Using Creative Techniques in Leadership Learning and Development: An Introduction

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Abstract

The Problem.

Leadership development programs have become prolific in organizations in both the public and private sectors, with new initiatives endlessly being developed. Empirical and conceptual work that challenges some of the mainstream approaches to leadership learning and development has led to initiatives increasingly becoming complex in nature and to the use of innovative and unusual approaches. There is limited knowledge, however, regarding the impact of such techniques.

The Solution.

This issue focuses on some core themes around enabling and enacting leadership development in organizations through creative techniques using art, poetry, symbolism, theater, drama, and film, and is rooted in experiences of delivering such interventions in a range of countries, sectors, and professions. Each article explores how these techniques can be translated into practice across a wide of variety leadership learning and development contexts and is rooted in the contemporary and critical leadership literature.

The Stakeholders.

Human resource development professionals seeking to identify key considerations in selecting creative techniques for effective leadership learning and development interventions, and academics advising on such selections and teaching leadership themselves, will be interested in these articles, which will also set the basis for further empirical research and theoretical reflection on the topic.

Keywords

leadership learning and development, creativity and HRD

Introduction

Leadership development programs have become prolific in both the public and private sectors (see Gill, 2011). Driven by the need for leadership learning and development, and reportedly receiving US$50 billion of investment in 2000 (Ready & Conger, 2003), this area of human resource development (HRD) practice is a fast paced world where new initiatives are endlessly being developed. For example, recent years have seen the emergence of a range of aesthetic and critical approaches (see Edwards, Elliott, Iszatt-White, & Schedlitzki, 2013, for a review), and there has been significant empirical and conceptual work that challenges some of the mainstream approaches to leadership learning and development (e.g., Cunliffe, 2009; Ford & Harding, 2007; Sinclair, 2007). This has led to initiatives increasingly becoming complex in nature and involving the use of innovative and unusual approaches: The use of art (e.g., Callahan, Whitener, & Sandin, 2007; Gayá Wicks & Rippin, 2010; Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer, & Kerschreiter, 2013; Sutherland, 2013), literature (e.g., Keller, 2007; Smith Mathis, 2007), stories (e.g., Browning, 2007), and cultural artifacts (Callahan & Rosser, 2007; Callahan et al., 2007) as a basis for leadership reflection is increasing. There is limited knowledge, however, regarding the impact of such techniques. Originating in the recognition that leadership cannot be reduced to an entirely rational process, there has been an increasing interest in emotional and social intelligence in the leadership literature (e.g., Chemers, 2001; Yukl, 2001). This is mirrored by the perceived need for leadership learning and development interventions to go beyond the traditional—largely rational—classroom-based programs of the past (Adler, 2011;Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008; Edwards et al., 2013), with arts-based methods and other creative techniques gaining ground in both the literature and in practice. Founded in experiential learning more broadly, arts-based interventions introduce

leaders to different forms of art such as literature, drama, music, and drawing (Springborg, 2012; Sutherland, 2013) to provide an experiential learning opportunity through which leaders can learn by "transforming aesthetic experiences to develop non-rational, nonlogical capabilities and self-knowledge" (Sutherland, 2013, p. 25). It is argued that these approaches have the potential to connect cognitive and emotional processes, provide challenge to underpinning assumptions, and highlight the relational and subjective aspects of human experience (Adler, 2006; Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Taylor & Ladkin, 2010). As with all experiential learning, the aim is to bring about "a transformation of experience into new knowing through perception, cognition and behaviour in an adaptive process" (Kolb, 1984, cited in Sutherland & Jelinek, in press).

Those advocating the use of creative techniques in leadership learning and development have also aligned such interventions with the perceived need for leadership development to address issues of leader identity and self-awareness and hence the need for development programs to provide "identity workspaces" (Petriglieri, 2012) where such learner-centered, personal transformation can be undertaken (Antonacopoulou & Bento, 2004). To this end, more individualized interventions are used to encourage leadership learners to examine and reflect on their own experience (Petriglieri, Wood, & Petriglieri, 2011). Creative approaches that have been brought into service in this context have included the use of the visual arts (Adler, 2006; Baker & Baker, 2012) and poetry (Richardson, 1997) to encourage self-expression, and the use of storytelling theatrics as a mechanism for developing leadership relationally (Elliott & Stead, 2008).

This issue aims to keep up with the fast paced world of leadership learning and development by exploring some core themes around enabling and enacting leadership development in organizations through creative techniques using art, poetry, symbolism, theater, drama, and film. The focus is on highlighting these approaches based on experiences of delivering such

interventions in a range of countries (Slovenia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States of America), sectors, and professions. Each article outlines a novel approach to leadership learning and development and explores how these techniques can be translated into practice across a wide variety of organizations as well as rooting them in the contemporary and critical leadership literature.

Purpose of the Issue

Previous interest in the topic of creative techniques for leadership learning and development speaks to the growing interest in and need for enhancing the repertoire of effective interventions available to those who commission and deliver such interventions. *Advances in Developing Human Resources* (ADHR) has been at the forefront of this interest with issues exploring emerging theories and interventions such as emotional intelligence, psychoeducational methods, and career planning programs (Ardichvili & Manderscheid, 2008); how events made accessible by modern media (e.g., tragedies on Everest and the re-telling of Shackleton's story) inform leadership education (Cummins, 2007); and—the flip side of the concerns addressed in this issue—developing leadership interventions for those people leading creative effortsm(Mumford & Gibson, 2011).

What has so far been missing is a critical review of current techniques and how these techniques are being used in the practical environment of management development. This issue will hope to address this perceived gap by:

• Creating a more critical engagement with the literature, research, and practice that will enable HR professionals to make informed judgments regarding the use of creative techniques on leadership learning and development programs and interventions;

• Helping to transfer knowledge of contemporary leadership learning and development

techniques to those involved in the learning and education business, those actively involved in helping HR departments in organizations to deliver quality products that have real impact on leadership development; and

• Developing contemporary leadership theory that relates to the practice of designing and delivering leadership programs across organizations.

The extensive spread of activities and interventions now emerging to support leadership learning and development provides a challenge to HR professionals and academics, in advising on and selecting appropriate methods to include in leadership development programs. The articles in this issue will help HR professionals identify key aspects and considerations when commissioning leadership learning and development in and across organizations and will set the basis for further empirical research and theoretical reflection on this important topic.

Contributions of Current Issue Articles

This issue consists of eight articles that describe and dissect differing creative techniques used in leadership learning and development interventions. These techniques include choral conducting workshops (Article 1 by Ian Sutherland and Jasna Jelinek), montage (Article 2 by Fiona Kennedy, Ralph Bathurst, and Brigid Carroll), metaphor (Article 3 by Heather Cairns-Lee), theater (Article 4 by Tammy Tawadros), storytelling theater (Article 5 by David Boje, Grace Ann Rosile, Jillian Saylors, and Rohny Saylors), film (Article 6 by Gareth Edwards, Doris Schedlitzki, Jenna Ward, and Martin Wood), and poetry (Article 7 by Andrew Armitage). The final article in the issue is a comparative analysis of arts-based interventions and more conventional leadership learning techniques by Thomas Garavan, Ann McGarry, Sandra Watson, and Fergal O'Brien.

Acknowledging that choral conducting workshops are rarely found in leadership

development programs, Sutherland and Jelinek argue that arts-based learning approaches' strength lies in their ability to connect the intellectual with the emotional. They explore executive management students' experience of conducting choral master classes across three separate leadership development interventions, through analysis of observational and interview data. The study is theoretically grounded in two main bodies of work: experiential learning, specifically in relation to management and leadership learning and education, and literature that seeks to connect sense making and aesthetic knowing. They define aesthetic sense making as "meaning making based on our feelings about what's going on around us." Arts-based learning methods use three concepts to explore how aesthetic knowing takes place: mastering craft, engaging metaphorically, and organizational aesthetics. Sutherland and Jelinek's key contribution is to connect theoretical conceptualizations of arts-based learning with a study of an arts-based method in practice. Their findings illustrate the significance of sensory triggers to stimulate reflection on individual's leadership practice. The move away from predominantly cognitive learning methods toward aesthetic sense making encourages participants' reflexive sense making. They conclude by recognizing the risk involved in using arts-based methods within leadership development, particularly from the learning and development professional's perspective. They, therefore, call for an increased focus on creating psychological safety and the agency of facilitators.

Kennedy, Bathurst, and Carroll situate their article within the adaptive leadership literature that calls for leaders to surface tensions and differences, phenomena that regularly remain submerged within organizational structures that seek efficiencies and privilege homogeneity. They argue that learning and development practitioners, who engage with leaders sympathetic to this way of working, require methods that go beyond the learning of new skills. They propose montage—a technique adapted from the movie industry—as a method with the potential to disrupt mind-sets and taken-for-granted ways of working.

Kennedy et al. highlight arts-based methods' ability to stimulate presentational ways of knowing, which facilitate access to emotional and embodied experiences. Such ways of knowing stand in contrast to propositional understandings of knowledge that privilege the cognitive aspects of organizational life that reward us for what we know "about" something or somebody.

The article's empirical material focuses on the second phase of an in-house leadership development program for a large public hospital in Australasia. Kennedy et al. discuss in detail their work with Daniel, a clinical director, who had been appointed to lead change in a previously under-resourced area of the hospital. An area of personal development identified by Daniel was a need to allow team members to contribute to discussions, rather than acquiescing to his impatient and enthusiastic ideas. To facilitate this development work, he was invited to construct a montage assembled from different images of the department during the change process, providing him with the opportunity to acknowledge competing realities. Analysis of this learning process leads Kennedy et al. to a number of conclusions including recognition of the limitations of cognitive approaches when working with conflict and difference. Such approaches are, they propose, unlikely to be sufficient in engaging individuals in new practices within asymmetrical power relationships. By contrast, an arts-based method such as montage has the "the potential to be a circuit breaker" within the organizational setting and a method with which researchers can explore individuals' emotional responses to organizational dynamics.

Our third article by Heather Cairns-Lee builds on Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, and Tymon's (2013) implicit leadership theory (ILT) to consider how authentic leadership and self-awareness might be developed through an approach that illuminates leaders' mental models and the naturally occurring metaphors and ILTs. Cairns-Lee uses the Clean Language approach developed by Grove (1989) to facilitate interviews with eight leaders working at

CEO, CFO, and director levels as a means to surface the naturally occurring metaphors about leadership held by them. Metaphors surfaced through the interview process and subsequent drawing exercise include the following: leadership falling off the table in environments of stress, an eagle, a shepherd, a wolf pack, connecting the dots, a scout on an adventure, a Greek flag, and being under the microscope.

Cairns-Lee notes the idiosyncratic and nuanced nature of these metaphors, a significant departure from the more prevalent deductive metaphors used to describe leadership.

Tammy Tawadros's article proposes a model for the evaluation of improvisational theater techniques in leadership development programs. A strength of these approaches is their ability to provide participants with the opportunity to discover and rehearse diverse leadership behaviors in a group context, thereby generating exposure to a form of experiential learning conducive to emotional and cognitive analysis. Nevertheless, Tawadros highlights the dearth of literature that evaluates such approaches' effectiveness,a gap that might be explained by the difficulty of analyzing the mechanisms of learning as a sense-making process. In her article, Tawadros proposes a model based on conversational analysis as a method to examine in-depth dialogic interactions within drama-based leadership development interventions. In focusing on micro-interactions between participants as a data source, Tawadros suggests this provides access to patterns and structures of dialogue that might be used as "evidence-based practice" for leadership development interventions using drama-based techniques.

The fifth article by Boje, Rosile, Saylors, and Saylors describes a process called storytelling theatrics designed to assist participants explore power dynamics within leader–follower relations. Boje et al. describe three approaches to theatrics grounded in the work of Freire (1970) and Boal (1979, 1992, 1995)—image, invisibility, and form theater—and discuss participants' reactions to these methods. A particular strength of these methods is that they

prompt participants to engage with a deconstruction process regarding leadership stories. They do this by discovering multiple sides of any one story, surface marginalized voices and highlighting organizational power dynamics. This technique therefore draws attention to leadership as a relational process. The article will appeal to leadership development theorists and practitioners alike as the authors take us step-by-step through each theatric approach that presents methods to explore theoretical developments regarding leadership as a relational process.

Edwards, Schedlitzki, Ward, and Wood suggest film analysis as an approach to facilitate students' understandings of toxic and bad leadership. They suggest that the storyline of the film *Batman: The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) reflects how societies' perceptions of good and evil have informed how bad or toxic leadership is defined. However, *Batman: The Dark Knight*'s storyline problematizes this simplistic dichotomy as the film's narrative challenges normative assumptions of how good and evil are formed.

Recognizing the multimedia literacy of many students, Edwards et al. describe a critical post-structuralist approach to film analysis, drawing in particular on the critical interrogation approach of Buchanan and Huczynski (2004) and Tyler, Anderson, and Tyler (2009). They describe an iterative process of viewing, discussion, and analysis, a method that opens up discussion possibilities for students' sense-making experiences. They argue that use of cinematic analogy as a leadership learning technique, alongside a constructionist process of interpretation and analysis, affords active exploration of the socially relative in conceptualizations of good, bad, and toxic leadership.

Edwards et al.'s article articulates a specific approach to film analysis and, in so doing, helps students to challenge normative assumptions about toxic and bad leadership in the leadership literature.

Andrew Armitage, the author of the seventh article, is also interested in examining toxic leadership but through the use of poetry. According to Armitage, poetry can be used as part of reflexive practice to assist in opening up individuals' experiences and relationships within the workplace context. Reviewing literature and examples of practice that argue for, and demonstrate, "the cross-fertilization of the arts and leadership" (Adler, 2006, p. 487), the article includes two poems: "The Moral Man" and "The Shadow Man." Both poems were written by Armitage following experiences of toxic leadership. Armitage then proposes "a road map" for educational practitioners who may wish to use poetry as part of their pedagogical approach. Reflecting on his experience of using poetry in the classroom to explore toxic leadership, Armitage concludes by asking a series of questions for HRD and leadership developers, including: "How can leadership and HRD programs be operationalized and designed to deliver inclusive and safe working environments in practice?" and "Can art be used as an alternative vehicle to identify and conceptualize leadership issues and/or problems within the organization?" Alongside the other articles in this issue, Armitage's contribution is to demonstrate how critical interrogation of theory and practice can be deepened through engagement with arts-based methods.

Recognizing the lack of evaluative studies examining the effectiveness of arts based leadership development interventions, Garavan, McGarry, Watson, and O'Brien complete this issue by evaluating a leadership drawing exercise in comparison with a more traditional leadership development intervention. Both interventions occurred in the context of a leadership development program for 164 leaders working in a large pharmaceutical multinational corporation (MNC). Their findings indicate that the arts based method was effective in enhancing emotional intelligence, leader identity, and feedback orientation. The conventional intervention, by contrast, was shown to enhance openness to experience and feedback orientation. Garavan et al. conclude by suggesting the application of longitudinal

approaches to determine the sustainability of development outcomes to understand whether long-term change does result from engagement with arts-based leadership development interventions.

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