

Assignment 3: Synthesis Paper

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Leadership Simulation

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Introduction

Leadership is a skill that is developed through practice. “Educational simulations are structured environments that allow participants to practice real-world skills with appropriate feedback but without affecting real processes or people” (Aldrich, 2009). Education simulations provide an ideal environment to practice leadership skills, to apply critical thinking, and then take what is learned into the real world work environment.

Management and Leadership Theories

Most theorists agree that management and leadership are intertwined. “If one wishes to distinguish leadership from management or administration, one can argue that leadership creates and changes cultures, while management and administration act within a culture” (Schein, 2004). Culture is a phenomenon of people’s behaviors and therefore, leadership is the practice of influencing human behavior.

As a leader, I recognize the characteristics of Charismatic Leadership within myself. Charismatic leaders exude dominance and self-security with a strong desire to influence others and impart the convictions of their personal beliefs. Charismatic leaders act as strong role models to “encourage the task-oriented motives of followers with the help of power and appreciation” (Winkler, 2010). They are “sensitive to environmental constraints and [have the] ability to identify deficiencies and poorly exploited opportunities in the status quo. Additionally, they are sensitive to follower abilities and needs” (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Charismatic leaders excel articulating their vision and creating an impression that allows for the “deployment of innovative and unconventional means to achieve their vision and their use of personal power to influence followers” (Conger & Kanungo, 1998).

As a charismatic leader, my skills were immediately used to establish the position of the status quo and form task-oriented relationships with my peers. As most charismatic leaders, I became the team leader when my abilities to assess and provide innovation became apparent.

Vision and Mission

“Great managers turn one person’s talent into performance” (Buckingham, 2005). Effective leaders guide performance through the development of a vision and mission for their organization. “Vision is seeing with the mind’s eye what is possible in people, in projects, in causes and in enterprises. Vision results when our mind joins need with possibility” (Covey, 2004). The development of a vision and a mission provides “the strategic purpose of the organization” (Finzel, 2007). Goals and objectives are born out of this “organizational blueprint” that forms the basis of evaluation of achievement of the same.

The Leadership Simulation has provided participants the opportunity to develop vision and mission statements. This experience for my sector bore some difficulties in that not all participants had clear knowledge of the differences between vision and mission statements. Our progress was labored and this work had to be revised numerous times until the participants had a clear understanding of the purpose of these statements. Since our work in this area was labored, our effectiveness in the first period’s negotiations for budget allocations suffered.

The experience has given me a clear understanding of the importance of vision and mission statements, which I must admit, have not held much importance to me in my day to day activities. I have not worked with a leader in the past who has imparted an explanation of the vision and mission of the organization that was tied to activities. I am now more interested in making this connection.

Communication

“Leadership is about making a difference and driving change which stimulates conversation and debate” (Ambler, 2009). Communication is the vehicle in which leadership is delivered. Without communication, there is no leadership.

During the simulation, communication led to success for my sector. We made use of every means available to us to communicate including some unconventional means. Text messaging became a key method of communicating during council meetings. We were able to confer privately and make changes to strategy as needed.

A product of this experience will be an increase in communication on my part. I have already begun to look for new and innovative ways to communicate with peers. I have begun a blog for my position in the fall and will have some optional meeting opportunities for staff members to become more informed.

Culture

In this section, you should define the culture of your organization and discuss the unique leadership behaviors that are necessary to meet its needs.

According to Finzel (2007), “An organization’s corporate culture is the way insiders behave based on the values and group traditions they hold.” In many organizational environments, culture can be difficult to identify and may create discord in the workplace.

In the simulation, the first city council meeting in Period 1 displayed some examples of discord as a result of cultural clashes. During the first period, the Education Sector established a culture of professional courtesy and decorum that was quite different from some of the other sectors. Upon entering the city council simulation, it became apparent that the Community Services Sector had a more collegial culture established that included thinly veiled coded

communication that left others not a part of that culture uncomfortable and unfamiliar with understanding their established communication norms. Since communication expectations were not established before the meeting, the meeting quickly disintegrated into a shouting match where communication did not occur.

The experience has left me thinking more about the importance of culture and establishing cultural norms within an organization. Finding one's place in the culture of an organization can be a determiner of long term success. I recognize the difficulty of newcomers to my workplace in establishing a place in the organizational culture. This experience has made me aware that as a leader, I must be aware of the cultural norms that are established in my organization.

Data Driven Decisions

Data driven decision making developed during the 1980's as corporations sought new ways to redefine and improve enterprise. "Their goal was to improve the bottom line by discerning hidden patterns and thereby improving the decision making process" (Weaton-Shore, 2003). In education, we have attempted to borrow these methods with mixed results.

During the simulation, we were provided the opportunity to make decisions based on data. We were required to explore the information provided in and about the simulation to help guide our decision making process. One thing became clear during the simulation: data does not drive decisions if you do not make an effort to understand it. It was apparent to all who participated in the simulation as to who had taken the time to study the data and who had not.

Another observation was also assessable: data driven decisions may not always yield the expected result. During Period 5, the Community Services Sector made a decision based on the data provided. The indicators provided that if a certain decision was made that it would result in

a positive outcome. However, the decision did not yield the positive result sought and may have been overridden by other factors in the simulation. Clearly, our decisions are only as effective as our ability to assess the data effectively.

This experience further highlighted what I already knew about data driven decision making: it takes time, it creates more questions, it is a process, it may highlight our weaknesses, and the journey is never ending. What I am taking from the simulation is the idea that not everyone is as committed to the process as you are, so it is a leader's responsibility to motivate others to see the value of data analysis.

Politics and Leadership

“Organizational politics manifests itself through struggle for resources, personal conflicts, competition for power and leadership and tactical influence executed by individuals and groups to attain power, building personal stature, control access to information, not revealing real intents, building coalitions, etc.” (ALAGSE, 2010). There is no shortage of organizational politics in the field of education. It has been no less so in the leadership simulation.

We have struggled over resources, had our share of personal conflicts, and there have been attempts to attain power and build personal stature. For my part, it is the exhausting portion of leadership. It is the portion that has kept me from applying for leadership positions in the past. I would have liked more discussion on this particular topic in the companion course since I feel it is the area we struggled with the most.

Change

“During the process of change, good leaders establish a climate of trust between themselves and their staff, there fostering faith that things will get better” (Clarke, 2008). Change is one element of education that practitioners do not trust. Recent changes in education

have not made our day to day work easier or more effective. Instilling trust during change for any leader in education is an uphill battle.

During the simulation, the affectation of change was simulated through the change in leadership from period to period. It was up to the leader in each period to instill a sense of trust in his compatriots. Unfortunately, this is one area that I think the simulation fails. The period of time in which we must participate in the simulation is limited and therefore the trust we must share is temporary. I can trust anyone for a five minute car ride, but I may not consider riding cross country with them. All the participants know that the time is limited and are willing to make concessions that they would not normally make to “get through” the course.

Ethics and Moral Qualities

“When conscience governs vision, discipline and passion, leadership endures and changes the world for good. In other words, moral authority makes formal authority work” (Covey, 2004). We consider ethics a key component of leadership, yet many leaders who practice unethical behavior are still successful in the workplace. We measure leaders by output not by how well liked they are. It may be more important to recognize that ethics and moral qualities may influence your purpose, decisions, and success in leadership.

The leadership simulation gives an opportunity for ethics in practice, though most may not recognize this phenomenon until after course is complete. Most participants were not focused how they interacted, how much they interacted, and how they were perceived during the interaction in the simulation. In fact, most were so focused on the outcome—completing the tasks within the simulation—that they may have missed the true purpose of the simulation. Can the question be answered by each student: Did I practice ethical leadership?

Summary

The leadership simulation has given the participants a trial in stretching their leadership muscles. Participants had the opportunity to consider many ideas that affect success in leadership. Has the simulation made effective leaders? No, that was not the purpose of the simulation. For those who intent to continue on the path of leadership, the simulation opened the gate and it is now up to the participants to decide if they are worthy of the quest.

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