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# Burns, Senge, and the Study of Leadership

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## Abstract

James MacGregor Burns and Peter Senge have been two of the most influential writers on leadership over the past 40 years. This paper is based, in part, on a survey of articles published in four leading leadership Journals (*Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, *Journal of Leadership Studies*, *Leadership*, and *Open Journal of Leadership*) to determine how the concepts of Burns and Senge were used in the articles. Each journal was searched from its first issue through January 1, 2018 for references to Burns and Senge. The authors found frequent references to each of them, but no systematic, adequate summary of their key concepts. The great majority of references was brief and at most highlighted one or two of the components of their thought. This paper summarizes the uses to which Burns' and Senge's ideas were put in the articles, provides a detailed summary of each of their major concepts, and compares their concepts. The comparison shows the considerable similarity between their key ideas. The paper recommends areas for further leadership studies to augment the understanding of how their ideas have been implemented and their effects on practice.

## Keywords

James MacGregor Burns, Peter Senge, Leadership, Learning Organization

## 1. Introduction

Peter Senge and James MacGregor Burns are two of the most influential contemporary writers on leadership and organizations. Burns is a highly regarded historian whose study of noteworthy leaders in history led to writing two important books on leadership: *Leadership*, published in 1978, and *Transforming Leadership*, published in 2003. He is primarily interested in leadership in political and social movements, but believes his concepts could apply to all organizations, including corporations, universities, and even the family. Senge's

best-known book on leadership is *The Fifth Discipline*, first published in 1990 and revised in 2006. His main focus is on leadership in private sector organizations, including corporations and not-for-profits.

In a recent review of the public health literature, we found that, although both Burns and Senge were widely cited and clearly influential, there were no detailed treatments of their major concepts and little that could be called implementation of their concepts (Reid & Dold, 2016). We also found there were few references in the public health literature on leadership to the broader field of leadership studies. One of our concerns with the articles identified in the public health paper was the appearance of not recognizing how complex and demanding the implementation of Burns' transforming leadership or of Senge's learning organization would be. The treatments were generally light and allusive. None of the writings provided a detailed description of the two critical sets of concepts and the difficulty of implementing them.

We decided to extend that inquiry into the more general leadership literature by examining how Senge's and Burns' concepts were used in four leadership journals: the *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, the *Journal of Leadership Studies*, *Leadership*, and *The Open Journal of Leadership*. These journals were selected because they focus on examining both theory and practice of leadership in organizations and society and their broad accessibility through indexing and abstracting services. We searched each of the journals for references to Senge and Burns. The articles identified were then reviewed for the uses of their writings. Book reviews and references to books edited by Burns were excluded. Several ways of spelling Burns' middle name (MacGregor) were found and these misspellings may affect the final number of articles identified. **Table 1**, located at the end of the paper, shows the distribution of articles that reference either or both of the authors in each journal. We searched each of the journals from its first issue through December, 2017.

The next section of the paper (II) summarizes the ways that Burns' writings were used in the four journals' articles. Almost exclusively, the references to Burns were brief, not explanatory, and did not provide much in the way of description of his key ideas of the two scholars. Those that did describe aspects accurately focused on narrow portions of his thought. To remedy this lack, we follow with a primer on his major concepts (Section III). We next explore the references to Senge in the four journals and conclude that the treatments are similar to those of Burns' writings: brief and insufficient to provide a reader with an adequate understanding of Senge's thought (Section IV). We then follow with a section (V) that summarizes his major ideas. On the basis of those summaries, we determined that there exists substantial similarity of the two writers' positions and present a side by side comparison of those similarities (Section VI and **Table 2**). Interestingly, neither author references the other in their main works. A few articles reference both Burns and Senge, but they, too, suffer from the same weaknesses of brevity and lack of specificity (Section VII). We also place Burns and Senge in a general the category of leadership and organizational

**Table 1.** Distribution of articles citing Burns and Senge in four leadership journals.

Author	Journal				Totals
	Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies 1998-2017	Journal of Leadership Studies 2007-2017	Leadership 2005-2017	Open Journal of Leadership 2012-2017	
Burns	22	43	58	8	131
Senge	17	6	14	2	39
Burns and Senge	7	3	6	0	16
Totals	46	52	78	10	186

Data source: Count of articles from four journals cited in text.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Burns' and Senge's concepts.

Dimension	Transforming Leadership	Learning Organization
Goals	1) Change individuals 2) Change organizations or society	1) Change individuals 2) Change organizations
Source of change	Leader	Leader
Framework for change	Leader's vision	Leader's vision
Obstacle to change	Unrecognized needs and wants of members	Unrecognized mental models
Methods	Create new consciousness in members	Radical change in thinking of members
Leader/follower relations	Mutual influence	Mutual influence
Initial result	Elevated purpose, uplifting vision of what might be	Shared ennobling vision, mission, values
Direction of change	Toward needs/higher moral level	Toward highest aspirations
Time frame	Lengthy	Lengthy
Ultimate result	Fundamental change in organization or society	Fundamental change in organization or unit

studies we describe as elitist (Section VIII). The next section (IX) identifies several areas of study that would enrich the understanding of leadership in organizations and as yet appear to be lacking in the literature as reported in the four journals surveyed. Finally, in Section X, we briefly summarize the paper's major findings.

## 2. Burns in the Four Journals

Of philosophy, Whitehead (1977: p. 39) wrote:

*The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato... I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them.*

Our survey of articles in the four leadership journals would seem to support a similar statement with respect to the writings of Burns. Among his "ideas" that are reflected in the literature are: transforming (or transformational) leadership,

transactional leadership, the role of leader vis-à-vis followers and vice versa and their mutual effects, the morality of leaders and their followers, psychological aspects of leadership, creativity, the role of conflict, a leader's vision, and the scope for leadership in organizations, movements, and society. Burns himself wrote an introductory article for the first issue of *Leadership*, identifying promising areas for study (Burns, 2005).

Only two articles provided detailed summaries of several of Burns' concepts in comparing them to those of Bernard Bass (Baker, 2007) and in critiquing some of the interpretations of Burns (Burnes, Hughes, & By, 2017). References to Burns' concepts in the rest of the articles tended to be very brief and often not to provide any substance. It is certainly possible that leadership scholars assume that all readers are familiar with the complexity of Burns' concepts and so believe there was no need to provide an extensive description of them. However, it is also possible to assume that there is not such familiarity.

We have placed the references to Burns' writings, principally *On Leadership* and *Transforming Leadership*, into three broad categories below. A few are placed into more than one category, and, of course, the assignment to the categories was to some degree arbitrary. The three categories and the articles that are included in them are:

1) *General*. Within this category are articles in which references to Burns appear in lists of references or lists within texts and articles in which there is very little of the substance of Burns' writings (e.g., articles that mention transactional or transforming leadership without defining the terms). Here, references to Burns are largely too brief to convey any sense of the complexity of his thought (Albritton, Oswald, & Anderson, 2008; Alvesson & Jonsson, 2016; Andersen, 2016; Barisione, 2009; Beck, 2014; Bligh & Kohles, 2008; Carter, 2012; Chace, 2015; Choi, 2006; Clark & Waldron, 2016; Collinson, 2005, 2017; Collinson & Grint, 2005; Conger, 2013; Conrad, 2008; Crossman & Crossman, 2011; Cunningham & Jackson, 2011; Delbecq, House, de Luque, & Quigley, 2013; Edwards, 2017; Erickson, Shaw, & Agabe, 2007; Ewest, 2015; Flanigan, 2017; Fourie, van der Merwe, & van der Merwe, 2015; Frawley, 2009; Gabriel, 2005, 2015, 2017; Gleeson & Knights, 2008; Goethals, 2017; Gormley-Heenan, 2006; Griffey & Jackson, 2010; Gronn, 2005; Groves & LaRocca, 2012; Harris, 2005; Harter, Ziolkowski, & Wyatt, 2006; Hetland, Sandal, & Johnsen, 2008; Holstad, Korek, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2014; Hudson, 2013; Hughes, Avey, & Nixon, 2010; Hughes & Harris, 2015; Humphreys, Pane Haden, Novicevic, Clayton, & Whitney Gibson, 2011; Iles & Preece, 2006; Inal, 2015; Islam, 2014; Iszatt-White, 2009; Jelen & Schmidt, 2010; Johnson & Klee, 2007; Jones, 2005; Kabalo, 2017; Karp, 2013; Kazmi & Naaranoja, 2013; Kliewer & Priest, 2017; Kolb, Prussia, & Francouer, 2009; Ladkin, 2006, 2017; Larsson & Lundholm, 2010; Lian, Brown, Tanzer, & Che, 2011; Long, 2017; Longenecker, 2008; López-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, & Landa, 2008; McDonagh et al., 2014; McEldowney, Bobrowski, & Gramberg, 2009; McMahan & Ford, 2013; Miao, Newman, & Lamb, 2012; Moreland, 2007; Moreland, Ludorf, & Middlebrooks, 2014; Nadim & Singh, 2008; Nyberg & Sve-

ningsson, 2014; Pietroburgo & Wernet, 2010; Price, 2017; Rosch, Anderson, & Jordan, 2012; Rottmann, Sacks, & Reeve, 2015; Saboe, Taing, Way, & Johnson, 2015; Sacavém et al., 2017; Sarid, 2016; Schwartz, 2016; Searle & Barbuto Jr, 2013; Shamir, 2005; Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005; Shapira, 2015; Sharma & Grant, 2011; Shepherd & Horner Jr, 2010; Singh, Nadim, & Ezzedeen, 2012; Souba, 2014; Spector, 2014, 2016b; Stewart, 2017; Stone, Conley, & Luo, 2014; Stuke, 2013; Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, & Jacobs, 2012; Turnbull, 2006; Wallace & Tomlinson, 2010; Wang, James, Denyer, & Bailey, 2014; Wang & Gagné, 2013; Warner & Riggio, 2012; Wood & Case, 2006; Woodward & Funk, 2010; Zhu, Norman, Peng, Riggio, & Sosik, 2012).

2) *Transforming and/or transactional leadership*. Within this category are articles that provide limited definitions of Burns' key concepts, transforming (or transformational) and transactional leadership, but without great detail (Baker, 2007; Browde, 2011; Chao & Tian, 2011; Chaturvedi, Arvey, Zhang, & Christoforou, 2011; Collinson, 2014; Ewest, 2015; Gaunder, 2007; Gavan O'Shea, Foti, Hauenstein, & Bycio, 2009; Guthrie, Shields, & Zernick, 2014; Khanin, 2007; Mir, 2010; Mohr, 2013; Perruci & McManus, 2012; Pietroburgo & Wernet, 2010; Sarid, 2016; Stuke, 2013; Woods, 2007; Zhu, Riggio, Avolio, & Sosik, 2011).

3) *Leader-follower issues*. Within this category are articles whose primary focus is on leader-follower relationships and their effects (which at times are reciprocal). These articles have a fairly narrow focus in their discussions without reference to the complexity of Burns' thought. These may also include brief discussions of transforming and transactional leadership, the importance of leaders' character, and ethical issues of leadership (Ahn, Ettner, & Loupin, 2011; Ali-mo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Andersen, 2016; Baker, 2007; Balda & Mora, 2011; Boje & Rhodes, 2005; Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Collinson, 2012; Ford & Harding, 2018; Frawley, 2009; Gavan O'Shea, Foti, Hauenstein, & Bycio, 2009; Groves, 2014; Guthrie, Shields, & Zernick, 2014; Hofman, 2008; Ilies, Judge, & Wagner, 2006; Kempster, Jackson, & Conroy, 2011; Malakyan, 2014; Matthews, 2008; Middlebrooks & Haberkorn, 2009; Mir, 2010; Mohr, 2013; Moss & Ritossa, 2007; Nye, 2014; O'Brien, 2007; Olivier, 2012; Peele, 2005; Popa, Hazel, Whatley, Andenoro, & Crandall, 2011; Redekop, 2016; Song, Kang, Shin, & Kim, 2012; Spector, 2016; Tafvelin, Armelius, & Westerberg, 2011; Wilson, 2013; Woods, 2007; Zhu, Riggio, Avolio, & Sosik, 2011).

### 3. Burns' Concepts Summarized

We think that a detailed summary of Burns' key concepts will be helpful to students of leadership, given the lack of one in the four journals. As noted earlier, Burns wrote primarily about political and social leadership, but argued that his leadership concepts were applicable to other kinds of organizations, from international bodies to families. The two concepts for which he is best known are transactional leadership and transforming leadership. *Transactional leadership* is associated with management practices. It is the typical form of leadership in organizations in which those in positions of power and authority enter agreements

with their subordinates. The two parties (in principle) engage in a respectful exchange of valuables (e.g., work for pay) so that the organization receives the benefits of the labor and to some extent the loyalty of the employee, and the employee receives benefits such as payment for service and use of the organization's resources. Burns believed this kind of exchange was an essential aspect of leadership, but claimed it was more limited in scope than transforming leadership. Transactional leaders' relationships with followers involve "modal" values, such as "honesty, responsibility, fairness, the honoring of commitments" (Burns, 1978: p. 426). Although transactional leadership is "not one that binds leader and follower together in a mutual and continuing pursuit of a higher purpose" (Burns, 1978: pp. 19-20), even transforming leaders must practice it.

*Transforming leadership. What it is and its first purpose*

Burns (1978: p. 4) wrote:

*Transforming leadership, while more complex, is more potent [than transactional leadership]. The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents.*

Such leadership often comes from intellectuals. The leadership of intellectuals "begins in a potent vision of what is and what might be, and grows in their ability to convey that vision to people in need of it" (Burns, 2003: p. 223). However, "would-be followers will respond only if the new frame articulated by creative leadership speaks directly to them, to their underlying wants, discontents, and hopes" (Burns, 2003: p. 168).

The vision is the basis for transforming leadership's "moral" leadership. Such leadership addresses the "authentic" and "higher" needs, aspirations, and values of followers. People have "unrealized wants, unexpressed attitudes, and underlying predispositions" (Burns, 2003: p. 172). The leader's vision addresses these feelings—"to make conscious what lies unconscious among followers" [Italics in original] (Burns, 1978: p. 40). Thus, one of the two essential purposes of transforming leadership is to change the potential followers by uniting them through shaping and elevating their motives, goals, and values in the pursuit of "higher" goals. Change occurs when the mutual interests are realized by action (Burns, 1978: pp. 425-426). For Burns, "the leader's task is consciousness-raising on a wide plane. The leader's fundamental act is to induce people to be aware or conscious of what they feel—to feel their true needs so strongly, define their values so meaningfully, that they can be moved to purposeful action" (Burns, 1978: pp. 43-44). Thus, "only with time, determination, conviction, and skill can followers be drawn out of these narrower collectivities and into 'higher' purpose and principle" (Burns, 1978: p. 429).

In practice, "transforming leadership is elevating. It is moral but not moralis-

tic. Leaders engage with followers, but from higher levels of morality; in the enmeshing of goals and values both leaders and followers are raised to more principled levels of judgment. Leaders most effectively “connect with” followers from a level of morality only one stage higher than that of the followers” (Burns, 1978: p. 455). However, once the “connection” is made, as group members rise in motivation and morality, the leader also rises to a higher level of morality to further lead the group to a higher level of conduct and ethical aspiration (Burns, 1978: p. 20). Thus, there is an intimate interaction between leaders and their followers. One of the consequences of this mutual dependency and interaction is that the participants can “move in and out of leader and follower roles” (Burns, 1978: p. 185). However, “the key distinctive role of leadership at the outset is that leaders take the initiative” (Burns, 2003: p. 172). With respect to individual change, Burns wrote: “Leaders take the initiative in mobilizing people for the participation in the processes of change, encouraging a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy, which in turn brings stronger feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy. By pursuing transformational change, people can transform themselves” (Burns, 2003: pp. 25-26).

#### ***The second purpose***

Recognition by followers of their innermost needs and common interests is an important result of transformational leadership, but it is insufficient for the achievement of transformation. The second purpose of transforming leadership is to change organizations or society in fundamental ways. “The premise of this leadership is that, whatever the separate interests persons might hold, they are presently or potentially united in the pursuit of “higher” goals, the realization of which is tested by the achievement of significant change that represents the collective or pooled interests of leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978: p. 425).

For Burns, change corresponds to small adjustments whereas transformation is a metamorphosis leading to new norms, cultural patterns, and mindsets (Burns, 1978: p. 414). He wrote that “transformation means basic alterations in entire systems. It does mean alterations so comprehensive and pervasive, and perhaps accelerated, that new cultures and value systems take the places of the old” (Burns, 2003: p. 24).

Change of a transformative nature will inevitably involve creative destruction and with that will come conflict. The unearthed “needs are social, and the conflicts over their legitimacy, their meaning, their extent, their satisfaction, take political form. More than anything else, wants and needs motivate leaders and followers to struggle for social change” (Burns, 2003: p. 144). Of course, on a lesser scale, leaders attempting to transform organizations will also engender conflict as they implement their visions. Note that in *Transforming Leadership*, Burns often uses the term “transformational”.

The transformational leader creates change by making people aware of their innermost needs and values, and then merging them into a collective purpose that satisfies the individual’s and group’s higher purposes and moves them to action. In fact, the success or failure of the transformational efforts, the “creative,



dynamic interplay of wants and needs, motives, values, and capacities of both would-be leaders and their potential followers” (Burns, 2003) “is measured, finally, by the same standard it has used to condemn the old regime: fulfillment of the principles it professes” (Burns, 2003: p. 167).

#### 4. Senge in the Four Journals

References to Peter Senge’s writings in the four journals are much fewer than those to Burns. He is principally known for *The Fifth Discipline*, which focuses on leadership and organizational change. Perhaps the scholars writing in these leadership journals are less interested in organizations (although a majority of articles concern leadership within organizations) or don’t perceive the importance of Senge to the study of leadership. As with the articles citing Burns, the treatments of Senge’s concepts tend to be brief and do not take into account their range, nor do they describe implementation of his concepts. Again, this may be because the authors assumed general familiarity with the complexity of Senge’s thought.

We also placed the articles referencing Senge’s writings into three categories. A few articles were placed into more than one category and, of course, the assignment had an element of arbitrariness about it.

1) *The learning organization and its disciplines*. Senge’s central framework is the learning organization and its five disciplines as described in *The Fifth Discipline*. The articles in this category made brief mention of learning organizations or their components

a) The learning organization (Brookes, 2011; Kaufman, 2009; Kodish, 2006; Lane & Klenke, 2004; Song & Kolb, 2012).

b) Systems thinking (one of the five disciplines) (Black & Copey, 2014; Chermack, 2003; Dittmar, 2006; Lahdenperä, Gustavsson, Lundgren, & Schantz Lundgren, 2016; Larsson, Segerstéen, & Svensson, 2011; Lengnick-Hall & Innocencio-Gray, 2013; Lynham & Chermack, 2006; Middlebrooks, Miltenberger, Tweedy, Newman, & Follman, 2009; Peterson, 2008; Satterwhite, Sheridan, & McIntyre, 2016; Song & Kolb, 2012; Steinbauer, Rhew, & Chen, 2015).

c) Mental models (another of the disciplines) (Fairhurst, 2005; Kaufman, 2009; Middlebrooks, Miltenberger, Tweedy, Newman, & Follman, 2009; Westbrook, Veale, & Karnes, 2013).

d) Shared vision (another of the disciplines) (Ahn, Ettner, & Loupin, 2011).

2) *Description of leader roles or characteristics*. The leader of an organization (or unit) has several roles. One of them is to describe a desired future and enlist the organization’s members into making it a reality. The Sengian leaders support employee learning and knowledge creation, are themselves perpetual learners, step back from day to day activities for perspective, employ “sensemaking,” practice “presencing,” and seeing oneself as a steward of an organization (Balda & Mora, 2011; Barrow & Mirabella, 2009; Carter, 2009; Ciporen, 2010; Dalakoura, 2010; de Jong, 2011; Gilley, McMillan, & Gilley, 2009; Head, 2005; Mabey & Morrell, 2011; Polding, 2016; Poulin, Hackman, & Barbarasa-Mihai, 2007;

Raelin, 2005; Satterwhite, Sheridan, & McIntyre, 2016; Song & Kolb, 2012; Steinbauer, Rhew, & Chen, 2015; Young & Pemberton, 2017).

3) *Description of organizational features.* These include being flexible, having “continuous organizational renewal” or continuous adjustment in the face of environmental changes, having leaders that adjust their visions based on feedback from employees, and encouragement of professional development (Dalkoura, 2010; Dool, 2010; Fertig, 2011; Teckchandani & Schultz, 2014).

Interestingly, only one of the articles noted two of the disciplines of a learning organization: team learning and personal mastery (Ciporen, 2010) and its treatment of those and the other disciplines are very brief. Two others briefly mentioned personal mastery (Black & Copsey, 2014; Lahdenperä, Gustavsson, Lundgren, & Schantz Lundgren, 2016). It would seem that these two disciplines would be of greater interest to students of leadership in organizations than their treatments in these leadership journals.

References to other elements of Senge’s writings include the use of knowledge (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002; Kaufman, 2009; Rai & Prakash, 2012), 21st century concerns (variety of environments, global values, eco-leadership, presencing, sustainability) (Bathurst, Jackson, & Statler, 2010; de Jong, 2011; Kolberg, 2008; Koskela & Schuyler, 2016; Middlebrooks & Haberkorn, 2009; Satterwhite, Sheridan, & McIntyre, 2016; Smythe & Norton, 2007; Wilson & Kosempel, 2016); and a miscellany of brief notices (Ament, 2007; Chandler, Roebuck, Swan, & Brock, 2011; Gambrell, 2016; Gilley, McMillan, & Gilley, 2009; Parry & Hansen, 2007; Ruwhiu & Elkin, 2016; Wondra, 2009).

## 5. Senge’s Concepts of the Learning Organization Summarized

Given Senge’s importance to the development of thinking about leadership in organizations and the relatively limited description of his framework in the articles in the four journals, we thought a summary of his five disciplines would be helpful to students of leadership in organizations. He and his fellow learning organization scholars have carefully defined the five “disciplines” whose practice is fundamental to the creation and maintenance of a learning organization. Each of the practices can be improved over time. As Senge wrote: “To practice a discipline is to be a lifelong learner. You never arrive.” (Senge, 2006: p. 10).

*The five disciplines are:*

- “Personal mastery is the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and seeing reality objectively. As such, it is an essential cornerstone of the learning organization—the learning organization’s spiritual foundation” (Senge, 2006: p. 7). It must be practiced by all members of an organization. It “starts with clarifying the things that really matter to us, of living our lives in the service of our highest aspirations” (Senge, 2006: p. 8).
- “People with a high level of personal mastery share several basic characteristics. They have a special sense of purpose that lies behind their visions and

goals. “*For such a person, a vision is a calling rather than simply a good idea*” (*Italics in original*) (Senge, 2006: p. 133).

- “Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Very often, we are not consciously aware of our mental models or the effects they have on our behavior” (Senge, 2006: p. 8). Understanding one’s mental models “starts with turning the mirror inward; learning to unearth our internal pictures of the world, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny” (Senge, 2006: p. 8).
- One of the reasons for identifying one’s mental models is to make it easier to apprehend reality. If we do, “we have the power to change ourselves profoundly” (Senge, 2006: p. 150). This kind of change is a result of “the power of truth, seeing reality more and more as it is, cleansing the lens of perception, awakening from self-imposed distortions of reality” (Senge, 2006: p. 125).
- “The practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future’ that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance.” Shared vision of the goals, values and mission of the organization requires “a discipline for translating individual vision into shared vision” (Senge, 2006: p. 9).
- “Organizations intent on building shared visions continually encourage members to develop their personal visions” because they are the basis of shared visions (Senge, 2006: p. 197). In fact, leaders need to build “an organization where it is safe for people to create visions, where inquiry and commitment to the truth are the norm, and where challenging the status quo is expected” (Senge, 2006: p. 162).
- “The discipline of team learning starts with ‘dialogue’, the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine thinking together. Team learning is vital because teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations” (Senge, 2006: p. 10).
- In “good” teams, their members have a “ruthless commitment to telling the truth about our current reality” (Senge, 2006: p. 239). In poorly functioning teams or organizations, conflict is often destructive. However, for Senge, “...one of the most reliable indicators of a team that is continually learning is the visible conflict of ideas. In great teams conflict becomes productive” (Senge, 2006: p. 232).
- In general, conflict and competition can be healthy practices. “Competition, which literally means ‘striving together’ (from the Latin *competrere*[sic] is one of the best structures yet invented by humankind to allow each of us to bring out the best in each other” (Senge, 2006: p. 138).
- “[Systems thinking] is the discipline that integrates the disciplines, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice... Without a systematic orientation, there is not motivation to look at how the disciplines interrelate”

(Senge, 2006: pp. 11-12). Senge views all organizations as organic systems, tied together by relationships among people and management issues. Just as a group of people create organizations, the group, not the individual, must create change.

- The systems that Senge addresses are primarily either organizations or units within organizations. The intended consequence of pursuing the creation of a learning organization is to change the organization or the unit. However, he notes that “many leaders have personal visions that never get translated into shared visions that galvanize an organization” (Senge, 2006: p. 9). All of the disciplines must be practiced for the creation of a learning organization.

### ***The roles of the leader in organizational change***

The organization’s leader is the prime force behind the creation of the learning organization. The fundamental roles of the leader are designer, teacher, and steward. Senge quotes a CEO favorably who said: “The first task of organizational design concerns designing the governing ideas the purpose, vision, and core values by which people will live” (Senge, 2006: pp. 326-327). Such design is crucial, but organizations are living systems and design must be followed by implementation by the organization’s members. Leaders should be strong advocates of their visions, but they should be “advocates who can also inquire into others’ visions [and] open the possibility for the vision to evolve, to become larger than our individual visions” (Senge, 2006: p. 212).

Some of the most important characteristics of the learning organization relate to change in the individual and the organization. For such changes to take place, the organization’s members must be “engaged” with it and their work. For this to happen, the shared vision “uplifts people’s aspirations. Work becomes part of pursuing a larger purpose...” (Senge, 2006: p. 193). This is so because “there is a need for people to feel part of an ennobling mission” (Senge, 2006: p. 208). Thus, the core values of an organization “answer the question How do we want to act, consistent with our mission, along the path toward achieving our vision?” Senge provides examples of core values which include “integrity, openness, honesty, freedom, equal opportunity” (Senge, 2006: p. 208).

For Senge, “the real skills of leadership in a learning organization... are the skills of effective parenting” (Senge, 1990: p. 310). A good leader helps “people understand the systemic forces that shape change” (Senge, 1990: p. 356) and provides a vision and the resources for people to move from reality to the vision: “time, management support, money, information, ready contact with colleagues, and more” (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994: p. 32). “The deep learning cycle is difficult to initiate” (Senge et al., 1994: p. 21). It takes years to master the skills, “within a ‘shell’, an architecture—of guiding ideas, innovations in infrastructure, and theory, methods, and tools” (Senge et al., 1994: p. 22).

## **6. Articles that Reference Burns and Senge**

A few of the articles contained very brief references to Burns and Senge. The

points they noted were: Burns as a humanistic theorist, Senge a theorist of management and spirituality, (Rai & Prakash, 2012); both as servant leadership theorists (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002); Burns on leaders taking corrective action, Senge on servant leadership (Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004); Burns viewing leadership from a humanistic lens, Senge through a systems perspective (Middlebrooks, 2013); Burns as the introducer of transformational leadership concept, Senge writing about learning (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Bryant, 2003; Ghislieri & Gatti, 2012); Burns writing about transformational and transactional leadership approaches, Senge writing about the leaders as visionaries and creators of shared vision (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2016; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006); Burns on transformational leadership, Senge on self-understanding (Gambrell, Matkin, & Burbach, 2011); Burns on communication, Senge on systems analysis and implementation of vision (Kinicki, Jacobson, Galvin, & Prussia, 2011); Burns on transforming leadership or its study, Senge on systems (Bums, 2002; Poulin, Hackman, & Barbarasa-Mihai, 2007); Burns on leaders initiating action, Senge on presencing (Kolb, Prussia, & Francouer, 2009); Burns and Senge only mentioned (Trethewey & Goodall Jr, 2007).

Although these articles mentioned both Burns and Senge, they contained very little information about their writing and none of them compared their concepts.

## **7. A Comparison of Aspects of Burns' and Senge's Concepts**

Despite the differences in their approaches and subject matter, there is considerable similarity between important aspects of each of their frameworks. These are summarized in **Table 2** at the end of the paper.

Burns and Senge charge leaders with providing the overarching mission and values for the organization and motivating the organization's members to elevate their thinking to conform to them. Members are thus changed by the transformed organization that pursues the leader's vision or purpose. Individual members and the organization change toward meeting their higher needs or purposes, their highest aspirations (although those aren't known to the individuals until their consciousness has been raised or they have achieved personal mastery and their mental models have been unearthed). The process of learning and transforming requires years and it will be continual as the leaders and members interact. That interaction may lead to modification of the leader's vision and values (learning organization) or elevation of the morals of the leader (transformational leadership) as the members achieve a higher moral plane.

## **8. Burns and Senge Concepts and their Implications**

Our reading leads us to conclude that both sets of concepts are essentially elitist in nature, despite the noted participatory roles of the followers. The engine for change is the leader. This isn't necessarily a criticism, in that it can be argued that theory and practice of leadership are inherently elitist, however diluted or

masked it might be in theory or practice. In addition to the points made earlier, we would make the following observations:

- The leader for Burns and Senge operates from at least an implicit theoretical viewpoint. For Burns, “good” leadership is understood to mean a transforming leader (even if the leader isn’t familiar with the term) that pursues and achieves fundamental change in society or in organizations and their members. For Senge, the true leader is a creator of a learning organization and the fitting of its employees for membership in it. Leaders of both have visions for what the society or organization should be and bend their energies to making that a reality.
- Both Burns and Senge believe there is a reality that hasn’t been perceived by their followers or employees. The Burnsian leader, through superior insight, imagination, or wisdom, perceives that reality, at least in large terms. The leader then attempts to raise the consciousness of the followers to see the underlying reality (their true wants, needs, aspirations) and make those the basis of their actions. Similarly, for Senge, employees have mental models that prevent them from perceiving accurately the reality in which they operate. The leader has explored his mental models, has achieved personal mastery, and is then prepared to lead the employees into seeing the underlying reality of their mental models and eventually to see reality as it is. The reality they will be led to see is generally the reality already discovered by the leader, although it may be corrected somewhat through interactions with followers or employees. The leader’s choice of words and methods will perforce become the language of the follower and employee, thus channeling discussion and interaction along the leader’s chosen lines. There seems to be, for Burns and Senge, a Rousseauian General Will that the leader is able to discover and articulate.
- Although both Burns and Senge note the existence of conflict, they pose the conflict as being around ideas, beliefs, and understandings. They don’t directly address what might be some of the fundamental sources of conflict in society and organizations. These include desire for more money or opportunity (higher wages, advancement), more resources to do one’s job (staff, funds), more power (authority, competition with the leader or manager for position), more security (society or the organization is changing, worry about its consequences), more autonomy (the vision or the new rules are constraints on my efforts), or outright opposition to the leader’s vision (for whatever reason). There seems to be an assumption that these will be swept away by the power of the vision and the leader’s ability to enlist the members or employees in it. The leader doesn’t begin by asking the members or employees what they desire or want or need, but assumes that what the leader wants will be what the enlightened member or employee wants. Burns’ and Senge’s views of human nature are quite benign (i.e., at bottom, people have higher aspirations and wants, desires for a higher morality and for more meaning in life and work, and so on). What if most members of society or

organizations want other things more, such as those noted above? Neither Burns nor Senge acknowledge this possibility.

- Burns explicitly and Senge implicitly assume that “right thinking” leaders operate from a highly ethical philosophy. For Burns, self-serving or immoral people in positions of power aren’t really leaders, even if they have visions and appeal to followers’ wants. The result of their actions can’t be transforming in a positive way. Senge draws a distinction between leaders building learning organizations according to his prescriptions and those who don’t. For both, “good” leaders operate from a higher plane of morality or understanding than do the members or employees. The leader must raise their consciousness, elevate their understanding, unearth their hidden wants or needs, and do this from a higher level of morality and ethics. Such leaders would doubtless view themselves as on a mission (missionaries?) and having hearts and purposes that are pure. Others might think that the actions of such leaders operating from this vantage point as being manipulative. The problem for such leaders is: How to get the members or employees to do right (as *we* define it)?

The following section contains several areas for study that we did not find addressed in our review of the four journals’ articles.

## **9. Challenges for the Study of Leadership: Areas for Further Study**

Our review of the uses of the concepts of Burns and Senge in the four journals found that few of the articles provide sufficient descriptions of their writings to understand their frameworks and the interrelationships among their respective elements nor were there reports of the implementation of the concepts as defined by Burns and Senge. This was similar to the conclusion we reached after reviewing the public health literature.

The review also identified several aspects of Burns’ and Senge’s thought that were similar and several areas that deserve greater attention than they received. Among these are:

- Burns and Senge argue that it will require extended periods of time to accomplish the changes that leaders intend to make (radically changing organizations and their members). How realistic is it to expect the chief executive officers, presidents, and political leaders to have extended terms as heads of organizations and to maintain their intent to transforming them and their members? Is it more likely that such leaders will not have time for such sweeping change or will be distracted from their purpose? It’s not clear from the review of the articles in the four journals that longevity in position and its effects have been studied. The public health study found that changeover was fairly frequent (resignation, discharge, promotion) and this severely constrained a leader’s capacity to achieve transformational change.
- A related issue is the level of a leader in an organization. Both Burns and Senge intend for leaders to achieve great changes in their organizations or

movements. How does the leader's position in an organization affect his or her ability to achieve such change in an organization or in a unit such as a department or college? Even leaders at the top of organizations have difficulty in accomplishing great change. Those at lower levels will have fewer resources, be under policies and directives other than their own, perhaps be bound by union contracts, and generally be accountable for their actions. There was little attention to this in the articles citing Burns and Senge. The public health study found that indeed these and other factors severely limited the ability of lower level leaders to achieve change.

- Another constraint on the exercise of leadership is membership in a bureaucratic organization. Many who may wish to practice leadership work in bureaucracies. The goals of such organizations are typically not expected to be met by creative leadership that focuses on the innermost needs of its members, raising their consciousness, focusing on moral issues, taking the time to reveal everyone's mental models, building shared understanding on these bases, and melding all into a shared vision. Rather, bureaucracies emphasize division of labor, specialization, hierarchy, and extensive rules aimed at producing (in theory) regularity, consistency, order, and predictability. Attempts to implement Senge's or Burns' concepts will inevitably collide with these. Again, there was little reported on these issues in the articles.
- A few empirical studies in the four journals considered transformation over time (1 year or so) while others measured transforming or transformational leaders at a point in time. The approaches are not necessarily comparable. Among the questions that might helpfully be addressed regarding transformational and non-transformational leaders (or managers) are: Was the workforce largely the same or had there been appreciable turnover? Did higher management change prior to the study and thus allow more (or less) transformational flexibility? Did their policies or priorities change? Were transformational managers found to be members of organizations undertaking renewal or of organizations whose leaders were seeking change (and thus employees were motivated to be part of the change for a variety of reasons)? Did the manager or leader experience important change during the period of study (e.g., training, mentoring, direction from above, personal experience)? What was the general organizational culture? What was the degree of bureaucratic constraint? Did measures of productivity increase where leaders were found to be transformational (beyond those of similar units)?
- A number of empirical studies were able to identify transformational leaders and their characteristics. A helpful extension of such studies would be to determine what, if any, personal characteristics, critical training, education, mentoring, or experiences (social, professional) had influenced them to be transformational.
- A very interesting and important set of issues not addressed relates to the moral or spiritual growth of leaders and their followers or employees. Burns clearly and Senge by inference view the leader as morally superior to the fol-



lowers and having the role of raising the morals of the followers or releasing the innermost values of the employees. Do transforming leaders in these or future studies in fact view themselves as morally superior? Do followers of transforming leaders view themselves as morally inferior and find themselves growing in morality? It is difficult to imagine that either would publicly acknowledge holding such views.

- One aspect of Burns' and Senge's thought that didn't receive attention in the articles we reviewed is the issue of succession and maintenance of the transformed society or organization or maintenance of the learning organization once established. How does the transforming leader assure that the transformed organization continues along the transforming path?

## 10. Conclusion

We surveyed the articles in four leadership journals (*Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, *Journal of Leadership Studies*, *Leadership*, and *Open Journal of Leadership*) from their first issue to the end of 2017 for references to two leading theorists of leadership, James MacGregor Burns and Peter Senge. The general leadership literature, at least as represented by our review, is rich in scope and complexity. The identified articles addressed leadership from many perspectives and thus seemed to continue to reflect one of Burns' concerns: "Leadership as a concept has dissolved into small and discrete meanings" (Burns, 1978: p. 2). However, we found that those articles that contained references to Burns and to Senge or to both (286 such articles) shared a characteristic that we found in our earlier survey of the public health leadership literature: they lacked an adequate summary of the major concepts of Burns and Senge. We aggregate the references to Burns and to Senge and to both of them into several categories, all of which are limited in their scope and too brief to provide an adequate understanding of their concepts. We provide a detailed summary of the major ideas of Burns (transformational and transactional leadership especially) and Senge (the learning organization). We thought this of value for students of leadership because they have been pivotal scholars of leadership. We compared the major concepts of the two experts and concluded that they shared many principles. Those principles tended toward an elitist, leadership-driven concept of organizations and their change. It is clear that the study of leadership will continue to be an important activity for theorists and practitioners. We have suggested several areas for further exploration to increase our understanding of the phenomenon.

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