Chapter III

Millennium Leadership Inc.: A Case Study of Computer and Internet-Based Communication in a Simulated Organization

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Abstract

Technology, communication, leadership, and work processes are inextricably linked in contemporary organizations. An understanding of these topics and an ability to apply these understandings in the workplace is becoming increasingly critical for workers in all sectors. In this chapter, we discuss some of the competencies that are vital for success in the
contemporary workplace, and provide a description of one approach to developing these skills: a simulated organization designed to create a dynamic classroom learning environment. We explain how simulations help students develop “real-world” competencies in effective communication and writing practices in mediated and geographically dispersed contexts, and we present how educators, students, and professionals may benefit from this approach.

Introduction

For many years, scholars and educators have investigated leadership in proximate settings—that is, in settings where leaders and subordinates are co-located with one another (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978; Fiedler, 1967; Mintzberg, 1994, 1973; Yukl, 1989, 1981). Contemporary organizations, however, often utilize geographically dispersed work groups. As a result, distanced leadership has become a timely and relevant issue. Various degrees of geographical dispersion exist. Some organizations employ “telecommuting,” a practice in which members may work at home, on the road, and/or at the office. Others have teams and operations that are globally dispersed. In these emergent organizational forms, computer and Internet-based technologies are the primary means through which organizational members and leaders communicate (Benson-Armer & Hsieh, 1997; Hymowitz, 1999; Townsend, DeMarie, & Hendrickson, 1998; Van Aken, Hop, & Post, 1998). Technology, communication, leadership, and work processes are inextricably linked in geographically dispersed organizations.

In this chapter, we present an approach to teaching and learning distanced leadership and mediated communication competencies in the classroom. Specifically, we: (1) discuss the role of simulations for approximating “real-world” dynamics within the classroom, (2) present a course design that allows educators to do so, and (3) give examples of computer and Internet-based communication from this course, Leadership in Groups and Organizations, developed by the authors at Rutgers University. Our approach is grounded in theory and empirical research in organizational communication, leadership in virtual teams/organizations, and written communication. The objectives of this chapter are to explain our approach to using simulation as an instructional model, highlight the outcomes of this approach, and discuss how educators, students, and professionals may benefit from such a design.
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