

Chapter XIX

Building a Holistic Foundation for Leadership and Management through Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

Leadership and management, in their truest state, represent a compilation of knowledge gained through the entire spectrum of experiential learning. While these terms are familiar as unique and individual entities, in today's global economy they are inexorably linked and increasingly essential. The paradigms of a Novice Leader/Manager and Leader/Manager are discussed along with the communication and acquisition of essential knowledge areas and skill sets via e-learning. Explored are three key areas: the importance of building a holistic foundation for the individual's role as a Leader/Manager, the essential journey the student, as a Novice Leader/Manager, must take to ferret out and enhance his/her own ability to recognize and close gaps in personal Leader/Manager development, and pathways to guide and support the student's discovery and transition from difficulties and pitfalls to operating at a point of top level skills and interaction via long distance online learning.

INTRODUCTION

In today's e-paced world, the words supervisor and boss have often been replaced by leader or team leader. Although an individual's title may be Vice President, Director, or Manager, he or she is called a leader and expected to manage his or her end of the business. If we were to divide

the two titles into simplified terms, a leader is someone who is at the forefront, charging ahead, gathering new ideas, determining strategies and direction (Yukl, 1989). A manager on the other hand, is someone who makes certain all the new ideas are appropriately processed and the strategic directives are measured and aligned with the day-to-day operational objectives (Kotter, 1988).

In an ideal workplace, a leader and a manager are two different types of talents processing business from two uniquely different perspectives. Both are essential, both are distinct.

A reality check would find that in a great many businesses, leaders are expected to be managers and vice versa. Since it is most likely that an individual's situation is or will be part of the reality check, rather than the ideal workplace, the individual will need to acquire skill sets in both the leader and manager arenas.

On closer inspection, Leader/Manager (LM) skill sets should be a fusion of two very specific actions: (a) the attainment of knowledge and proficiency coupled with (b) the utilization of the knowledge and acquired competencies. The synthesis of both actions should then be employed as a keystone where additional learnings can take hold. Complimentary, and mutually sustaining this base takes shape, transforms, and matures into a holistic resource for a LM or a Novice Leader Manager (NLM).

This chapter discusses and sets the framework for a holistic approach to the NLM and LM role in today's global economy. It examines the system for metamorphosis of the NLM to LM as well as the roles and responsibilities of the learner and the instructor in an online setting.

BACKGROUND

"We know the best way to build ownership is to give over the creation process to those who will be charged with its implementation" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 66). A holistic approach is not only about learning content, it is also about perspectives. To engage holism, instructors of leadership and management must be able to first and foremost transfer ownership of the student's education from the classroom, be it bricks or clicks, to the student. Second, they must change their paradigms concerning how the learnings will be utilized. No longer is it safe to assume that because a student

is majoring in areas such as journalism or art they will never need to show a proficiency in what has traditionally been thought of as Business Management skill sets. Finally, they must understand that historically, most individuals entering the workplace have been and still are woefully lacking in basic LM skills. "...young people today... learn to take orders, not give them. The result is that most young people entering the work force do not have an understanding of how to lead others" (Manske, 1987, p. 13).

For most processes, systems, or plans, there is a definite starting point: 1, 2, 3, A, B, C, a place of beginning. Established educational protocols would view one of the best systems for knowledge transfer grounded in the combined learning and shared understanding of co-constructivism (Reuser, 2001). This basis, while sound can prove difficult in an e-setting. Many e-learning sessions take place when the individual is able to schedule the educational opportunity midst personal and business responsibilities as opposed to the routine of a conventional classroom. Removed from a traditional venue, replete with constant interaction and a mutual learning experience, the e-learner is by definition detached from the practice of joint learning and plunged into what could be an isolated chasm of information and processes.

Holistic foundations on the other hand, are better suited for the e-learner, as they allow for quick and easy reinforcement of the student's own erudition and ability and do not rely on the accessibility of others for understanding or knowledge transfer. Allowing the student the flexibility of curriculum, holism reinforces the student's personal self-worth and provides a firm footing for the growth process. In building a holistic foundation, the best place for the student to start is exactly at his present point of reality, i.e., current knowledge, skills, and what is most important to the student at this particular time. Starting at different points and traveling different paths with a variety of students all at once, may seem a bit overwhelming. Traditional formats

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