

EMPLOYING PROGRESSIVE PRACTICES AND PRINCIPLES TO FACILITATE SEMINAR ROOM LEADERSHIP AMONG LEARNERS: SHARED POWER AND COLLECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

Alan Platt

Florida Gulf Coast University
arplatt@fgcu.edu

George Alexakis

Nova Southeastern University
alexakis@nova.edu

ABSTRACT

Acquisition of knowledge may clarify why certain people excel in leadership training sessions. To explain varying learning methods, trainers tend to identify items such as a disinclination among participants to engage the material. Commonly published human resources explanations seldom include admissions of organizations' poor leadership training practices. The acknowledgment would be an imprudent disclosure, since such behavior is an expected component of the human resources leadership. The innovative trainer knows the excuses could at least be mitigated by scarce human talent within these organizations. Uniting organizational mission, leadership research, and instructional modalities can benefit an organization looking for competitive advantages.

INTRODUCTION

The notion that leadership training should first and foremost meet the needs of business clearly makes sense (Anonymous, 2004). Developing leaders through appropriate human resources development (HRD) planning is extremely helpful in creating quality organizations. In redefining the role of an effective organizational leader, it is useful to link the organization's competencies and resources to create a competitive advantage (Preziosi & Gooden, 2002). The paper commences by arguing the importance of developing leaders through solid training practices and principles. The research then turns to possibilities that exist to optimize the resources allotted for leadership training in the classroom. Finally, the specific anthropological modalities cited, each provide scope for new and interesting research opportunities. Throughout the completed, original manuscript, there are various HRD theories and solid training research, which inform leadership learning and the context in which it exceeds.

LEADERS SHARING POWER □ TRAINERS/TEACHERS SHARING THE LECTERN

If the classic definition of management is meeting goals by working through people, then leaders have a higher duty. With great power comes great responsibility. How does a good manager become a good leader? Much has been published in the literature on leadership but little in the discourse critiques how leaders are created in the seminar room or classroom. Everything from trait to transformational theories are promoted to postulate the reasons for good or great leaders. Theoreticians run the gamut from nature to nurture in describing the cause and effect of leadership development. The very fact that virtually every human being has an element of entrepreneurship intimates that all potential leaders commence with at least some genetic predisposition for leading others (Lehrer, 2001). To this extent, leadership skills can be learned.

Easing the process by which trainees or students acquire the behavior of skillful leaders is imperative to organizations. Sanders (1994, p. 39) suggests seven steps to establishing a foundation for leadership development.

- Commit to investing the time, resources, and money needed to create a culture that supports leadership development
 - Identify and communicate the skills associated with leadership abilities
 - Develop the tools and measures necessary to support leadership skills
- Make leadership skills a focus of management training; communication, team-building, planning, interpersonal
- Implement ongoing programs that focus on leadership skills, such as managing multiple priorities and creating change
 - Know that in the right culture, leaders can be found at every level

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- Recognize, reward, and celebrate leaders for their passion, dedication, and results

It should be added that all of these things could be attempted in the leadership classroom environment. Theoretical models aside, the classroom can effectively represent a smaller representation of the organizational world. An instructor who follows the path of simulating the business world in the seminar room with interactive and experiential learning activities will be at the forefront. This has been true for centuries. Once some or all of the above procedures are followed to set a base for developing leaders, the stage can be set for innovations so that leadership development may be practiced in the seminar room or classroom.

A manager is given power through position—not so with a leader. A leader, quite often has no power granted by the organization. Strong personal characteristics give a leader power. With that power comes the responsibility. Type A individuals thrive on the constant stress created by additional duties. People in organizations are now humorously referring to these personalities as *control freaks and tension overachievers*. However, after the initial euphoria of acquiring a management role and exercising their power, most individuals wish that they could share some of the responsibility and accountability and reduce their stress. Effective leadership requires the leader to, on occasion, take the back seat and allow others to take the helm temporarily. An important part of being a leader has to do with the flexibility of staying quiet and letting others assume their responsibility from time to time. Besides providing an effective leadership training exercise for subordinates, sharing power occasionally has benefits for the organization through buy-in of subordinates, creativity, and new thinking to address problems. The resulting *alternating leader model* is evident in government, non-hierarchical organizations, and even nature. This scenario is also often accurate in the seminar room or classroom, as instructors frequently find it difficult to draw the type of energy that they had at the beginning of their course, program, academic year, or career. It takes far less energy to manage than to lead. If leadership responsibilities are being shared, these instructors can have partners, referred to by Senge (1993) as 'cocreators', and the leadership role no longer rests on their shoulders alone.

Education and industry have yet to fully internalize the value of shared power. Facilitators that have long practiced learning methodologies such as experiential learning activities know that the ideal learning environment does not simply consist of pupils listening to an all-knowing teacher with a book or manuscript for supplementation. The great facilitator of the 21st Century will be acutely aware of when to share the leadership duty. S/he will heed to the truthful research concerning learning and motivation principles. Scholars and practitioners must also be aware that sharing power and control makes many people nervous. As Kohn (1999, p. 196) so aptly states, “. . . giving people responsibility for, and control of, their own work is

tantamount to introducing democracy to the workplace, and democracy in any arena is profoundly threatening to those who exert undemocratic control.” Therefore, it is not surprising that executives and teachers alike eschew participative power sharing scenarios. To make shared power in the classroom work, facilitators must feel comfortable to share it. It means that they must not only be comfortable in sharing the responsibility but necessarily the authority as well.

VARIETAL STUDENT-LEARNERS

In addressing how a leadership development program of study might best serve the needs of its intended audience; consideration must be given to identify how these learners prefer to be taught. This preference stems from the way an individual or a group tends to process information. Several cognitive methods can be used to assimilate information. Examples include visual, textual, auditory, and spatial processing. Usually people employ a combination of methods to learn. The dominant method(s) that are used can often be matched up with personality profiles and occupations. For example, a specific blend of learning style characteristics typical of healthcare administration learners is significantly different from public administration learners.

The term learner connotes the word student, but denotes an alternate to the traditional teacher/student relationship. The reference to learner implies that education is assessed not by how much material is taught in the classroom, but rather how much is learned by the student. The teacher (not instructor) facilitates a classroom environment that, through encouragement, enables learners to interactively participate and traverse the academic and professional path (Alexakis, 2003). Trainers and educators should ideally use several methods and techniques to engage trainee/student interest and aid the understanding of the subject matter. Their role is that of the guide, coach, and facilitator, not as the all-knowing expert or academician. Training/teaching and learning are haphazard processes. There are a multitude of learning permutations and combinations for simple tasks. All people learn differently and therefore the onus is upon teacher and student to identify and engage in learning that works for the student. If the facilitator believes in the learner's right to self-determination, it means that their learning process is self-directed and the facilitator is simply there to facilitate their learning. It is most effective if the plan or program is chosen by the student and the facilitator aids the process. In short, the effective facilitator is more of a “guide on the side” than a “sage on the stage.”

Then how do people ideally learn? Scholars have advanced a *transformational learning theory* that builds upon previous lines of inquiry into adult learning such as andragogy and self-directed learning (Ashton, 2004). It is the process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one's experience as a guide to action. Essentially this approach to learning is about dramatic and fundamental change in the way people see themselves and the world in which we live. It is an

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expansion of consciousness and observes that this kind of learning is more than merely adding to what we already know. Much like a significant emotional event, transformational learning shapes people so considerably that they are noticeably different afterwards (Ashton, 2004).

Learning by doing is considered by many to be an efficient way to learn, as it accelerates learning, which saves time, money, and other resources. Applied education or professionally oriented learning has been around for centuries, but has been separated from the theoretical components of scholarship in the United States and a few other countries. These terms refer to practically focused instruction that is applied education. Leadership development programs with a professional orientation would focus on the applicability and functional utility of coursework and research. The following activities are recommended to launch a sound program for leadership development: 1. Game Playing which provides a non-threatening power sharing environment, 2. Project Groups which encourages the swapping of leadership roles, 3. Mentorships which allows for private or personal disclosure of leadership techniques, 4. Interviews which reveal interesting facts about other leaders, and 5. Collaborative Learning which allows the sharing of personal experiences, perspectives, and insights with the intent of improving the learning accomplishments of the others in the class.

Striking a balance between theory-based learning and experiential learning has always been a challenge for trainers confined to the classroom, but there is new hope. Recently, training instructors have better harmonized the two by implementing the use of industry guest lecturers, field trips, field-based projects, case studies, and computer simulations.

Guest lecturers have always been popular with students, enhancing the classroom experience with real-life stories of how theories taught in class work or do not work in industry. Field trips allow an opportunity for students to develop a visual framework of industry (McKeachie, 1998). Case studies have increased in use in leadership programs. They serve to replicate problems and issues faced by leaders and managers in organizational operations. They are particularly popular with adult students that have industry experience. Computer simulations have been used more frequently recently, because of the enhanced usability of computer software programs (Pederson & Pederson, 1993 as stated in Kiser & Partlow, 1999). Computer simulations provide learners skills such as business analysis, decision-making, critical reasoning, communications, and team building (Ferreira, 1997).

What eludes many instructors is the ability to hone the two skills that best distinguishes ordinary instruction from extraordinary instruction in the minds of trainees: public speaking and interpersonal (McKeachie, 1998). Kapoor (1999) posits that exemplary instructors have superior abilities in two areas: 1. ability to generate intellectual excitement (or offer presentations in clearly organized and interesting ways). 2. possesses strong interpersonal rapport

with students and were able to motivate them to work hard to meet academic challenges (p.9). Both of these characteristics focus more on modality and less on content of instruction.

CONCLUSION

The development of progressive practices and principles will improve training programs and provide instructors with vehicles to readily synthesize and efficiently relate broad expanses of the growing amount of information in their respective disciplines. An improved delivery of subject matter and modality of delivery system can benefit trainees and students. Ultimately, this will arguably potential serve to attract quality people to the organization or school.

Through these change paradigms, the practices of employers will quickly change to reflect the not so new knowledge on effectively training and educating their employees. Working, living, and surviving organizational life will be inclusive of these eclectic pedagogical/anthropological perspectives and models. The resultant management and leadership development, education, and training that will take place will ultimately revolutionize instructional methods and techniques.

Suggestions for enhancing the effectiveness of the resultant progressive training program include, but are not limited to: (a) that courses be developed as part of a holistic curriculum design effort that in turn dovetails into the departmental and organizational missions. (b) Everyone is informed of the purpose of the program and the motives of the implementers. (c) That the immediate development of an assessment instrument be used to evaluate each seminar's/course's effectiveness in achieving its goals. The evaluation should be carried out as a periodic audit to check if updating of the course or curriculum is needed. (f) The organization examines the feasibility of hiring a fulltime curriculum facilitator as a permanent position.

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