

THE LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

**NPLD 793:
LEADERSHIP WITHIN AND ACROSS BOUNDARIES
THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL POLICY AND PRACTICE**

School of Social Policy and Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Educational Objective

One major educational objective of NPLD 793 is to explore the challenges of being in positions of authority in organizations that are operating in the global community. In addition to learning about key business principles, there are also many critical issues associated with the human side of organizations. These include: (1) **leadership**, (2) the management of complex **group dynamics**, (3) the balancing of political processes that result from **intergroup relations**, (4) questions about **wealth creation**, and (5) the difficulties of learning how to **think in ecological terms**. In NPLD 793, we explore these themes through the LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP that is run parallel to the AGES Business Simulation.

The Primary Task of the Leadership Workshop is to provide participants with opportunities to learn about the exercise of leadership and authority. This is accomplished in two major ways. The first is through our shared reflection upon the interpersonal, group and intergroup activity within the temporary social system created to conduct the Business Simulation. The second is through our private reflection upon how we function in our various roles in our everyday work, family and community settings. This learning is multifaceted, and involves experiential, didactic, reflective and applied modes.

Context

The economic and political boundaries of the world are changing rapidly. Accompanying these changes are significant shifts in leadership, economic and political possibilities, and conflicts among and within nations. These changes are making notions of national identity increasingly complex and are demanding new thinking about both the dynamics of wealth-creation and wealth distribution.

Work environments are also changing and leaders are required to develop and implement a perspective that incorporates not only diverse workers but also diverse work locations and strategies. Consequently, we can no longer rely on old assumptions about the world order, about who will follow what leader, and about who will be loyal to whom.

What is the nature of leadership in these times of transformation? How do we prepare ourselves to embrace the full complexities of the worlds in which we function? What new patterns of thinking will help us to understand how our actions create and/or destroy the very things upon which our individual and collective survival depends? The Leadership Workshop is designed so participants can reflect on these issues while they are conducting the business simulation.

Model

The Leadership Workshop has been developed as a way for participants to reflect together on those forces that affect individual, group and whole system functioning. The Workshop, in conjunction with the Simulation, provides a temporary educational environment that mirrors forces influencing our lives at work, how we think, what we attach meaning to and what we dismiss as being irrelevant. Some of these forces are already in our day-to-day awareness, but many are not.

The Workshop will focus on: (1) How each simulation team functions as a group; (2) How the actions of the competing groups in the simulation create the very marketplace dynamics within which they must operate; (3) How learning at the collective level can occur; (4) How the actions of individuals and groups have a transformative impact (which is how we conceptualize leadership); and (5) How individuals function in the back-home work environment.

One basic premise of the Workshop is that an aggregate of persons becomes a group when interaction among members occurs in the service of performing a task together. That task may be explicit (as in doing work together) or somewhat intangible (as in satisfying basic needs of individual members such as occurs in a family). The feeling of "being a group" grows as members become aware of their mutual interdependence.

Another key premise of the Workshop is that when a collection of individuals becomes a group, that group's behavior as a whole is different from the sum of its parts (sometimes greater, sometimes less). This group's very existence depends on how well it works to preserve itself, to manage forces that threaten its integrity as a whole, and to foster meaningful interdependencies with other groups upon which it relies.

Membership in a group is an exciting but ambiguous experience. It prompts individuals to join the group but also to have mixed reactions to belonging. Often, one wishes to simultaneously be "a part" of the group and also to be "apart" from the group. The desire to be "a part" brings with it the fear of getting too involved, of being consumed, absorbed, de-individuated. The desire to be "apart" triggers the fear of exclusion, aloneness, and isolation.

The "group-as-a-whole approach" can be summarized as follows:

- * The group is always preoccupied with what it must do to survive as a group.
- * The group has a life of its own that is different from the sum of its parts.
- * The essence of this group life can be seen in:
 - 1) the actions taken by the group.
 - 2) how members interact with each other and with members of other groups.
 - 3) the fantasies members harbor about their group and the groups they compete with or oppose.
- * Every action in a group is actually a reflection of its character as a group, both of its manifest and of its hidden nature.

STRUCTURE & PROCESS

The Workshop Events

The Workshop provides opportunities to study the complexities of social systems from a variety of perspectives. It is built around the process of reflection, which occurs at three different levels: individual, group-as-a-whole, and total system.

There are several kinds of learning events, all integrally linked to the Simulation, which are based on the process of reflection. For this reason we refer to them as “**Reflection Events.**”

- (1) **Group Reflections Events**
- (2) **System Events**

The Staff

The Leadership Workshop is directed by Jeff Klein. He and the Director of the Simulation (Rob Brodo) are co-equals. They both answer to the Director of the Non Profit Leadership Program at the School of Social Policy and Practice. In the context of the Leadership Workshop, Jeff will be assisted by several colleagues. The staff will deploy themselves in a variety of ways to assist the learning of participants during the Workshop.

The Staff:

Flora Taylor
Amanda Rose
Tyler Watson
Melissa Extein

Schedule

The sequence of workshop events is noted in the overall course schedule and is also listed below.

Saturday 2/22

9:00 am	Introduction to Simulation
10:00 am	Strategy and Group Formation
11:30 am	Lunch
12:15 pm	Round 1 Begins
5:15 pm	Reflection Session
6:00 pm	End

Sunday 2/23

9:00 am	Debrief + Introduction to Round 2
10:00 am	Round 2
1:00 pm	Lunch
1:45 pm	Reflection
2:30 pm	Debrief + Introduction to Round 3
3:30 pm	Round 3
6:30 pm	Reflection
7:15 pm	End

Saturday 3/1

9:00 am	Debrief + Introduction to Round 4
10:00 am	Round 4
1:00 pm	Lunch
1:45 pm	Reflection
2:30 pm	Prepare Board of Directors Presentation
3:30 pm	Board of Directors Presentations and Debrief
5:00 pm	End

Sunday 3/2

10:00 am	Social Systems Debrief Part 1
12:30 pm	Lunch
1:15 pm	Social Systems Debrief Part 2
5:00 pm	End

A Few Words on Some Difficult Processes

1. In the Simulation and the Leadership Workshop participants often find themselves confused and anxious over:
 - a) the amount of individual authority they should exercise.
 - b) how much to subordinate their individual interests to those of their group.
 - c) when to delegate tasks to others and how much to rely on the staff for input.

Typically, group members take positions on a continuum that ranges from "I don't know what to do -- I wish somebody else would take over"; to "I'm not going to go along with anyone in this group because I don't trust them." Delegated authority is often experienced as diminished power.

"Authority issues" almost always surface in any activity for which the task is specified but the means of accomplishing it are left to be determined by the members. In everyday life, these issues remain obscured behind predetermined role relationships, custom, and assumptions about competence. Frequently, authority is vested in individuals because of age, gender, race, rank, education, or other even less tangible personal attributes.

2. There are also struggles linked with how groups in competition view each other. Often a group judges its own worth on the basis of comparison with another group. If another group is doing poorly it is easy to view this as a confirmation of the notion that "our group is doing well" even though "we may still be achieving much less than our potential." The concept of success is thereby often cast in merely comparative terms.

In contrast, for a group that sees another group as more successful, the temptation may be to strive to be like it, to adopt its strategies, etc. What works for one group might not work for another. In the end, each group must develop the strategies and operating procedures that work for itself. It is interesting to note however that while this "knowledge of self" can only be indigenously created, it is often developed via comparing the self with others.

3. One of the hardest things for a group to grasp clearly is how its actions contribute to the "ecology of relationships" which forms a large part of its environment. For example, a group that finds itself embedded in a competitive situation may conclude that the only way to survive is by dramatically increasing its competitive posture. However, such an escalation may be the very thing that throws the "ecology" into a new pattern that ultimately undermines the capacity of any group to survive.

Classically, this issue has been labeled the "Problem of the Commons." This is because long ago, in times when people shared a common pasture to feed their livestock, the thorniest of questions presented themselves whenever the limit of the number of animals that the Commons could sustain was reached.

Consider the following scenario: When three owners each bring three sheep to graze in a pasture that can sustain a total of ten, there is no problem. But what occurs when one owner decides to bring a fourth sheep. The Commons' threshold has now been hit. What do the others now do? Add a fourth also? If so, the ecology will go into decline and ultimately the whole pasture will be destroyed. All sheep will die. Next, a second owner chooses to bring a fourth sheep. The threshold is exceeded. What should the third owner do now? Keep pace with the competition, or cut back to two sheep and preserve the viability of the Commons?

This story has many forms and we all know how it unfolds; likewise with groups and human systems as a whole. How we behave as a group, and how all others behave, is what creates the "ecology of relationships." The question before us here thus becomes: How is a group to fully immerse itself in its own experience and also maintain a "bird's eye perspective" so it can see how its actions creates or destroys the very ecology upon which it depends?

The events of the Simulation and the Workshop provide an arena for examining these problematic phenomena. These are the issues that group reflection is specifically dedicated to address.

Key Boundaries

For any social system to function there have to be highly developed boundaries, ways to separate one part of the system from another. Effectively articulated boundaries enable processes to be contained in the location where they belong. They enable responsibility to be delegated. They are the bedrock of a system's capacity to do work. However, some boundaries may also be permeable. If they are not, communication cannot occur and the essential energy needed to keep the system vital will be quickly exhausted.

In the Leadership Workshop, all participants are encouraged to maintain strict boundaries in three different areas.

1. The Task Boundary. Each workshop event has a specific task that does not overlap with any other. You are asked to work only on the task designated for that event.

2. The Role Boundary. The special social system workshop roles (staff, CRO, anthropologist) will attempt to stay "in role" during the workshop and will resist and interpret all attempts by participants to entice them into dropping their role.

3. The Time Boundary. All events start and stop on time.

REFLECTION

The ability to reflect about what is happening is central to the leadership workshop. Reflection will be done at the personal, group and systems levels.

Personal Reflection

Participants will be asked to focus on questions like the following:

1. As an individual, am I performing at a satisfactory level?
2. Are my dormant capabilities being released?
3. Can I get my voice adequately heard in my group?
4. Am I doing things that have personal meaning for me?
5. Do my contributions make a difference?
6. Am I being asked to compromise my values?
7. Am I developing skills that will be useful in other situations?
8. Do the energies I expend on behalf of the group get adequately replenished?
9. In what ways is my behavior similar to and/or different from how I function in my everyday work setting?
10. What new behaviors can I experiment with and how can I free myself from old patterns that have outgrown their usefulness?

The Group Reflection Events

The primary task of the Group Reflections Events is to reflect together on the "group level processes" operative in your simulation team. This reflection is to include (a) what transpired during the last decision-making round, (b) the ongoing developmental patterns your group is engaged in, and (c) how your group is functioning in the "here and now."

Typical questions that teams explore during Group Reflections Events are:

- (1) **How** is my group doing the work of the simulation, in contrast to **what** it is doing?
- (2) How are leadership and followership emerging in my group?
- (3) How does my group make or not make its decisions?
- (4) How is division of labor broken down into sub-units in my group?
- (5) How does my group integrate the efforts of those sub-units?
- (6) How are norms -- informal ground rules of operation -- developed, maintained and changed in my group?
- (7) How do members of my group interact with each other?
- (8) How does my group process feedback?
- (9) How is communication facilitated, and blocked, both within and among my group's sub-units?
- (10) How do conflicts arise in my group?
- (11) How are conflicts confronted, and/or managed, and/or avoided in my group?
- (12) How does my group work to build and maintain a climate of collaboration among its members?

"Group Reflections Events" will be conducted by an assigned Workshop staff. Group members will be encouraged to focus on what the group-as-a-whole can learn about the group and system level processes they are embroiled in. .

PLEASE NOTE: The Workshop staff members are available for assistance in the human and organizational domain only. For help with any kind of business issue, groups are asked to seek the consultation of the Director and staff of the Simulation.