Smith, S. (2011, October 17). Steve Jobs' legacy. *TWICE: This Week in Consumer Electronics*, 26(21), 3.
22. Stephanopoulos, G. (2011, October 24). Steve Jobs revealed: Biography details private life. In Goldston, J. & Cibrowski, T. (Producers), *Good Morning America*. New York City, ABC Television Network.
23. Stone, B. (2011). 1997-2011 The return. *Bloomberg Businessweek*, (4249), 36-42.
24. Tabakoff, N. (2011, October 7). Legacy of man with an eye on the future - Death of an iCon: Steve Jobs. *The (Sydney) Daily Telegraph*, pp. 6.
25. Ullas, S.S. (2011, November 15). iCon Steve Jobs now part of B-school curriculum. *Times of India*.

26. Vale Steve Jobs - Death of an iCon: Steve Jobs. (2011, October 7). *The (Sydney) Daily Telegraph*, pp. 8.

Note. Representative sample of articles and remembrances of Steve Jobs that appeared in the popular press between October 2011 and March 2012.

Data Analysis

To analyze these data it was necessary to determine a set of constructs with which to operationalize transformational leadership. In their review of transformational leadership studies by researchers like Austin, Avolio, Bass, Bennis, Citrin, Kouzes, Nanus, Neff, Peters, Posner, and Waterman, authors Hackman and Johnson (2009) identified the following five key characteristics of transformational leaders: “creative,” “interactive,” “visionary,” “empowering,” and “passionate.” It should be noted that this list of characteristics is a simplification of a more complex theory. These five key terms serve as synonyms for expressions used in describing the more complex theory and were used because they were more likely to be found in popular press accounts of Jobs’ life and leadership. As a shortcut, this list exists somewhere at the midrange of the continuum between the practical and theoretical metadiscourses of transformational leadership. Nevertheless, it provides a good starting point as a set of constructs from which to compare remembrances of Steve Jobs and his leadership. Using NVivo, we completed two different analyses. First, using the Word Frequency tool, we searched for the words used most commonly across all of the data. Second, using the Text Search Query tool, we performed a targeted search for how frequently Hackman and Johnson’s (2009) five transformational leadership constructs appeared in the data.

The first analysis, the Word Frequency search, was completed in two steps. First, using the Word Frequency search tool, we searched for the 100 most common terms of five letters or more that appeared across all articles. The words leader and leadership, as well as three of the transformational leadership characteristics (charismatic, passion, and visionary) appeared in the results, including stems of those words, like charisma and vision. We narrowed down the list to remove terms like “apple” and “technology” to focus on those pertaining to Jobs’ leadership and influence. We determined that the top 25 terms were most relevant for our analysis because after that the frequency dropped to only two or three occurrences.

In the second step, we then examined these 25 terms as they occurred in the 26 articles to ensure that each instance of the word was relevant to this analysis. Specifically, we verified that the term was included within the context of the article and that it was used in reference to Steve Jobs and his leadership style. Instances that appeared in breakout text, keyword lists and, in some instances, articles sharing the page, were omitted from the final word count. The refined results of the Word Frequency search are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2*Count of Most Frequent Leadership Related Words of Five or More Letters*

| Word | Count | Similar Words |
|---------------|-------|---|
| innovations | 32 | innovate, innovating, innovation, innovations, innovative, innovator, innovators |
| created | 25 | create, created, creates, creating |
| leadership | 15 | leadership |
| vision | 14 | vision |
| inspired | 12 | inspiration, inspire, inspired, inspiring |
| passion | 11 | passion, passionate |
| leader | 10 | leader, leaders, leaders' |
| visionary | 8 | visionaries, visionary |
| transformed | 7 | transform, transformation, transformative, transformed, 'transformed', transforming |
| invented | 5 | invent, invented, invention, inventions |
| connection | 5 | connect, connected, connecting, connection, connections |
| creativity | 5 | creative, creatively, creativity |
| revolutionary | 4 | revolutionary |
| pioneering | 4 | pioneer, pioneered, pioneering |
| charismatic | 4 | charismatic |
| focus | 3 | focus, focused, focuses, focusing |
| impact | 3 | impact, impacts |
| imagine | 3 | imagination, imaginative, imagine |
| creations | 3 | creation, creations |
| champion | 3 | champion, championed |
| charisma | 3 | charisma |
| influence | 3 | influence, influenced |
| inventor | 3 | inventor |
| reshaped | 3 | reshape, reshaped, reshaping |
| involved | 2 | involve, involved, involves |
| intuition | 2 | intuition, intuitive, intuitively |

Note. Confirmed results of terms appearing in body of text (e.g., not in articles on the same page).

For the second analysis, using the Query tool, we systematically searched for Hackman and Johnson's (2009) five characteristics of transformational leadership and compiled the results. Whereas the Word Frequency analysis identified the words most frequently used to describe Jobs (and thus provided a good indication of the prevailing discourse), we also needed to determine whether people were using the five terms of interest to describe Jobs, even if at a lower frequency. We initially set the sensitivity level to include synonyms, but we found that this diluted the results with non-relevant uses of the terms.

For example, when we instructed NVivo to include synonyms when searching for “creative,” the program yielded the term “original,” but none of the references were to Steve Jobs or his influence. Therefore, we limited the sensitivity level to include stem words (e.g., search for “create” and “creativity” along with “creative”). We compared the results of the second analysis with the first analysis and confirmed the same findings: prevalent uses of the terms “creative,” “passionate,” and “visionary,” with no instances of “empowering” or “interactive” that related to Jobs.

Results

As is evident in Table 2, the words “leader” and “leadership,” along with three of the five characteristics used by Hackman and Johnson (2009) to describe transformational leaders, appeared frequently in the remembrances of Steve Jobs: “creative,” “visionary,” and “passionate” (and their variants). Other words that appeared most frequently included “innovation” and “innovator.” The terms “interactive” and “empowering” did not appear at all as descriptors for Jobs. The term interactive did appear, but the references were to “interactive television,” how Apple products changed the way people “interact,” and references to customer “interaction.” Empowered appeared only once, in reference to how people were empowered by having access to personal computers.

Discussion

The results of our analysis show that people remembered Jobs as a leader per se, and that they ascribed at least three attributes to him that are commonly associated with transformational leaders: “creative,” “visionary,” and “passionate.” Indeed, Jobs’ eye for design, his ability to imagine new products and ways of doing business, and his tenacity to see things through to market are likely reasons why Jobs is often cited as an example of transformational leadership. However, the absence of “empowering” and “interactive” in descriptions of Jobs as a leader cannot be overlooked. We focus on the missing terms and the implications of their absence for the remainder of this discussion.

Transforming Industries vs. People

Above it was noted that transformational leadership is partly about the personal qualities of the leader, but also, importantly, about the leader’s engagement with followers for their mutual benefit. Specifically, KK and Kumar (2004) described the construct of interactive as one that fuses the leader and follower, allowing each to reach higher levels of development and performance. The authors argued that transformational leaders’ self-development helps them eventually to coach and develop others. Even more recently, these interactive and empowering qualities are being championed as the most significant leadership characteristics of the global workplace of the future (e.g., Desvaux & Devillard, 2008). Thus, it is also noteworthy that the constructs describing these interpersonal dimensions of a transformational leader were *not* present in remembrances of Jobs: that is, no instances of “interactive” or “empowering” emerged in the Word Frequency search. When we targeted those terms directly using the Text Search Query tool, we found no results that ascribed these qualities to Jobs.

“Innovator” was another word used frequently to describe Jobs, but it is not necessarily a term normally associated with transformational leaders. Richmond, McCroskey, and McCroskey (2005) described innovators as venturesome people willing to take risks. Innovators are desirable in an organization because they are willing to launch new ideas; however, they “cannot communicate informally with their peers as easily as people in some other adopter categories” (p. 164). Nevertheless, innovation is a term that relates to technological adoption and organizational change, particularly in high technology industries. Given remembrances that noted how Jobs transformed entire industries, the prevalence of this term makes sense.

“The Reality Distortion Field.” People remembered Jobs as demanding much from his employees, which is not incompatible with being a transformational leader. However, there is some evidence that followers perceived him as mercurial, abrasive, and potentially capricious in his evaluations of employees’ work. Isaacson (2011) explained, for example, “a key aspect of Jobs’ worldview was his binary way of categorizing things. People were either ‘enlightened’ or ‘an asshole.’ Their work was either ‘the best’ or ‘totally shitty.’” Bud Tribble, a software designer for the original Macintosh team, categorized Jobs’ demanding style as part of his “reality distortion field,” (RDF) a concept that Tribble further explained as a process of influence: “In Jobs’ presence, reality is malleable. He can convince anyone of practically anything. It wears off when he’s not around, but it makes it hard to have realistic schedules” (Isaacson, 2011). While these descriptions reflect the high expectations that transformational leaders have for their followers, it does not represent engagement with them.

Taken together, the emphasis on Jobs’ innovation of industries coupled with the absence of discussion of “interactive” and “empowering” as interpersonal qualities suggest that it may be important to distinguish between leaders like Jobs who transform *industries* and those who are transformational with respect to their *followers*. This also has implications for the theoretical metadiscourse of transformational leadership. Namely, the danger in remembering Jobs as a “paradigm case” transformational leader is that we might lose sight of the importance of leaders being interactive and empowering with followers and instead focus only on the qualities and achievements of the “great” individual.

Jobs as a Pseudotransformational Leader?

In some ways, the anecdotes above are reminiscent of Bass’ (1998) description of pseudotransformational leadership characterized by exploitation and self-concern. Throughout the articles analyzed in this study, the RDF was mentioned three times (Cnet.com, 2011; Stone, 2011; Stephanopoulos, 2011). Each used RDF in a passing mention of Jobs’ characteristic way of imposing his will upon others to have them fall in line with his vision. Thus, for a more complete discussion of the RDF, we turned to Isaacson’s (2011) biography of Steve Jobs.

Specifically on the issue of exploitation, Isaacson (2011) asserts that RDF was “often a tactic for accomplishing something”(p. 118), such as setting an imminent deadline for a

hardware or software design. In addition, Debi Coleman, a member of the original Macintosh team, along with Steve Wozniak regarded Jobs' RDF to be "empowering: It enabled Jobs to inspire his team to change the course of computer history with a fraction of the resources of Xerox or IBM" (Isaacson, 2011, p. 119). However, Hackman and Johnson (2009) describe the empowering characteristic of transformational leaders as giving followers "access to the funds, materials, authority, and information needed to complete tasks and to develop new ideas" (p. 119). The quote by Coleman and Wozniak demonstrates that Jobs was possibly empowering in some ways but not others: on the one hand, Jobs' RDF fulfilled his employees' needs to complete tasks and to develop new ideas, but on the other hand, he seemingly made them complete those tasks with limited resources. Use of the RDF while limiting resources available to employees reflects self-concern rather than the other-concern inherent in transformational leadership characteristics.

Also suggestive of self-concern is Jobs' distribution of stock options. When it came time for Apple to go public, Isaacson (2011) depicted Jobs as being particular about who would be eligible to receive stock options. Daniel Kottke was one of Jobs' friends from college who helped get Apple off the ground, but he was denied any options. Richard Holt, an engineer who received stock options, approached Jobs and suggested he and Jobs each give Kottke some of their own options. Holt said to Jobs, "Whatever you give him [Kottke], I will match it." Jobs' response was, "Okay. I will give him zero." This anecdote is a small sample of the brashness exhibited by Jobs, suggesting that he was remembered as very power-oriented and possibly self-aggrandizing. It illustrates that Jobs wanted to exclude certain people from reaping benefits others might enjoy.

Limitations

Our sample specifically targeted remembrances of Steve Jobs in the five months following his death. This focus on what people said about Jobs in the aftermath of his passing could explain the emphasis we found on personal qualities like creativity, passion, and vision. In other words, the particular discourse we studied might not have addressed the interpersonal dimensions as a function of the genre of eulogizing. However, given the time period, eulogizers would have been most informed about Jobs' leadership through the work of Isaacson (2011), who had free reign to publish all that he learned about Jobs. While examination of different kinds of materials written about Steve Jobs specifically related to the workplace may yield more results, the way in which he was remembered in eulogies is likely to contribute to historians' views of him.

Outside of the eulogies of Jobs in the months after his death, the single volume offering the most insight into Jobs is the biography of him written by Isaacson. The extent to which the remembrance writers were influenced by Isaacson's account of Jobs is unknown, which represents another limitation of this study. Conducting additional research on the five key terms related to transformational leadership found in Isaacson's *Steve Jobs* could yield additional insight to his leadership style. In addition, using Bass and Avolio's (1994) descriptors of transformational leadership, often referred to as the

“four Is” (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration), could reveal more about Jobs’ leadership style as well.

Practical Implications

When teaching the theory of transformational leadership, instructors should engage students in a critical discussion about Steve Jobs as a transformational leader, not only to discuss how he might have lived up to three of the ideals, but also to address the implications of how he may have fallen short on the interpersonal dimensions of being interactive and empowering. Such a discussion might allow students to bring into sharp relief some important dimensions of transformational leadership, providing a more complete understanding of the theory.

For example, it might be worth discussing the difference between being a transformer of industries and being a transformer of people. Students might discuss the ethics of Jobs’ Reality Distortion Field, including its potentially empowering and disempowering dimensions. Students might be asked to consider whether a leader’s extraordinarily high levels of creativity, vision and passion could “make up” for a dearth in interactivity and empowerment. Students could also be encouraged to consider the effect of using Jobs as a “paradigm case” upon the concept and theory of transformational leadership; for example, how using Jobs as a mental shortcut might cause us to ignore the absence of “interactive” and “empowering” in favor of the brilliant person who simply had an impact.

References

- Apple co-founder, Chairman Steve Jobs dies. (2011, October 5). *CNET.com*. Retrieved from http://news.cnet.com/8301-13579_3-20116336-37/apple-co-founder-chairman-steve-jobs-dies/
- Berg, D. & Robb, S. (1992). Crisis management and the paradigm case. In E. L. Toth & R. L. Heath (Eds.) *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations* (pp. 93-109). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics* 18, 19-31.
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1993). Transformational leadership: A response to critiques. In M. M. Chemers & R. Ayman (Eds.), *Leadership theory and research: Perspectives and directions* (pp. 49-80). New York: Academic Press.
- Bass, B.M. & Avolio, B.J. (Eds.). (1994). *Improving Organizational Effectiveness Through Transformational Leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational Leadership* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bass, B.M. (1998). *Transformational Leadership: Industrial, Military, and Educational Impact* [Google Books version]. Retrieved from:

http://books.google.com/books?id=CF7yFpsFYZgC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q&f=false

- Burns, J.M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Craig, R. T. (1999a). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory* 9, 119- 161.
- Craig, R. T. (1999b). Metadiscourse, theory, and practice. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 32, 21-29.
- Craig, R. T. (1999c). Practical-theoretical argumentation. *Argumentation* 10, 461-474.
- Craig, R. T., & Tracy, K. (1995). Grounded practical theory: The case of intellectual discussion. *Communication Theory* 5, 248-272.
- DeCarlo, S. (2011, Aug. 11). The World's 25 Most Valuable Companies: Apple Is Now On Top. Forbes.com. Retrieved from: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/scottdecarlo/2011/08/11/the-worlds-25-most-valuable-companies-apple-is-now-on-top/>
- Den Hartog, D.N. & Belschak, F.D. (2012) When does transformational leadership enhance employee proactive behavior? The role of autonomy and role breadth self-efficacy. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97 (1), 194-202. doi: 10.1037/a0024903
- Desvaux, G., & Devillard, S. (2008). *Women Matter 2: Female leadership, a competitive edge for the future*. McKinsey & Co. Retrieved from <http://www.mckinsey.com>.
- Empowering. (2012). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empowering>
- Goleman, D. (1998). What makes a leader? *Harvard Business Review*, 76, 93-102.
- Hackman, M. Z., & Johnson, C. E. (2009). *Leadership: A Communication Perspective* (5th Ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Isaacson, W. (2011). *Steve Jobs*. New York City: Simon & Schuster.
- Letter from Steve Jobs. (2011, Aug 24). *Apple Press Info*. Retrieved from <http://www.apple.com/pr/library/2011/08/24Letter-from-Steve-Jobs.html>.
- Kanellos, M. (1997, Dec. 11). Apple market share sinks again. *CNET.com*. Retrieved from: http://news.cnet.com/Apple-market-share-sinks-again/2100-1001_3-206284.html
- KK, V. D. and Kumar, M. P. (2004). Augmenting subordinates' competencies. *Journal of Management Research*, 4(3), 164-170.

- Metz, R. & Donald, B. (2011, Oct. 11). Jobs' death caused by respiratory arrest, cancer. USA Today.com. Retrieved from: <http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/story/2011-10-10/jobs-death-certificate/50723994/1>
- Reich, R. B. (1987). Entrepreneurship reconsidered. *Harvard Business Review*, 65 (3), 77-84.
- Richmond, V.P, McCroskey, J.C., & McCroskey, L.L. (2005). *Organizational communication for survival*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Turner, T. (2011, Oct. 6). Outdoor tributes to Steve Jobs. Retrieved from <http://www.thehangline.com/creative-examples/outdoor-tributes-to-steve-jobs/>
- Ziegler, J. A., & DeGrosky, M. T. (2008). Managing the meaning of leadership: Leadership as “communicating intent” in wildland firefighting. *Leadership 4*, 271–297. DOI: 10.1177/1742715008092362

Authors' Biographies

Marlane Steinwart is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Valparaiso University. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in the areas of mass media, public relations, and strategic communication.

Having spent a previous career in IT user support, Dr. Steinwart is particularly interested in how technology continues to shape human communication. Watching first hand how college students were addicted to technology caused her to wonder how it would affect them as the next generation of workers. Ultimately, this curiosity led to her dissertation: *Can You Hear Me Now? A Phenomenological Study of the Net Generation's Workplace Communication Skills*. She continues to conduct research in this area.

Jennifer Ziegler is Associate Professor of Communication at Valparaiso University, where she teaches courses in organizational communication, leadership, and graduate digital media. Her research focuses on communication and culture in the management and practice of safety in dangerous occupations. This article continues an interest in leadership discourses first reflected in an article on wildland firefighting in the journal *Leadership* with Michael T. DeGrosky.