

Chapter 20

Global Leadership Training and Technology

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, where organizations' leaders can come from dispersed geographical and cultural backgrounds, leadership training must embody cultural as well as leadership content. This article will investigate the impact technology has had on distributing leadership training across borders and will provide examples of how it can be done effectively.

INTRODUCTION

While the impact of technology on training can be examined very generally, the uniqueness of leadership training requires a specific investigation. Technology is often considered to be effective for certain subject matter and often ineffective in more human resource oriented skills such as those essential to leadership. One of the advantages of technology is often considered to be its usefulness in providing information and training over long distances but when those distances cross political

and cultural boundaries, consideration of cultural dimensions offers additional insights.

This article will investigate the essential aspects of leadership training and the impact that technology has had on distributing it across borders. It will include examples of leadership training for those in formal leadership roles within organizations but also for those who are expected to perform in more informal roles as team leaders or subject matter experts. Examples will illustrate the role of technology and the implications of Hofstede's cultural dimensions in the training design and implementation.

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BACKGROUND

Leadership and Culture

While leadership and culture are often considered independent topics, it is important to consider the influences of one on the other, especially when considering global leadership training. Schein (1985) begins the discussion of the connection between leadership and culture by suggesting that “the endless discussion of what leadership is and is not could, perhaps, be simplified if we recognized that the unique and essential function of leadership is the manipulation of culture. It is this function that provides the most difficult challenge for leadership. It sometimes involves nothing less than surmounting one’s own taken-for-granted assumptions, seeing what is needed to ensure the health and survival of the group, and making things happen that enable the group to evolve toward new cultural assumptions” (p. 317). Kouzes (1999) notes that “my colleague Barry Posner and I have been collaborating on leadership research for fifteen years, and we keep learning the same thing over and over. We keep rediscovering that credibility is the foundation of leadership. People don’t follow your technique. They follow you – your message and your embodiment of that message” (p. 39). This individualistic character of leadership would suggest the importance of the cultural background of the leader.

Schein (2010) delineates four categories of cultures. Macro cultures: nations, ethnic and religious groups, occupations that exist globally. Organizational cultures: private, public, nonprofit, government organizations. Subcultures: occupational groups within organizations. Microcultures: Microsystems within or outside organizations. He then discusses the culture and leadership connection in more detail. Schein (2010) notes that “the connection between culture and leadership is clearer in organizational cultures and microcultures. What we end up calling a culture in such systems is usually the result of

the embedding of what a founder of leader has imposed on a group that has worked out. In this sense, culture is ultimately created, embedded, evolved, and ultimately manipulated by leaders. At the same time, with maturity, culture comes to constrain, stabilize, and provide structure and meaning to the group members even to the point of ultimately specifying what kind of leadership will be acceptable in the future” (p. 3). The situation becomes more complex when the national macroculture is present.

Hofstede (2001) extensively researched these national cultures and determined several cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and long versus short term orientation. He also studied organizational cultures but it is Schein (1985) who provides an example of the interactions between national and organizational culture. Schein (1985) recounts his experiences on a trip to Australia and Singapore and how they “reinforced this sense of difference across countries, but, at the same time, I noticed another phenomenon: that companies operating in the multinational context sometimes did things in dramatically similar ways, even in widely differing cultures. Companies thus seemed to have cultures of their own that were sometimes strong enough to override or at least modify local cultures” (p. ix). Examples of this will be given later in this chapter.

Schein (2010) adds a broader perspective to the discussion. He suggests that “if we remember that culture is our learned solution to making sense of the world, to stabilizing it, and to avoiding the anxiety that comes with social chaos, then we have taken the first important step toward deeper cultural understanding” (p. 400). This might suggest that the first step has been taken toward more effective leadership.

Inventories for Insights

The recognition of the importance of leadership and culture have lead to numerous attempts to

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