

Chapter 77

How Virtual Work Informs Virtual Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the connections between behaviors in virtual work and virtual learning environments. Benefits and challenges of virtual communities are reviewed. Following a review of organizational and educational literature, the authors identified six core competencies that emerged with shared emphasis as keys to virtual environment success. The authors appeal to educational leaders to assess and develop student, faculty, and administrator skills in developing trust, building relationships, empowerment, coaching and mentoring, inclusion and communication management.

INTRODUCTION

Technology enhancements have expanded how we approach work and education. At times, leaders in work and education environments have scrambled to keep pace with technology. As technology enhancements have enabled us to collaborate more freely for virtual work environments, it has also shifted how we consume education. Birth of the internet and the world wide web at the turn of the century led to changes in technology that beget changes in organizational behavior. As adoption of virtual work and virtual learning communities became more widespread, leadership practices in both environments shifted. With the advent of virtual work and virtual learning communities, traditional leadership approaches such as servant leadership (e.g. behaviors that help others accomplish shared objectives by facilitating individual development, empowerment, and collective work that is consistent with the health and long-term welfare of followers) (Yukl, 2013, p. 348-349); transactional leadership (e.g. leadership

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behavior that motivates followers by appealing to their exchanges that support self-interest) (Yulk, 2013); transformational leadership (e.g. leadership that appeals to the moral values of followers in an attempt to raise their consciousness about ethical issues and to mobilize their energy and resources to reform institutions”) (Yukl, 2013, p. 231); and shared leadership (e.g. “a mutual influence process, characterized by collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility, whereby team members lead each other toward the achievement of goals”) (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014, p. 393) gave way to new leadership ideas.

Researchers and practitioners began considering the true meaning of leading in virtual environments. Early iterations of virtual work and virtual learning communities led researchers to question whether organizational and educational leaders ignored the behavioral changes required to successfully navigate technology-mediated interactions (Gurr, 2004). Early attempts to understand this phenomenon looked for behavioral symmetry between virtual work and virtual learning communities (Parchoma, 2005). The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the connection between exhibited behaviors in virtual work and virtual learning communities with consideration for how expanded technology use and application has made *virtual* a basic approach to work (Chen, Wu, & Yang, 2008) and learning. With this as a guiding principle, the authors explore how virtual learning behaviors are informed by virtual work behaviors and appeal to educational and organizational leaders to develop expanded leadership competencies and virtual leadership practices to better meet the educational and performance needs of virtual environments.

BACKGROUND

Virtual Benefits

Virtual work leads to multiple organizational benefits. Advancements in communication technology make it possible for global companies to bring together people from around the world to connect and collaborate on virtual teams. Dispersed, virtual teams use electronically-mediated communication to collaborate on shared organizational goals (Hertel, Geister, & Konradt, 2005; Morgan, Paucar-Caceres, & Wright, 2014). Virtual work leads to multiple positive economic and environmental byproducts including decreased travel and facility use (Duarte & Snyder, 1999), increased efficiency and productivity (Eom, 2009), flexibility and convenience, access for participants otherwise excluded due to disabilities (Nydegger & Nydegger, 2010), removal of geographical limitations (Hunsaker & Hunsaker, 2008), access to international talent and expertise, as well as asynchronous collaboration (Barnwell, Nedrick, Rudolf, Seasay, & Wellen, 2014). Although in a modified context, these benefits also apply to virtual learning experiences. Learners experience similar efficiencies and conveniences. Access to virtual learning opportunities such as online courses and degree programs enables learners remove traditional impediments such as time and distance.

Virtual Challenges

Virtual learning and work communities present similar challenges. Participants rely heavily on technology to mediate interaction (Olsen, Appunn, McCallister, Walters, & Grinnell, 2014; Parchoma, 2005). Participation can be hindered by novice user experience or software and hardware challenges (Leidner, Kayworth, & Mora-Tavarez, 2001/2002). Ambiguity often results from lack of in-person, face-to-face

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