



APPLICATION OF INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR STUDENTS' LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Leadership is one of the most researched fields in social science, however, our knowledge about leadership process is still limited. With increasingly changing environment, more focus is being put on the innovative ways for leadership development, particularly self-leadership, as means to prepare for future challenges, where leadership will be only skill needed for certain in uncertainty defined environment. This is way leadership development is essential in leadership emergence which has particular importance for the participants of future job market which will require people management, emotional intelligence and other leadership related skills. Leadership development refers to the experiences, training, and growth opportunities that help a leader mature and gain the knowledge and skills necessary for success in leadership positions. In order of more young people to take the role of leaders the systematic attitude to this question is necessary and one of the aspects is that it is needed to begin preparing professionals for the leadership already at a higher school. Although there are many facts that universities play an extremely significant role in creating and developing the quality of leadership in the contemporary society and about the importance of developing of leadership competences at higher schools, there is a lack of research on the subjects (1) how innovative study methods could be applied for more effective development of leadership competences of students and (2) what is students' opinion about using these methods. That is why the research considering these issues is relevant practically and quite new scientifically. The aims of the study are (1) to reveal the possibilities of using innovative study methods at the university for leadership development and (2) to reveal students' opinion about using these study methods. Research has shown the high demand of students to develop their leadership competences during the studies at the university. Applying innovative study methods for leadership development can be seen as a student - centered approach. There are plenty of possibilities to use innovative study methods at the university for leadership development. Playing many games do not require any additional place or space, only the regular classroom. It needs to be said that students did not need to be forced to get into playful activities. They enjoyed them very much. First of all, games helped to break down the barriers and helped to communicate better. Playing games as practical activities during the "Leadership" classes helps to create good environment for understanding oneself and others better, for acceleration of creative thinking, for developing fruitful discussions and finding different sides of leadership. These results show the effectiveness of innovative activities for leadership development and display the need for large study finding and describing innovative and non-traditional practices.

KEY WORDS: leadership, leadership development, innovative teaching methods

Introduction

Leadership is one of the most researched fields in social science, however, our knowledge about leadership process is still limited (Steers, et al., 2012, Barker, 1997). Nonetheless, leadership continues to maintain importance in research considering its established recognition as crucial to human well-being and achievement (Gill, 2011). Furthermore, leadership is important due to the significant overall effects it has on societies (O'Reilly et al., 2010). One of the main forces behind popularity of leadership research is the never ending search for leadership effectiveness as means to improve organizational performance and outcomes (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, Carsten, 2014). However, with increasingly changing environment, more focus is being put on the innovative ways for leadership development, particularly self-leadership, as means to prepare for future challenges, where leadership will be only skill needed for certain in uncertainty defined environment (Breakwell, 2016). This is way leadership development is essential in leadership emergence (Hernez-Broome, Hughes, 2004) which has particular importance for the participants of

future job market which will require people management, emotional intelligence and other leadership related skills (World Economic Forum, 2016).

Previous researches revealed that the demand of students to develop leadership competences at the institution of higher education is high (Skarbalienė, 2017), but the application of different teaching methods is not discussed widely. Using different teaching methods (depending on circumstances: age of the students, number of students in the group, previous experiences of the students, class environment, etc.) could make leadership education and development more student - centered and more efficient. Due to practical relevance, taking into account the lack of scientific research the issue of application of innovative methods for leadership development at the university has been chosen for this research. The object of the research is the development of leadership competencies at the university.

Leadership emergence

There are about 60 leadership theories found in the literature (Dinh et al, 2014) which illustrates the efforts to research this complex phenomenon from various

perspectives. Moreover, this plethora of theories exercises its effect upon leadership researchers resulting in difficulties when making research decisions (Snaebjornsson, 2016). Due to the latter, it is important to define and contextualise leadership considered in the research. In regard to the research presented in this paper, it is relevant to describe leadership in terms of assigned *versus* emergent leadership. Assigned leadership implies position that was formally assigned to the person in an organization (e.g. director, head of department, managers), whereas emergent leadership implies the rise of a leader based on how members of the group responded to the person (Northouse, 2013). Emergent leadership can be considered more influential type of leadership due to affect emergent leaders have on the groups, e.g. emergent leaders without assignation of formal power will have stronger influence on group members and hence, will be able to achieve needed goal or organizational outcomes. Research suggest that communication, particularly communication behaviours (e.g. seeking others' ideas, being verbally involved, being firm but rigid, initiating new ideas) and exhibiting certain personality traits (e.g. dominance, intelligence, self-efficacy) are two factors that are highly related with emergent leadership (Smith, Foti, 1998, Fisher, 1974). Emergent leadership is also one of the most sought skills when hiring talents. Illustrating latter, are the words of Laszlo Bock, the senior vice president of people operations for Google one of the world's most successful companies - explaining the characteristics of successful job candidate at Google, and naming leadership as second most important characteristics: "is leadership - in particular emergent leadership is opposed to traditional leadership. Traditional leadership is, were you president of the chess club? Were you vice president of sales? How quickly did you get there? We don't care. What we care about is, when faced with a problem and you're a member of a team, do you, at the appropriate time, step in and lead. And just as critically, do you step back and stop leading, do you let someone else? Because what's critical to be an effective leader in this environment is you have to be willing to relinquish power" (Friedman, 2014, n.d.). Hence, development of emergent leadership - knowing oneself, being effective communicator, being reflective and engaging, is considered one of most desired features of employees of today and tomorrow at the most successful companies across the globe.

Leadership development and methods

Leadership development refers to the experiences, training, and growth opportunities that help a leader mature and gain the knowledge and skills necessary for success in leadership positions (Norris, 2017). Leadership development typically focuses on assigned formal leaders and existing models that purport to help these individuals become better at leading. However, this sort of leader development (as opposed to leadership development) is questionable with regard to efficiency and effectiveness (Schyns et al., 2013). There is a fairly short history of rigorous scholarly theory and research on the topics of leader and leadership development (Day et al., 2014). The distinction between developing leaders and developing

leadership is possibly an important one, as leader development focuses on developing individual leaders whereas leadership development focuses on a process of development (Day, 2000).

Therefore, question arises: considering the importance of leadership, particularly emergent and self-leadership, how does one find the most effective ways to develop leadership competence despite fragmentation, academic *de ja vù* and uncertainty about the future that leadership is facing (Hunt & Dodge, 2001, Breakwell, 2016)?

Complicating the answer to the question is implicit assumption noticed in leadership literature, even though misleading one, that if "correct" leadership theory is found, then the development would inevitably follow (Day et al., 2014). However, human development is complex and involves set of processes that need to be understood, making leadership development a challenging task. Considering that individual leader development occurs in the context of ongoing adult development (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009), we need to focus on development as much as leadership to shed light on how this process unfolds (Day et al., 2014). Hence, leadership development should take into account the complexity and transformation of an individual, as well as the stage of life one is in leadership development process.

Answering this question requires understanding, that apart from increasing competition and pressure to perform and pragmatic underpinnings (Boin, 2005), leadership field maintains its popularity due to its appeal based on psychological satisfaction it provides to those engaged in leadership process (Stelmokienė, Endriulaitienė, 2015). Taking part in leadership training and development process provides the means to one's self discovery and improvement. The motivation to lead and engage in leadership development is enhanced when a person has strong engage in positive thought self-leadership. Leadership development initiatives designed to strengthen efficacy beliefs and encourage the development of thought self-leadership among emerging leaders are worthwhile strategic management techniques useful for enhancing overall leader effectiveness (Norris, 2017). However, finding the ways of such leadership development, particularly within younger participants is difficult task, as many of such participants lack experience and skills in effective in-group communication skills and self-analysis (Wright et al., 2013). Leadership development programs are described as an 'identity workspace' (Petriglieri, 2011) that is 'ultimately about facilitating an identity transition' to create new leadership options (Ibarra et al., 2010: 673). Considering above mentioned and the importance and relative underrepresentation in leadership development field (as opposed to development of leadership of assigned leaders) of emergent and self-leadership, requires innovative attitude in method construction and epistemological move from heroic-centric and leader-centric approach in leadership (Nicholson, Carroll, 2013).

Methodology

Cohen and Bradford (2005) argue that an ability to positively influence others regardless of title or position

is a fundamental principle of leadership. Nevertheless, most of the students imagine that only a person who holds a formal leader's position can influence others (Skarbalienė, 2015).

In order of changing this image and more young people to take the role of leaders the systematic attitude to this question is necessary and one of the aspects is that it is needed to begin preparing professionals for the leadership already at a higher school. Although there are many facts that universities play an extremely significant role in creating and developing the quality of leadership in the contemporary society and about the importance of developing of leadership competences at higher schools, there is a lack of research on the subjects (1) how innovative study methods could be applied for more effective development of leadership competences of students and (2) what is students' opinion about using these methods. That is why the research considering these issues is relevant practically and quite new scientifically. The aims of the research are (1) to reveal the possibilities of using innovative study methods at the university for leadership development and (2) to reveal students' opinion about using these study methods.

For this purpose, in the year 2016 the qualitative research involving last year graduated students from Klaipėda University was fulfilled. 2 groups of students attended weekly "Leadership" class. The instructor used integrated strategy, i.e. included some theoretical knowledge on different leadership competences and many innovative practical activities as well. Leadership classes contained both leadership and some management competences to prepare students for leading in social, personal and professional life without a formal leadership title or position. After the class students had to write feedback essays. In the essays students were asked to write their own reflections (and opinions) how they feel about the lecture, new knowledge, practical activities, does this knowledge change their attitudes, how they could use new knowledge in professional and personal life.

Researcher carried out the observation of the activities. While observing the researcher took the notes about students' involvement and interest in the activities and discussion. Special requirements needed for the activities (size of the class, tables, board, tools, special readiness, etc.) were noted as well. This information was analyzed and categorized. After getting feedback essays from the students, narrative analysis were carried out and several categories distinguished.

And here are the examples of the class activities used for the research. One of the objectives of the "Leadership" course was to emphasize that effective communication and collaboration enables team members to demonstrate and use their knowledge, skills and competences for the achievement of team goals and that effective collaboration entails maximizing the abilities of the team members to complete different projects, thus requiring the building of awareness and trust in each other's abilities (Bennett, Gadlin, 2012). After providing students with the theory of communication in the team and the roles of the team members, a puzzle building activity as described by Reed et al. (2016) was used to

promote interpersonal communication and collaborative work skills.

Instructions given by Reed et al. (2016) for this activity were followed. Each team of students is given a box of puzzle pieces. Each puzzle has the majority of its own puzzle pieces but also has puzzle pieces from other puzzles. The following task goal is written on the board: "Put the puzzles together as quickly as possible." As the activity unfolds, the instructor monitors verbal and non-verbal communication within and between teams, behavior of the team members and roles taken. For example, does a collaborative strategy emerge in a team or does each individual act alone? Does a leader emerge in any team? It typically takes 5-10 minutes before students realize that there are extra or missing pieces. Students may begin to exchange pieces with other teams and when the first team finds their missing pieces and completes the puzzle, they typically declare victory. By 15 minutes, several teams may finish, and the instructor reiterates the goal. Depending on the group of students, the finished teams may or may not help the other teams finish. The activity ends when all teams finish. The activity is debriefed with a discussion of the types of verbal and nonverbal communication observed collaboration versus competition, and the importance of a clear understanding of task goals. The discussion is framed within the context of the instructor's goals for the teams and the project (Reed et al., 2016).

Another example of innovative practice activity is "Poster session". After getting some new theoretical knowledge, students had to develop posters for presenting their ideas about the topic learned. Posters were used to accelerate the discussion.

One more example is the game "The 5 Whys". It helps to see the bigger picture of the problem analyzed in wider context. The 5 Whys game mirrors the motive to move beyond the surface of a problem and discover the root cause, because problems are tackled more sustainably when they are addressed at the source. This game is about reading more between the lines - about understanding the root cause of a problem so that people can get the greatest leverage out of solving it (Gray, Brown, Macanuff, 2010).

Students also made their own leadership SWOT analysis and other non-traditional tasks.

After every class for their homework, students were asked to write the feedback essay. As it was mentioned before, students were asked to write their own reflections (and opinions) how they feel about the lecture, new knowledge, practical activities, does this knowledge change their attitudes, how they could use new knowledge in professional and personal life.

After the semester the discussion with the students groups was held to learn their thoughts about using non-traditional activities and writing the reflections for their leadership development. Both the feedback essays and recorded discussion served as a source for narrative analysis.

Results

Though that was not the aim of the study, but it needs to be mentioned that research has shown the high demand

of students to develop their leadership competences during the studies at the university. Students kept saying: "If only I knew this before". They welcome the opportunity to have special leadership subject.

Games for understanding theoretical knowledge better. Applying innovative study methods for leadership development can be seen as a student - centered approach. It was quite difficult to develop discussion with the students after giving them only theoretical knowledge. For example, even after explaining the idea that every person takes different role in the team and describing the roles, it was difficult for them to decide what role they play personally. But after playing the puzzle game (that is kind of childish and do not ask thinking about leadership) in a group student understand their behavior easier. Discussing their feelings and behavior after the game helped to reveal their roles in a team and understand specification of different roles better. It is also important that puzzle and other games played during the semester helped students to know each other better. Students relaxed while playing and discussions were also much more interesting, young people expressed their opinions and questions better.

Games for developing the creative environment. Discussions after playing "5 Whys" were full of energy. After students were asked to be honest in thinking the questions, after they were asked to write the first thing that comes to their mind each time they think "Why?" and after they learned to ask "Why" until they feel that it really takes to some meaningful insights, they learned to identify problem's root cause and find the way toward the solution. All the games played for development of leadership competences helped to create very creative environment and helped students to understand their feelings about the topic better.

Games for understanding oneself better. Self - evaluation of own leadership skills and self - recognizing of own strengths and weaknesses are very important issues when developing leadership. Different tests are used for this usually. So SWOT analysis of oneself was unexpected for students. But this practice was called interesting and useful after all.

Reflection for leadership development. Another strategy of innovative study method was rethinking the class experience and writing the feedback essays. The reflective learning was new for students; they said that never experienced it before. Students admitted that first feedback essays were really difficult to write. But after they were reminded to write down their feelings after the class and new topic, try to reason the feelings and understand strengths and weaknesses and describe new knowledge and new skills, writing got much easier.

What is common for many students, that having trust and faith in the class was difficult at first. They did not want to say that out loud in the classroom, but some of them were too shy, some of them were afraid to get negative response to their opinion or thought that others may have more interesting ideas. But atmosphere got lighter and more playful during non-traditional activities and students realized that everyone has different ideas to contribute. That brought important understanding that there are many different people with their roles ideas and

only communication and collaboration can bring the best results and outcomes.

Overall, it was agreed that reflecting the class experience is not only very interesting, but also effective method for development of different leadership competences, for example: setting own leadership values, defining the model of moral authority, developing emotional intelligence, understand the nature of conflict and overcome it, improving communication and collaboration skills, promoting understanding of roles in a team, etc. Students enjoyed the process of rethinking the class experience and purposefully thinking how new knowledge could help in the future life. It helped them to develop new understanding about leadership and create new models for own interpersonal relations.

Conclusions

Though leadership is one of the most researched fields in social science, it continues to maintain importance in research considering its established recognition as crucial to human well-being and achievement. That is the reason why leadership development - knowing oneself, being effective communicator, being reflective and engaging, is considered one of most desired features of employees of today and tomorrow at the most successful companies across the globe. But the changing of the environment and moving from heroic-centric and leader-centric approach in leadership to relation-centric approach requires innovative attitude in method construction for effective leadership development in contemporary society.

Whereas there are many facts that universities play an extremely significant role in creating and developing the quality of leadership in the contemporary society, the research has been carried out using innovative methods for leadership development at the university.

Research has shown the high demand of students to develop their leadership competences during the studies at the university. Applying innovative study methods (playing games during the class and reflecting the experience while writing feedback essays) for leadership development can be seen as a student - centered approach.

There are plenty of possibilities to use innovative study methods at the university for leadership development. Playing many games do not require any additional place or space, only the regular classroom. As it takes approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour to play, regular class time is enough for providing students with theoretical knowledge, doing activity and developing the discussion. And another important thing - many games that could be used for leadership development need 5 - 10 players. So they can be played in the groups. And many different groups can be formed during the semester. It gives the possibility for students to try different strategies for effective communication and collaboration within one group and between several groups.

It needs to be said that students did not need to be forced to get into playful activities. They enjoyed them very much. First of all, games helped to break down the barriers and helped to communicate better. Playing games as practical activities during the “Leadership” classes helps to create good environment for understanding oneself and others better, for acceleration of creative thinking, for developing fruitful discussions and finding different sides of leadership. Some students admitted that they wrote down those innovative activities to their notebook and will use them as a tool at work or in social life.

These results show the effectiveness of innovative activities for leadership development and display the need for large study finding and describing innovative and non-traditional practices.

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