Creating Sustainable Communities:
Adult and Leadership Theories and Principles in Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Creating organizational commitment is something that leaders want to achieve in all kinds of environments. Leadership theory and practice has moved from industrial models of command and control to newer forms of leadership that emphasize shared power, transformational leadership systems, and community-based thinking (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, Wagner, & Associates, 2006). Presumably, the flattening of traditional hierarchies of power will encourage organizational members to be more invested in the organizational community. While there is a fair amount of research showing linkages between shared leadership and organizational commitment, there is less theorization of how people's commitment to an organizational community actually develops in the context of shared power. This chapter seeks to fill this gap by drawing on various theories of adult learning, particularly concerning communities of practice and critical reflection. Citing a case study of a university classroom, the authors suggest ways that existing theories of leadership and shared power can be more fully fleshed out.

BACKGROUND: THEORIES OF SHARED LEADERSHIP, COMMUNITY FORMATION, AND CRITICAL REFLECTION

Theories of Shared Leadership in Education and Organizations

Moving away from a hierarchical single person leader is a trend in education and leadership (Lambert, 2002; DeVries & Korotov, 2010). The one-person leadership model fails to fully utilize talents and sustainability of leadership with instructors. Organizations are finding out that to be competitive, they need distance from the model of one leader to a more distributive view of leadership (DeVries & Korotov, 2010). Through involvement of stakeholders, including participants, all can take on some kind of leadership role. By inviting this sort of engagement, participants become invested communities. These communities are reflective of the institutional values and can create and work towards a shared vision, making the program or organization more cohesive.

Using reflection and problem posing helps to direct communities to discover areas of improvement and change. This creates a collaborative work setting where everyone shares in the vision, ownership, and becomes invested in the community. Through this collaborative setting, leadership capacity is developed for individuals and the organization as a whole. Components of shared leadership are "skillful participation, vision, inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and student achievement" (Lambert, 2002, p. 38). When interacting together, the collaborative setting and components of shared leadership, create new tasks and increased readiness for change (Lambert, 2002).

According to Pearce and Conger (2003) this readiness for change is supported by "[a]uthentic leaders advocate[ing] goals that are grounded in shared values—promoting goals that "benefit the larger community" (pp. 1478-1479). Social cues from the environment indicate suitable leadership behavior. As these social cues are reinforced through active socialization, the social cues become norms. These norms continue to be reinforced over time by the active socialization and behaviors of other members.

Caring work climates and employees that are developed are important to fostering shared leadership. Belasen (2000) states empowerment of employees is a result of successful organizations taking in and constructing values which are in line with the newer philosophy of shared leadership. Empowered employees benefit organizations in the following ways: (a) they develop as "team players" and "future leaders," (b) they think and act in entrepreneurial ways, can react with speed and in creative ways to changes in market, and (c) they exhibit behaviors such as delegation, experience collaborative work laterally, and contribute to "inclusive, nurturing, altruistic" environments supported by vicarious learning and socialization. These "high performance leaders' appeal to employees' self-concepts, values, and personal identities to generate the energy needed to replace the old command structure with a commitment of culture" (p. 3). Furthermore, Belasen (2000) contends that nurturing work climates which are synergistic promote empowered employees to adapt quickly to needs and change. Leaders of organizations "must inspire others, building a common understanding, and foster commitment to the new vision" (p. 4). This requires leaders to show effective communication skills, mutual trust and high confidence in their employees and to foster the same from employees (Belasen, 2000). Through empowered teams of employees, positive morale and work climates are a benefit. Through the shared power process, there is a contagion effect where employees are able to influence one another creating cohesion, positive feelings, and a collective, collaborative team of shared values and beliefs (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008).

Both theory and empirical research point towards shared authentic leadership behavior as an emotive stimulus that invokes strong positive emotions (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2008). These are collectively experienced by team members. Authentic leadership, especially when shared by team members, can be a positive experience which permits higher levels of achievement for both employees and the organization (Pearce & Cogner, 2003). Shared leadership may show itself in a team through "peer-based support and encouragement and of providing self-rewards" (Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006, p. 220). Through this lens, personal obstacles become opportunities to learn and to engage in teamwork with other members of the team. Shared leadership allows for empowerment and leadership to originate from any team member in a peer group, not just stemming from a top leader (Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006). The evidence is strong that shared leadership and shared power has a positive impact on organizations.

Madsen, O'Mullan, and Keen-Dyer (2014), in an evaluation they conducted of a rural leadership program in Australia, found that there is a compelling reason to use and relate adult learning theories as foundational to planning, developing and implementing leadership programs. Specifically, the authors' believe that incorporating adult learning theories (transformational learning and social learning) builds capacity for shared leadership to be realized with optimal results.

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