

Ambassadorial Leadership and E-Collaborative Teams

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INTRODUCTION

If differences between virtual and traditional teams are bounded by the use of technology (Arnison & Miller, 2002; Griffith, Sawyer, & Neale, 2003), then virtual teams must not be considered a new phenomenon. What have changed are the tools which affect the breadth and depth of virtual teams. A global change in core communication technologies has occurred in the last 2 decades. Primary communication in the 1980s included letters, memos, telephone (one to one), and face-to-face meetings placing constraints on infrastructures supporting virtual teams; today's communication is based on technologies that transcend the physical constraints of the past but impose new and significant challenges in the interpersonal relationships.

The emergence of personal computers, the Internet, and wireless technologies created a communications revolution. E-mail proved as instantaneous as the telephone, as permanent as the written record, and capable of communicating simultaneously one to many. The Internet allowed written, audio, and visual collaboration. Cellular phones removed the tether of brick and mortar offices. Actors became always available. These technologies have reduced the world into a global neighborhood by relieving earlier constraints. In fact, all e-collaborations are virtual to some extent. The term *Virtual Distance™* is used to indicate the team's position on a relationship scale that spans the purely virtual and the purely nonvirtual. Virtually distant teams are characterized by extensive use of electronic media, cultural differences, a lack of preexisting ties, and low perceived interdependence among other factors (Sobel-Lojeski, Reilly, & Dominick, 2006).

Effective teams develop high levels of trust and cohesion around the team mission and vision. But how can leaders build trust with virtually distant, global teams? As Bell and Kozlowski (2002) note, virtual teams do

not fit in any existing typology for team leadership. Virtual leaders must cope with organizational, cultural, functional, and geographic boundaries; issues that do not figure into most leadership models. We suggest that virtual team leaders (VTLs) can apply the best aspects of transformational and transactional leadership by exhibiting a separate category of behavior that we call "ambassadorial behaviors."¹ Effective ambassadors create conditions for cooperation and collaboration between states. They use diplomacy to bridge the differences in cultural values and norms and establish greater communication while remaining sensitive to their differences and needs. Effective VTLs also act as ambassadors, in this case, between organizations, functions and cultures. This requires openness, empathy, and a certain level of "social intelligence" necessary for spanning the inherent boundaries (Ascalon, Schleicher, & Born, 2005). As a first step, effective VTLs recognize the factors that create *Virtual Distance™* and mistrust between team members. Differences in cultural values and communication styles, for example, can impede trust levels and effective collaboration. For example, Gluesing et al. (2005) describe Celestial's French-American team in which the American leader tried to lead with traditional methods supplemented through travel and virtual meetings. These attempts proved unsuccessful leading to resistance, tension and finally outright conflict and hostility. Ultimately, the problem was solved by a facilitator who employed "shuttle diplomacy" in a series of one-on-one meetings to obtain the views of all team members so that shared understanding could be reached.

Ambassadorial behaviors promote trust and allow cohesion around common goals. As in diplomatic circles, the ambassador presents the values and norms of his or her "home" organization/culture to his or her host; concurrently, the ambassador seeks to understand the values and norms of this host and communicate that understanding to his or her "home" population.

LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Transformational and Transactional

Transformational and transactional leadership summarize behaviors that can be used to characterize the styles of different types of leaders (Bass, 1985), although effective leaders often exercise components of both (Yukl, 2001). Transformational leadership includes four behaviors: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Yukl, 2001).

Idealized influence supports member development of a strong positive identification with the leader. Transformational leadership theorists include charismatic behavior as a component of idealized influence. In developing the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ), Avolio, Bass, and Jung (1999) have split idealized influence into two components—attributed to the leader and behavior of the leader. The behavioral component is closely aligned with charismatic leadership proposed by Conger, Kanungo, Menon, and Mathur (1997).

Individualized consideration supports followers by fostering personal efficacy. Inspirational motivation presents a collective purpose resulting from a clear vision articulated by the leader. Intellectual stimulation encourages member participation and contribution in developing a solution. These behaviors, individually and collectively, provide the foundation for member commitment and a sense of ownership (Ryan & Reilly, 2005). Bass (1985) postulates transformational leaders raise the level of personal awareness and encourage followers to transcend their self-interest resulting in increased motivation and greater effort.

Transactional leadership is based on an exchange between followers and leaders. This is defined by the task assigned and subsequent consequences (positive, negative, or neutral) for success or failure. Transactional leadership includes four behaviors: contingent reward, active management by exception (AMBE), passive management by exception (PMBE), and *laissez-faire*. Contingent reward, unequivocally, presents the expected output and resultant reward. AMBE exists when the leader actively monitors the follower and enforces guidelines designed to avoid mistakes. PMBE addresses mistakes after the fact and imposes a contingent punishment (negative reward). *Laissez-faire* is an extreme form of passive leadership and is unlikely

in a leader that assumes or exercises the role, but may be evident in an assigned leader's behavior.

Ambassadorial Leadership™

While traditional leadership models may work for traditional teams, as organizations change from traditional hierarchies to networked structures, new leadership behaviors are needed. Virtual collaborations, especially global virtual teams, offer a more complex and varied set of possible leader-follower relationships and require new approaches for understanding how to successfully lead e-collaborative teams. We suggest that a new model of Ambassadorial Leadership™ is essential for the effective leadership of virtual teams, especially global teams.

Ambassadorial Leadership™ focuses on behaviors that engage the team in building and expanding their relationships internally and externally. These behaviors include: internal boundary spanning; external boundary spanning; shared leadership; and impression management. Some of these behaviors are evident in traditional leadership models (i.e., impression management and external boundary spanning), but the traditional behavior has been limited, as we will discuss below.

Internal boundary spanning is concerned with the relationship between team units that are separated by some environmental, functional, or socio-economic barrier. External boundary spanning is concerned with the relationship between the team and/or its subunits and external entities that provide resources, are clients of the team, or both. Shared leadership allows the leader to leverage team resources by using team members as leads for specific parts of the project and in so doing aids in developing relationships within the team. Impression management addresses the communication between internal and external parties and helps manage the expectations of the team, sponsors, clients, and contributing parties. Ambassadorial Leadership™ complements the transformational goals of increased levels of personal awareness by drawing attention to team awareness and its potential to enhance the efforts of the individual.

Internal boundary spanning promotes team cohesion, understanding, and acceptance. The leader may exercise these behaviors directly or indirectly. Directly, the leader nurtures the team vision, advocates openness, and facilitates the development of relationships between distant and close members. Indirectly, the leader encourages other members to share leadership,

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