

PEER TEACHING OF SHARED LEADERSHIP

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Presentation Track: Practice

Techniques to enhance students' abilities to take on leadership roles, foster shared leadership and develop their ability to improve group member's confidence and skills are described. A combination of lecture, audience participation and discussion will target those engaged in leadership education who wish to develop shared leadership skills in groups.

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Peer Teaching of Shared Leadership

Introduction

Professors employ many approaches to leadership education including lecture, journaling, service learning, skills training and case studies. This paper describes the use of in-course students to act as peer teachers in the process of learning and developing group leadership. The learning objectives of peer development of leadership are to utilize students' individual skills to develop teams based on shared leadership and to engage group members in their own development and the development of others as leaders.

Background

Facilitative leadership is leadership that promotes respect and positive relationships between team members, productive conflict resolution, and open expression of ideas and opinions (Hirst, Mann, Bain, Pirola–Merlo and Richver, 2004). Day, Gronn and Salas (2004) describe a shared distributed process in which all team members participate in the leadership process creating a capacity for versatility and adaptability. Reasons for leaders to teach other leaders include gaining personal satisfaction from watching others grow, developing their own skills as a consequence of sharing experiences resolving business (Mumford, 1998), adding considerable value with minimum expense and building leadership within and across groups (Cacioppe, 1998). Learners can serve as sources of information and interact with each other by assuming roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formal trained teacher or tutor This has the potential for creating a rich learning environment(Liu and Hansen, 2004).

How it works

The author's graduate course in Facilitation and Conflict Management and undergraduate course in Leadership Development in Rural Organizations are structured in such a way that peer to peer development of group member's leadership skills is central to the learning experience.

I lecture on several central themes modeling a facilitative teaching style. Lecture topics include oral presentation skills, meeting management, conflict management, facilitation, teambuilding, group dynamics and networking. Students are administered a personality assessment instrument, such as 'True Colors', to engage them in the exploration of their group work values and those of others. In groups of 4-6, students conduct lectures on the different leadership theories in such a way as to demystify the academic jargon and then come up with a class exercise illustrating the theory under discussion. All group members take part and must facilitate a portion of the exercise. As part of the group experience they coach each other for presentation skills, techniques to engage the class during their presentations and subsequently, to evaluate their group members' performance.

Additionally, students are assigned a number of 'cases' that require leading their group to reach decisions and create effective oral presentations in which all members must

participate. Examples include survival scenarios, marketing strategies, conflict management strategies, strategies for dealing with difficult people and negotiation problems. The students submit e-journals of learning's gained throughout the course, Make a group oral and written presentation analyzing the leadership of a volunteer or not for profit organization of their choice and develop a paper and make an oral presentation on their personal vision of leadership. The students in the graduate course are required to work with community organizations to conduct focus groups on topics of interest to the community also.

Results to date

For the past 5 years I have used students' e-journals, personal vision papers and course evaluation comments as a basis for assessing the effectiveness on peer teaching of leadership. Some observations of those students who were most engaged follow.

"I can't think of another class or group situation that has ever provided this kind of growth and learning. The personalized critiques were obviously a huge force in moving us all forward if education was structured in this way everyone would have valuable personal insight and awareness much earlier in their lives."

"I thought this week's class was amazing! I was amazed because this is the first time in my considerable experience with classroom settings that an instructor allowed for a critical, formative evaluation of the program. I really feel that we (class participants) have considerable ownership of the program andthat we can take steps to make changes. How incredibly empowering."

"This has been the ultimate in learning experiences because every medium of teaching was used. We have all had an opportunity to learn from others in a very creative and impactful way."

"The place where I learned the most in the class was in the group work. I realize that I have to talk with people and not just to people. To me working with the difficult personalities was the hardest part of the class. Its not that we didn't have the techniques to handle problems it is just that we didn't handle them at all."

"I do feel more comfortable being assertive. Much of this is due to the multiple 'play-acting' scenarios we do in class, putting ourselves into different roles. It reminds me of what theater must be like"

"This class is about putting words into action, facilitating the catalyzing of action, building the confidence to turn ideas into action, to help others turn ideas into action. We really bonded together and created an incredibly supportive environment to explore our own gremlins, to face our fears and to challenge ourselves without fear of judgment or making mistakes or looking silly or feeling inadequate."

“I watched fellow classmates come out of their shells in my small group environment and then with some encouragement and motivation they were able to carry this involvement to the larger class as well.”

“My peers were all great coaches because they helped me to identify my needs and supported me so much that my confidence grew.”

“The (graduate focus group) meeting was phenomenal. No word of a lie. Individually we were great and as a team we functioned like a well-oiled machine. Kris got a job offer.”

Conclusions

Peer interaction in the teaching of leadership provides a valuable approach to leadership development. Students gain confidence in sharing leadership by taking charge, following, coaching and facilitating discussion within their group. Instructors gain rich insights from participating in the peer learning experience.

References

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