

Leadership Philosophy

ORGL 620 – GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

SCOTT MONTNEY

Artisans all have tools they proudly wield in the pursuit of their craft. Musicians utilize instruments of wood, brass, string and voice. Sculptors and painters manipulate their materials of metal, clay, pigment and canvas, while dancers use their bodies and costumes. These tools are used in support of the personal expression for the artist and many seem to be born with natural talents to manipulate these tools in pursuit of their expression. However, none excel at their craft without dedication and deliberate practice. The same is true for leadership. Each of us brings our own combination of life experiences, personal traits and stylistic preferences to the practice of leadership. Additionally, I believe a leader is not a singular person, but a member of a community. The community may be a business with goals of sales and profit; or it may be a professional, civic or volunteer association with goals of serving specific needs of others. The community may even be our own individual family focusing on the growth and education of our loved ones. Each of these communities have their own goals and purposes and we are members of them all. As leaders, we excel in our craft not because of the specific traits and behaviors we exhibit to provide control or influence, but in the interactions and relationships we cultivate with the members of our communities as we guide them. It is in these varying roles of our lives that the context of my leadership exists.

Early in my organizational leadership studies, I was exposed to Ignatian principles such as purposeful reflection and imagination to see and then see again my understanding and my role within the groups I belong. Through this continued act of deliberate reflection and contemplation, I become aware of myself and how my experiences and traits are likely to help or hinder my pursuit of effective leadership. I become aware of my own personal truths, my strengths and my faults. I believe this practice is the foundation from which my leadership philosophy has been built.

As a leader of a community, I provide clarity for the community members on what shared values exist and what goals are being targeted. By “modeling the way” and “inspiring a shared vision” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), I intend to energize and focus the community in pursuit of our goals. I accomplish this not through a few singular epic moments of clarity and design, but via thoughtful process and energy contributed to the community in support of our efforts. In the professional environment, this manifests itself by integrating the vision for change into everyday communications such as email messages, meetings and team presentations. I also build energy within the community by looking for ways to structure change such that numerous small wins build upon one another. Rather than prescribe methods of execution, as a leader, I actively listen and engage with all members of the community. Through this dialog, I demonstrate tolerance for viewpoints and methodologies different from my own, encouraging further dialog and interaction within the community members.

In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge describes mental models as ranging from simple generalizations to the complex theories and assumptions we hold about the world around us. He continues that “what is most important to grasp is that mental models are active – they shape how we act” (Senge, 2006, p. 164). What I have found in my studies at Gonzaga is the myriad of subtle ways in which mental models affect our thinking beyond preconceptions or prejudices. I have observed and participated in teams that had effective processes and fared well with their assigned tasks and yet came to see even as we engaged in defining and working towards our shared vision, our mental models of the tasks at hand and the associated systems impacted how we defined our vision in the first place. In my efforts to surface and challenge mental models with my communities, I rely on a method of communication labeled Dialogic Coordinates. Briefly described, this consists of:

1. Listen and learn: Listening to comprehend and respect the position of the Other
2. Dialog must not be demanded: By demanding that dialogical communication be present, we project our own understanding of dialog onto the Other
3. Bias is inevitable: The viewpoints we hold predispose us to a particular understanding and the same is true of the Other and their own understanding
4. Not all communications require dialog: Not all communication needs require dialog, monologue or technical dialog is, at times, warranted.
5. Remain open to new possibilities: As we learn, opportunities for new connections may arise.

The intersection of these five coordinates of communication become the Dialog Coordinates and is where effective dialog is likely to flourish (Arnett, Fritz and Bell, 2008 p. 90). Using this method of collaborative communication, I am again able to model that way as our community expands our understanding of the changing environment we operate within.

Moving beyond the principles of authentic leadership (Northouse, 2016, p. 195-205) and shared vision, I have found the concept of team learning to be one of the most impactful to my leadership practice. “Individual learning, at some level, is irrelevant for organizational [community] learning. Individuals learn all the time and yet there is no organizational [community] learning. But if teams learn, they become a microcosm for learning through the organization [community]” (Senge, 2006, p. 219). To foster team learning, I have created an integration of Tuckman’s model of group development (Raynolds, et al, 2007, p. 73) with Lencioni’s model of the five team dysfunctions (Lencioni, 2002, p. 187). The interplay of these

two models provides a valuable reference as I work to build effective teams within the communities I lead.

Tuckman's forming stage and Lencioni's development of trust are foundational to effective team development and are therefore tightly coupled with each other. Beyond that, I utilize the layers offered by Lencioni in his model as a bridge to facilitate the transition into further stages of development within Tuckman's model. An example of my integration of these models is summarized in the following figure:



I guide a team toward the top of this composite model by encouraging community members to experiment with various solutions to new challenges and celebrating their successes while treating unsuccessful attempts as learning experiences. In doing so, I ultimately provide an environment that challenges community members to be accountable for their own development and transformational growth.

As I reflect on my personal leadership philosophy and goals, I am reminded of a line from the character Nanny McPhee in the Universal Pictures motion picture of the same name:

“There is something you should understand about the way I work. When you need me but do not want me, then I must stay. When you want me but no longer need me, then I have to go. It's rather sad, really, but there it is.”

While I certainly do not intend to completely disappear, effective leadership is, in many ways, a similar paradox for me. Having been effective in my practice of leadership, my community will have benefited from my guidance in several ways with many in community moving on to begin the process of leadership anew.

References

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