

Chapter XLVIII

Technology Enhanced Collaborative Leadership Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a case study of the process of employing technology in a project involving the development and presentation of a unique leadership program for the not-for-profit sector in a major Canadian city. The project relied on telephone and Internet technology as a primary means of communication between the three women developing and delivering this program. The chapter provides a background on the development of the program; the ways in which technology was employed; and the problems and benefits of employing technology in doing this. Finally, it identifies the strategies and interpersonal skills found to be most effective in facilitating technology-enhanced collaboration, and makes recommendations for maximizing the benefits of using technology in the process of creating new approaches to leadership development. The chapter can contribute to the literature in the field of leadership development, collaborative program development and diversity management in the field of leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, within Western contexts, the concept of leadership has developed as a particularly individualistic venture. However, the varying changes

in the local and global marketplace, and within organizations, has ushered in multiple constructs of leadership that are informed by varying cultural practices, social expectations, and the involvement of organizations that are located within cultures

that are foregrounded within modes of communal leadership. This unsettling of “the leader” position has required a shift in our ideas regarding leadership; the practice of leadership; and also the way in which we manage leadership issues.

Leadership is emerging as quintessentially a collaborative process where decisions are no longer the sole charge of an individual. Rather, there are multiple stakeholders who are expected to play an integral role in any decision making process. In addition to the multiple emerging constructs of leadership which are significantly informed by globalization practices, there are attendant changes regarding how leadership is developed and negotiated. Collaborative practices continue to be identified as the hallmark of effective leadership, despite the role that technology plays.

Pearson (2000) for example defines globalization as “the process in which economic, financial, technical and cultural transactions between different countries and communities throughout the world are increasingly interconnected, and embody common elements of experience, practice, and understanding” (p 10). Globalization then, facilitates a sharing of ideas and resources across vast geographical boundaries. Prior to the explosion of various technological developments such as the telephone, and more recently the Internet, the levels of contact between equidistant groups required enormous amounts of cash infusion and time involvement. The evolving technologies that have accompanied global development have resulted in the removal of geographic and time/space boundaries that in the past limited the potential for cross border development projects. Leadership therefore is no longer contained within organizational or geographical boundaries, thereby requiring an increased usage of technological forms of communication.

According to Appadurai (1990) with the advent of “print capitalism, a new power was unleashed on the world, the power of mass literacy and its attendant large-scale production of projects of ethnic affinity that were remarkably free of the

need for face-to-face communication ... between persons and groups” (p. 325). Therefore in this chapter we will examine the manner in which leadership program development has unfolded in a process that relied heavily on technological advancements and limited the usage of face-to-face communication between the parties. This leadership program was developed and designed for the executive directors, senior managers and board chairs of not-for-profit organizations in a major Canadian city. Technology was a central means of communications between the program developers; the primary forms being the telephone and Internet. The chapter will discuss the problems and possibilities of using technology; highlight the ways in which tasks and roles were delegated, discuss the strategies that we used to facilitate this process; explore the cross-cultural dynamics that emerged and the processes that were employed to address the conflicts that ensued. Finally, we will identify the strategies and interpersonal skills that we believe were most effective in facilitating technology-enhanced collaborative leadership development.

Drawing from the work of a range of theorists in the field of leadership development, we will discuss the historical development of the field of leadership and also provide a summary of the contemporary issues that are emergent in the field. We will also discuss the way in which globalization practices, and technology most specifically, impacts on collaborative development processes. Additionally we discuss the ways in which our personal locations and professional backgrounds, particularly in light of racially marked sites of social difference and educational trajectories were implicated in the development process and the role that technology played in unraveling these conflicts. The issue of social difference and understandings is a unique and important aspect for analysis in this paper given the changing demography of Canadian society. In addition, although conversations happen across a technological divide such as email which includes

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