Promoting Creative Capacity in Followership Education

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Abstract

With increasing acceptance of followership as a counterpart of leadership, the study of followership within graduate-level leadership and business curricula should be equally considered. Further, an understanding of andragogy, or adult education theory, is of benefit with the inclusion of creativity within a followership curriculum. By developing creative capacity within followership education, graduate students are better equipped to influence the business world with innovative thinking skills that enhance problem solving in an increasingly competitive work environment.

Keywords: creativity, followership, graduate education, curriculum, andragogy

Introduction

From the time we are all quite young, we are inundated with models of leadership. We study great (and not-so-great) leaders, write essays about leaders we admire, watch movies that emphasize leadership, and aim to become leaders ourselves. For many, the idea of following suggests a lesser position of influence; however, this antiquated way of thinking is changing, as the purpose and value of followership is becoming more prominent. Followership is a critical aspect of any organization.

According to Chaleff (2009), no serious student of leadership can ignore its essential counterpart, followership. Johnson (2009) and Kellerman (2008) agree that developing followers is as significant as developing leaders. Every leader is a follower of someone else; therefore,

being an effective follower is as important professionally as being an effective leader. Leadership cannot be completely understood without considering the attitudes, skills, and behaviors of followers (Johnson, 2009). The successful leader-follower relationship is intertwined and dependent upon the other (Koonce, 2012), creating a need for leadership students to gain a greater understanding of this paradigm through a distinctive followership course. As post-secondary institutions offer courses and graduate degrees in leadership and management, the addition of a followership curriculum should be considered, specifically the inclusion of promoting creative capacity within followership andragogy.

Understanding Adult Learners

Children and adults learn differently. Unfortunately, the approach to curriculum development does not always vary. Andragogy is the adult education theory stating that adults will learn when they understand why the knowledge is important or can apply the knowledge to their own life situations (Knowles, 1990); whereas, pedagogy is considered the art and science of teaching/educating a child (Bruner, 1986). The basic difference between andragogy and pedagogy is the determination of the *adult* versus the *child* learner. Once *adult* is defined, the way in which an adult learns varies from that of a child, and the curriculum should reflect these differences. Adult characteristics are not merely contingent upon age, but on a combination of age, emotional maturity, and experience.

According to the Interactive Model of Program Planning Model (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013), there are nearly a dozen elements that are necessary to successfully develop curriculum for adult learners. Unfortunately, adult education has been considered a narrow practice of intellectual growth or cognitive development within one specific discipline (Merriam & Clark, 2006; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Recently, however, researchers have discovered that, in

addition to cognitive development, graduate students experience emotional and behavioral development through creative or transformative learning experiences (Stevens-Long, Schapiro, & McClintock, 2012). By utilizing the Interactive Model of Program Planning approach, university professors would be able to help students embrace the entire process of a creative educational experience and not just course content.

For decades, graduate student success has been measured by scholarship and accomplishments such as publications, grants, salaries, and career placement (Stevens-Long, Schapiro, McClintock, 2012) and not necessarily by creative capacity or professional contributions. Perhaps the assumption is that as long as the student completes the coursework and research, learning has taken place. Classroom-based adult learning would be considered a more traditional authoritative curriculum approach to learning, where information is dictated from professor to student. For graduate students, this format may be ineffective because a greater level of postformal thinking (Sinnot, 1998) is evident. Changes in epistemology occur, beginning with understanding the uncertainty of knowledge and a quest to creatively analyze and explain different interpretations (Stevens-Long, Schapiro, & McClintock, 2012). Classroom-based adult learning is linear and does not pertain to the majority of adult learners, but especially graduate students who seek advanced creative capacity through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development; therefore, learning transference may be best demonstrated through creative capacity.

To determine learning transference, students must be able to show effective application of what they learned (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). A level of observable changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes must be evident. The plan for learning transference is typically limited to the evaluation plan within the timeline of the course. However, by linking transfer of learning

components to creative planning components, a greater probability of transference will occur. To ensure transformational learning has occurred when incorporating creative capacity in followership curriculum, the planning process, learner characteristics and motivation, design and delivery methods, learning context, immediate application, workplace environment, and the elimination of barriers should all be considered (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

Transformational learning is the process in which adults begin to reconsider long-held values, beliefs, and perspectives as new experiences occur (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). When researchers studied transformative learning in graduate education, they found that a shift from the "hyperspecialization typical of graduate curricula" to incorporate the emotions of the learner and the needs of society was necessary (Stevens-Long, Schapiro, McClintock, 2012, p. 180). This study found that by initiating a transformative approach with graduate students that cognitive, personal, and behavioral development was enhanced. Respondents expressed increases in cognitive perception, tolerance, positive emotions, and resiliency. Additionally, these students experienced expanded consciousness, confidence, and interests in continuous learning (Stevens-Long, Schapiro, & McClintock, 2012). Welle-Strand and Tjeldvoll (2003) found that learning creative capacity has to be organized by someone and based on one's values and interests. Therefore, by appropriately incorporating a creative, transformational approach to the followership classroom, students may be more equipped to contribute to an organization's success.

Creative Capacity in Followership Education

By considering the need for followership inclusion in leadership/business programs and understanding adult learning processes, creative capacity should be an imperative component to followership education. Researchers state that there is not a well-defined or agreed upon

definition of the term "creativity" (Collard & Looney, 2014; Kleiman, 2008; Su, 2009; Tsai & Cox, 2012). Nonetheless, the influence and importance of integrating creativity into academia is highly encouraged (Berrett, 2013; Johnson, 2009; Schmidt, Soper, & Facca, 2012; Welle-Strand & Tjeldvoll, 2003). As organizations are constantly changing (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013), creativity is a critical skill for entrepreneurship training (Schmidt, Soper, & Facca, 2012) and essential for organizational survival (Tsai & Cox, 2012).

Creativity is often narrowly viewed as a natural-born gift involving the arts, rather than a skill to be nurtured or developed. According to Dewey (1902), creative inquiry is the root of all intelligence. Einstein biographer Walter Isaacson (2007) stated that Einstein's success resulted from his creativity. Research has shown that creativity can be learned and taught (Davis, 2006; Saracho, 2002) and effectively transferred into the workplace environment (Castro, Gomes, & de Sousa, 2012; Driver, 2001). Additionally, by utilizing such tools as the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) model, students can transfer knowledge gained within the followership classroom to business environments. The CPS model was initially formulated by Alex Osborn (1952), founder and President of the Creative Education Foundation, and further developed by Sidney Parnes, who succeeded Osborn as president of the foundation. Osborn's book *Applied Imagination* (1953) introduced the term brainstorming - a well-known term closely associated with creativity. Osborn spent his lifetime encouraging the deliberate development of creative capacity particularly within the field of education (Isaksen & Treffinger, 2004). The premise of the CPS model is to assist groups through the creative process of identifying a goal to establishing a plan for action. Utilizing the CPS model, Fontenot (1993) found that by implementing creativity and problem-solving skills, creative operating levels of business environments were enhanced, as employees began to "think outside the box."

Researchers Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer (2013) identified five essential habits of the mind: inquisitive, persistent, imaginative, collaborative, and disciplined. This research challenged the perception of natural-born creativity and mirrored the CPS model through the assessment of the creative processes starting with identifying a problem, generating ideas and potential solutions, and ultimately finding a creative product or result. To teach creative capacity within a followership curriculum, instructors must be able to encourage inquiry, engage learners by nurturing their own creativity, and stretch their capacity to develop original and high-quality work (Collard & Looney, 2014). By understanding that creativity can be learned, as well as recognizing the long-term benefits to organizations, it is essential to integrate creativity into followership education.

Organizational Benefits of Creative Capacity among Followers

The lack of creativity in organizations has resulted in a major threat to the competitiveness of organization in the current global economy (House, 2003); yet, a number of studies highlight the importance of creativity within an organization (Avey, Richmond, & Nixon, 2012; Castro, Gomes, & de Sousa, 2012; Oldham, 2002). Northouse (2010) stated that leaders and followers are "inextricably bound together" in transformational or creative change processes (p. 172). Yet, when an organization loses its creativity power, it may also lose its competitive resources, energy, and commitment of its workers (Amabile, 1998). Therefore, for organizations to cultivate original ideas in times of crisis, it is important to develop creative individuals and maintain a creative environment.

Avey, Richmond, and Nixon (2012) found four components that are likely to influence individual creative task performance and ultimately the organizational environment: efficacy (ingenuity), hope (goal-directed energy), optimism (positive expectations), and resilience

(recover from changes). Although these and other personality-based strength analyses seem to be innate, these traits can be further developed within the classroom then encouraged through organizational leadership, followership, and organizational creative culture.

Until recently, followership has not been part of educational curricula (Malakyan, 2014). Leadership and management curricula have traditionally focused on the leader's traits and responsibilities, rather than the leader-follower paradigm. Although creativity is a core competence in leadership (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2012), it is important that leaders not rely solely on their own creativity but rather facilitate the creative capacities of others, as the relationship should be considered complementary, not competitive (Kelley, 1992). Therefore, as post-secondary institutions offering leadership and management degrees begin to implement followership curriculum for their adult learners, creative capacity should be further considered.

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Author Biography

As a career educator, Ms. Baublits values learning and strives to exemplify life-long learning to those with whom she interacts. She has taught grades 5 through college, as well as directed an Upward Bound program, which is designed to assist area high school students with additional academic preparation, advisement, and encouragement to succeed in high school and later in college. While working with adolescents, she noticed a lack of leadership development opportunities, particularly for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. For her doctoral research, she is currently studying whether there is a significant difference between adolescents from low socioeconomic households who serve in positions of leadership and adolescents from middle and upper socioeconomic households who serve in positions of leadership in public Colorado high schools. Most recently, Ms. Baublits was selected to serve as a peer reviewer for the Creighton Journal of Interdisciplinary Leadership (CJIL).