

Increasing management competency skills of post-secondary level leaders

By
Sheila Grangeiro
GTEP North Miami Beach

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Abstract

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The following concept paper discusses how to increase the management competency skills of post-secondary level leaders. The paper focuses on a variety of authors who have conducted research regarding technology, leadership, and education. The target group was 1,280 managers working in various leadership roles in a post-secondary school in the United States comprised of 12,767 employees. This report emphasizes the importance of collaboration when it comes to learning. This proposal shows how leaders and managers are interested in attending training and in receiving alternative training such as online training. Also discussed is how the implementation of a social learning network will promote collaboration, knowledge sharing, networking, and an increase in leadership competencies

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Chapter 1: Purpose

Background Information for Purpose

Leadership is a key component of any organization. This organization is a post-secondary school in the United States comprised of 12,767 employees. Currently there are more than 2,000 employees in a leadership position. In such a large organization, departments are comprised of various units and their individual leaders. This structure creates several autonomous units that foster an environment of decentralization of their departments. In turn, leaders are afforded the leverage of operating according to their discretion. Recent budget cuts have contributed to the slowed hiring process. With demands of each department increasing, leaders are forced to branch outside of their title and do several jobs to meet demands of their unit.

The university is presently striving to become a part of the Association of American University. The current expectation of the university's leaders is to have high level performance incorporating the methodology of service excellence. In order to achieve this goal, the university needs to support its leaders in attaining the competencies needed in order to become a high performing leader. The university is actively offering a competency based leadership program for its current and aspiring leaders. This program is comprised of several online and face-to-face training sessions along with coaching and mentoring opportunities conducted by fellow leaders.

In order to increase the management competency skills of post-secondary level leaders at the university, the organization needs to implement an educational strategy that will allow leaders to expand their knowledge and identify their skill gaps and understand the importance of making time to learn about them. In order to meet these demands the university is currently working on alternative delivery methods for training and resources available to its leaders. The

university also has implemented an annual performance appraisal process that allows leaders to determine the competency relevant to their current skill gap. Once the leader knows the competencies they are lacking, they have a chance to go to try and attain that knowledge and skill. In order support leaders in the university to achieve this goal, the university needs to continue to look at different avenues of disseminating information about resources and trainings available through various marketing outlets. The institution also needs to implement a new strategy to reach the leaders with very little time such as creating m-learning, live and pre-recorded trainings done through various outlets.

Problem Statement

Leaders at the University are currently lacking several management competencies and due to time constraints attached to their positions; they are unable to fill their skill gaps through traditional training methods independently. Leaders should be able to attain management competencies throughout their career using training and other educational methods.

Needs Assessment Instrument Design

To prove that traditional training methods alone are unable to fill leaders' skill gaps a survey will be sent out to university managers and leaders assessing their knowledge of technology and other mediums used for learning. Currently, leaders complain about traditional classes and not having enough time to attend courses, but are aware of the need for leadership skills and training. With the organization's desire to have the tools available for employees to gain key leadership skills needed to strengthen performance, a new approach to learning needs to be implemented. It is vital for the organization to understand the value of its leaders encompassing the skills needed to be successful and being able to reach the organization's goals. The data

provided through this assessment will identify alternate methods that could be implemented for learning in this organization's environment.

Leaders and managers will be asked to provide information on their availability, current learning methods, knowledge of technologies, and current use of popular technologies.

Technology now is prominent in our society and it is important to evaluate where the organization currently is and how we are to integrate new methodologies to leaders. As an assessment of the organization's leaders is made, the level of assistance needed to integrate modern technologies to learning will be determined. In order for an innovative approach to be executed, a process must be placed that will maximize both the organization and employee efficiency for success. The data collected should determine which method will be most susceptible to leaders.

Needs Assessment Report

There are 1,280 managers working at the university in various leadership roles. A total of 100 leaders were evaluated in this assessment. These employees were randomly selected from different areas and departments at the university. This assessment was sent electronically and responses are completely anonymous. There was no data collected on age or gender for this survey. All employees were given the same survey to evaluate the level of assistance needed to integrate modern technologies to the learning environment.

Table 1

Leadership Skills Assessment Results (Questions 1, 2, 4, 5)

Question	% of managers with positive responses	% of managers with negative responses
How often do you attend live trainings?	80	20
How often do you use the web?	89	11

How interested are you in receiving training online?	65	35
How comfortable are you with technology?	52	48

Table 2

Leadership Skills Assessment Results (Question 3)

Question	Response				
	Text	Web	Data	Text + Web +Data	None
What types of features do you have on your cell phone?	15	5	10	60	10

After reviewing all the data from the completed surveys, the results show that leaders and managers are interested in attending training and in receiving training online. In Table 1, questions 1 and 2 report that more than half of the employees' responses were positive when it came to an interest in training and use of technology. Questions 4 and 5 report that more than half of the employees' responses were also positive when it came to the level of interest in online training and comfort level with technology. Question 3 demonstrates that leaders have access to phones that have text, web, and data capabilities. By conducting this leadership skills assessment we now have a greater knowledge about the needs of the employees to determine the level of assistance needed prior to integrating technology into leadership development. The current leadership and development program needs to be altered in order to provide employees with more opportunities to learn and gain competencies to meet the organization's goals.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Performance and Leadership Development

Currently, in order to stay competitive, organizations are seeking to maintain a high performing workforce (Ketter, 2006). Ketter noted that executives recognize the importance of the learning function and its essential effect on performance in an organization. Allen & Hartman (2008) state that leadership development takes place when feedback and an understanding of leadership are provided to individuals. Therefore enabling the leader to process and assess the information given to them and utilize this knowledge for development. Smith (2010) reports that the faster the organization assesses their leadership situation the quicker they can commence improvement in their leadership development process.

Gannan (2008) found that the younger generation of leaders requires new learning methods. In order to implement new learning modalities, Gannan notes the importance of workforce demographics. Quinney (2010) provided information that showed how younger generations use technology to collaborate and quickly gather information. Quinney also found that the long term effectiveness of employee development demonstrated employees being more productive and efficient. It is implied by both Gannan and Quinney that traditional learning methods are not enough. They both demonstrate the need for organizations to think outside the box when it comes to leadership development and training.

Allen & Hartman (2008) further explained that provided a learning opportunity, leaders would strive to gain knowledge that would improve their ability to lead and grow in various situations. Their research showed that there are four themes when it comes to leadership development: (a) personal growth; (b) conceptual understanding; (c) feedback; and (d) skill building. This demonstrates that a variety of approaches can be used in order to achieve

leadership development. Allen & Hartman found that based of organizational needs and other distinctions in organizations, different tools, interventions, and experiences could be conducive for effective learning. These sources of learning can help performance and leadership development techniques improve and become more efficient.

Educational Value

Hildebrand (2006) reported that there was a high demand in companies for project managers to attain more knowledge skills in their field through education. He wrote on how companies worked with a variety of academic establishments to create tailor-made trainings for their staff. Therefore, demonstrating the value these organizations have in their employees' education. These educational implementations are done in order to improve employee's performance and the organization's overall success. As organizations rely on their staff and leaders to be the driver for success, they will continue to place value in their education.

Frahm & Brown (2006) used empirical data to show the significance in skills development when implementing change in the organization. Their study focuses on the need for managers to develop communicative competencies in an environment that is consistently changing. They note that a boost in manager's competencies occurs when learning is adapted by organizations. The study shows that organizations need to commit to aiding employees in learning and building their skills in order to reach success. Unfortunately, Frahm & Brown point out in their study that a high percent of change management programs fail. Demonstrating how important it is to plan before implementing any learning structure to an organization.

On the other hand Naquin & Holton (2006) focus on management development programs that are successful. They report on how competency based programs are the solution for companies wanting to achieve their strategic goals through their managers. They find that this

training strategy has become sustainable in today's society where knowledge is a tool. Naquin & Holton point that in order for organizations to have high performing individuals, they need to observe their processes in leadership development. Their conclusion was that business results directly correlate with employee's performance and that in order for a business to succeed; their managers need to have the skills to be a high performing individual.

Technology's Impact

With today's result driven economy, organizations are striving to maximize time and money while still equipping their employees with the tools to make them successful. Quinney, Smith, & Galbraith (2010) wrote that in order to remain relevant, employees need to be proficient with technology. In their research, it was a skill gap in technology between employees and student patrons that lead them to see a need in training employees on current technologies. This enabled the implantation of a self-directed training program that promoted learning by teaching technology applicable to the employee's job. They found that making employees comfortable with the technology and focusing on their personal needs increased their motivation to learn and better service their customers.

There are several technologies out there waiting to service a number of learning organizations. Pace (2011), reviews five prominent technology suppliers in the learning and development field. Noting an increase in the training and development industry, Pace points out the augmented demand for learning technologies. With mobile phones and other technologies evolving so quickly it is vital to this industry that suppliers and services are ready keep up with the rate of change. Pace reports on how these companies understand the needs of businesses and the need of learning being available continuously. She also states on how social media is being used to enhance training. Technology trends in learning programs and being on top of emerging

learning technologies is essential for companies like: Blackboard, Element K and NexLearn. From a business perspective, Pace discusses the opportunities organizations have with suppliers in future market trends and innovation.

McGee (2006) reported on how Gap allowed educational technology to help improve their management team's leadership skills. She noted how blended approaches to learning lead to a positive result in performance and productivity. Web-based programs are implemented into the company's leadership training. The impact of these interactive e-learning trainings has maximized success for Gap. According to McGee, a return on investment has been shown with improvement in manager's aptitude and skills.

Hartley (2006) emphasizes the importance of collaboration when it comes to learning. He describes how this is now done in the world of technology and how collaboration is facilitated with technology. A variety of communication tools can be used for collaboration and it can include social software to aid in organizational collaboration. Hartley also explains the importance of implantation when it comes to a new application or technology in an organization. He found that appropriate training and support needs to be implemented when there is a lack of technology skills is observed in the organization. This will provide employees with support and confidence they need to be able to utilize the technology and be able to share information with one another and maximize knowledge transfer. Hartley's key point is that in collaboration technology is just a medium used to reach the company's goal and it is vital for the company to understand their employees' needs.

Summary & Conclusion

According to Ketter (2006) "In today's ever-changing business climate, organizations constantly seek ways to remain competitive". Performance and leadership development are vital

to an organization's success. With the increasing demand for companies to have high performing individuals, companies need to implement new strategies for learning that will meet the needs of employees. As building employees' competencies and skills continue to be an essential part of business, organizations will continue to value their educational and training needs. The strategies companies implement for learning should encompass technologies that are currently being used to meet demands of a high paced economy. As technology continues to evolve its impact in organizational learning will continue to increase.

Chapter 3: Method

Discrepancy Statement, Solution Strategies, Goal, Objectives, and Activities

Discrepancy statement: Leaders at the University are currently lacking several management competencies and due to time constraints attached to their positions; they are unable to fill their skill gaps through traditional training methods alone.

Solution Strategies:

1. Implement a social learning network at the university, for knowledge sharing and collaboration for leaders enrolled in courses
2. Increase offerings of webinars for leaders and managers
3. Create a podcast library for leadership trainings

Goal: Leaders should be able to attain management competencies throughout their career through training and other educational methods.

Objective 1: By the end of the first week, 85% of the participants will have accessed the social learning network system at least once.

Activity 1: Each employee will create a username and password using their university email in order to login to the system.

Activity 2: After logging into the system employees will explore the system and get acquainted with its functionalities.

Objective 2: By the end of week two, 95% of the participants will have joined the corresponding learning group to their assigned training.

Activity 1: Employee will introduce themselves to group.

Activity 2: Employee will give feedback on topic discussed in group.

Objective 3: By the end of week three, 82% of the participants will be posting “conversations” (informal information sharing).

Activity 1: Employee will post information and questions about job and course to all peers (not restricted to group).

Activity 2: Employee will respond to peer’s questions and give solution to problems.

Objective 4: By the end of week four, 80% of the participants will be collaborating with peers in their group.

Activity 1: Each participant will give feedback to the facilitator’s article posted and respond to peers’ feedback in group.

Activity 2: Participants will contribute information and articles to group.

Objective 5: By the end of week five, 85 % of participants will regularly check their social learning network and give input.

Activity 1: Participants will consistently login and verify activity in group and conversations.

Activity 2: They will begin discussions in their group and contribute links, videos and other resources for peers.

Objective 6: By the end of week six, 80% of participants will create a learning group as a subject matter expert.

Activity 1: Leader will make peers aware of their group and ask for participation of other managers and leaders in their area.

Activity 2: They will contribute and ask for feedback in group.

Matrix

Weeks	Facilitator	Materials	Teaching Strategies	Learning Activities
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Prior to Implementation	Plans implementation, customizes, and creates how-to tutorials and demonstrations.			
Week 1 Objective 1	Send email notifications to employees with tutorial guides.	Computer & internet access.	Tutorials will teach participants on how to use the social networking system.	Each employee will create a username and password using their university email in order to login to the system. After logging into the system employees will explore system and get acquainted with its functionalities.
Week 2 Objective 2	Create instructions and select topic for appropriate course to post. This will allow participants to further discuss how they applied what they learned on the job.	Computer & internet access.	The facilitator will give participant instructions to use group and post topic.	Employee will give an introduction to group. Employee will give feedback on topic discussed in group.
Week 3 Objective 3	Create a knowledge sharing environment with the social	Computer & internet access.	The facilitator will observe participant interactions and spot check if	Employee will post information and questions about job and course to all peers (not

	network by allowing employees to post as they please in the groups.		groups are posting and collaborating with each other.	restricted to group). Employee will respond to peer's questions and give solution to problems.
Week 4 Objective 4	Review feedback and check participation.	Computer & internet access.	Facilitator will review how much participants are engaged and will review post to see how knowledge is being shared and how much is being applied on the job.	Each participant will give feedback to the facilitator's article posted and respond to peer's feedback in group. Participants will contribute information and articles to group.
Week 5 Objective 5	No action required from facilitator.	Computer & internet access.	By this week, no observation will be needed. Participants should be able to self-engage and transfer and share learning from courses and experiences.	Participants will consistently login and verify activity in group and conversations. They will begin to begin discussions in their group and contribute links, videos and other resources for peers.
Week 6 Objective 6	Send a follow-up email to participant to retain feedback on experience and share	Computer & internet access.	With follow-up email, reminders should trigger participants that are already using system to share	Leader will make peers aware of their group and ask for participation of other managers and leaders in their

	expectations of continued knowledge sharing.		information with peers outside group and encourage knowledge sharing among other leaders.	area. They will contribute and ask for feedback in group.
Post Implementation	Collaborate with leadership team to review the results of the six week objectives and activities.			

Chapter 4: Evaluation Plan

Objectives

The objectives for this research include: (a) participants will have accessed the social learning network system at least once, (b) participants will have joined the corresponding learning group to their assigned training, (c) the participants will be posting “conversations” (informal information sharing), (d) participants will be collaborating with peers in their group, (e) participants will regularly check their social learning network and give input, and (f) participants will create a learning group as a subject matter expert.

Data Collection and Analysis

The methods for data collection and analysis will include: (a) reviewing the data collected and comparing it with participant’s achievement of each individual objective, and (b) pre-test and post-test data analysis and comparisons. The pre-test will measure the participant’s level of knowledge about social networking and knowledge sharing before the social network was implemented. The post-test will measure and evaluate the participant’s level of knowledge in how to use social networking with peers and the transfer of knowledge that occurred as a result of the social network implementation. By comparing the pre-tests and post-tests the results will illustrate whether the participant’s competency and knowledge about leadership issues increases. If the results show the objectives were met and an increase in the participant’s competency and knowledge transfer occurs (pre-test and post-test), the implementation plan will have reached its goal of increasing the participant’s competency with an alternative learning method for the target group to an achievable level.

The data will be collected and analyzed by the Professional and Development and Training Office. The data will be used as a basis for reasoning whether the implementation plan

has increased participant's knowledge in leadership and/or competency. This data will also help show which activities had the greatest impact or least impact on the participant's ability to transfer and gain knowledge. By collecting this information, the activities can then be modified in order to increase knowledge transfer and information sharing among university leaders. Also the data will show if the length of the implementation plan was sufficient or needs to be changed in order to reach the desired goal.

Plan for Use of Data

The results of this action research will be submitted to the Professional Development and Training Office at the university. The evaluation will assist in creating a social learning network for leaders and managers at the university. The social learning network will promote collaboration, knowledge sharing, networking, and an increase in leadership competencies. The university's human resources leadership team may choose for this researcher to also have this work presented to the human resources departmental meeting and/or a university leadership meeting. This researcher also reserves the right to submit this work for presentation at a local and/or national conference.

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Appendix A
Needs Assessment Instrument Design

Leadership Skills Assessment

Directions: Please answer each question below and circle the answer that best represents you:

1. How often do you attend live trainings?

- a. Very Frequently b. Frequently c. Occasionally
d. Rarely e. Never

2. How often do you use the web?

- a. Very Frequently b. Frequently c. Occasionally
d. Rarely e. Never

3. What types of features do you have on your cell phone?

- a. Text b. Web c. Data
d. None e. Text +Web + Data

4. How interested are you in receiving training online?

- a. Very interested b. Interested c. Sometimes interested
d. Seldom interested e. Not interested

5. How comfortable are you with technology?

- a. Very comfortable b. Comfortable c. Sometimes comfortable
d. Seldom comfortable e. Not comfortable