Chapter 30
The Productive Leadership Game:
From Theory to Game-Based Learning

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to illustrate how new digital leadership simulation game, Productive Leadership Game, can foster the leadership competencies and actions to improve team based and organizational productivity. Game's theoretical roots are based on the human capital production function for public organizations, which is also described in this article. Human capital production function illustrates the significance of the human resource management actions for the organizational performance and the quality of working life connection to team performance. A case study in municipal business is performed using a Finnish mid-sized case organisation. In terms of evidence-based theory of productivity, this article describes methodology of how complex and multitude cause-relationship can be gamified to serious game for learning purposes. The article makes a significant contribution to public sector research and management, as it explains the ontology of the performance and productivity of public organisation and illustrate method to multiply essential learning to practice.

INTRODUCTION

As global economy growth has been slow the public organizations are confronting fiscal distress, and therefore the organization performance improvement has become important issue. There are increased pressures for public sector organizations to improve their performance. Organizations are producing services within the limits of budget constraints, thus it is essential to turn the inputs into high-qualified

service products using effective processes, building innovative HRM practices as well as investing in the quality of working life and psychological well-being on the employees. Leadership is one of the major sources of organization's competitive advantage and productivity. Public sector organizations have invested in leadership development training programs which aim to strengthen the leadership cultures, competence, leadership identities and the whole organizational performance. These development programs have usually been implemented as lectures, seminars and workshops comprising theoretical approaches to leadership and testing leadership skills utilizing various questionnaires and self-evaluations. However, the effectiveness of these training programs has remained ambiguous and they are also often disconnected from the distinct management practices. Furthermore, despite of these numerous trainings and management courses aimed for public managers, there are several studies and arguments which yet reveal the leadership problems in public sector organizations. That is, managers lack skills in strategic actions, change management, conflict resolution and in enhancing collaborative and entrepreneurial organizational culture, for example.

Continuous performance improvement in private companies – with the entrepreneur mind-set - has a long history. Due to the productivity and quality pressures, this same kind of entrepreneur mind-set should also be adapted at the public sector and public sector leadership. The public sector entrepreneurship means that organization adapt the culture where continuous improvement is at every employee's mind-set. This does not mean innovative re-engineering projects but rather in everyday orientation to solve problems, act proactively and make innovative improvements at work environment, customer service and, processes. Because culture is deeply rooted at the organization operations, the middle managers' cognitive competence, attitudes and behavior are the most important elements in changing or maintaining the elements of the entrepreneurial behavior and culture in public sector organizations. Middle managers are described as initiators and the main source in advancing public entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial behavior among employees (Borins, 2000; Bernier & Hafsi, 2007). That is, employees act entrepreneurially if they perceive their managers as being supportive of such behavior. The entrepreneurial orientation in management requires active engagement with the stakeholders, systematic human resource management practices, attributes to motivate, delegate, organize and think strategically as well as the ability to develop and manage a flexible, innovatory organization (e.g. Boyett, 1996). That is, managers need new effective methods to really understand their facilitative role, importance and effects on their team performance and on the public sector organization productivity.

However, organizational entrepreneurship as well as leadership is difficult to teach at the classroom. It is also typical, that leadership training programs teach mainly leadership theories, concepts, scientific views and studies. This kind of training doesn't necessarily promote the actual leadership skills, behavior and competences needed in every-day organizational life. Leadership theories, for example, are often quite difficult to implement in organization practices. Also reason-cause relationships are much more complex in real life compared to theoretical views and scientific assumptions. We argue that more practice-based teaching orientation and tools are needed in leadership training in order to give a learner a more pragmatic view into the organizational world. That is, the content of the training should represent the diversity of challenges and address the real-world problems public managers are facing in organizations. As Siewiorek et al. (2013) stress, leadership competence develops only when learner is forced to address the challenge of innovating, inspiring and adapting. According to several studies, various evidence-based practices in leadership development are effective and lead to favorable performance improvement results. Therefore, public sector managers need effective ways to understand and learn the

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