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How to Build Network Citizenship Behavior Within a Social Network or Consortium

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How to Build Network Citizenship Behavior Within a Social Network or Consortium

As we move further into the 21st Century, we are becoming more aware that we live in a networked economy and culture, and, as a result, we need to learn how to improve the development of social capital across organizations. Although in nearly all sectors of the economy we have learned that we must rely on stakeholders outside our boundaries to supply us with the necessary knowledge to manage our own operation, the development of collaborative network relationships has not always come easily. For many people, developing the requisite intergroup competence to build and sustain a network is a challenge. At the same time, stand-alone organizations are bound to face devastating inefficiencies if they can't learn to coordinate services.

In higher education, universities are looking to establish network structures, such as consortia, to formally tie institutional members together looking to share resources. These hubs not only establish instrumental means to bring the parties together but seek to develop a mindset of cooperation underpinned by intrinsic contribution and trust.

The Boston Consortium

One such consortium, which happens to be a member of the national Association of Consortium Leadership (ACL), is the Boston Consortium of Higher Education (TBC), a network of 15 collegiate institutions in the Boston area. Initially formed by the chief financial officers of the member institutions, its initial charge was to reduce the cost of education by limiting redundancy and non-academic operating costs and by obtaining economics of scale and scope in such areas as purchasing and health prevention. Subsequent to the founding years in the mid-90s, TBC expanded its role beyond financial savings to the establishment of trustful relationships across its member schools to engage the creativity and energy that reside within the network. By creating an environment that is at the outset systematic in its call for collective engagement but that spawns natural collaboration, TBC seeks to create innovative solutions to what may seem to be intractable problems. It does this through a number of means, in particular, by sustaining a learning culture throughout the network, by supporting reinvention and innovation, by enabling the natural formation of communities of practice, by supporting the personal and professional development of its representatives, and by promoting collective leadership releasing the perspectival and out-of-the-box thinking required to survive in the complex world of higher education.

What are the ingredients of the working style of the Boston Consortium that encourage the emergence of citizenship behavior? Paramount is the emphasis on a collaborative style of leadership that is

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distributed throughout the network; neither the Consortium including its directorship and Board nor any one member directs or controls the participation of anyone else. It sees itself as a hub of activity who's only interest is to serve those who participate. Thus, it adapts and focuses on issues which its members deem important. Conversations are held and out of these conversations may emerge a project, which could range from a modest agreement to share services among a few schools to a large enterprise, like the Healthy You Health Management Initiative that has involved some 20,000 faculty, staff, and family members across the member institutions, with the potential to reach 40,000 more.

The interest in TBC's directorate on distributed leadership is based on the premise that especially in a university environment, leadership needs to be seen as a collective not as an individual, heroic property.[1] Those in leadership positions trade off their role as the director of action for that of the facilitator promoting mutual learning. They encourage their staffs to act in their own domain of expertise and to learn with one another and with fellow stakeholders what they need to know. The learning process tends to operate as a cascade starting with the individual, expanding to departments and organizations, and ultimately between organizations across the network.

Outside of university environments, corporate and public enterprises also need behaviorally complex leaders. In most industries, markets can be characterized as increasingly complex because of the interaction of heterogeneous and disaggregated elements making it difficult to comprehend the entire system at any one time.[2] The way to combat this complexity is to encourage those individuals and groups facing uncertainty to engage with one another through a distributed leadership process to generate a variety of innovative ideas and responses.[3] Once these individuals and groups develop a collective sense of their agency, they are likely to engage in further creative activity. New stakeholders may be invited to contribute and other spontaneous collaborations are likely to occur to augment the work.[4] What is occurring is what Spillane, Halverson and Diamond[5] refer to as a leadership which "stretches over" the range of actors or what Raelin calls a "leaderful" practice,[6] in which everyone participates in the emerging practice both collectively and concurrently, in other words, all together and at the same time.

Experimentation through Work-Based Learning

Not only did the TBC directorate encourage the development of collaborative behavior through its verbal and visible statements and exhortations, but it also experimented with formal work-based learning programs. Work-based learning differs from conventional classroom education and training in four unique ways:[7]

1) It is acquired in the midst of action and dedicated to the task at hand.
2) Its participants work on problems aimed at institutional as well as personal development and the intersection between them.
3) It features peer learning teams in which learners are encouraged to support and challenge each other.

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4) Its participants demonstrate a learning-to-learn aptitude entailing a search for fresh questions over expert knowledge.

Work-based learning is thus contextualized learning that seeks to generate learning from human interaction arising from engagement in the solution of real-world work problems. Although its proponents[8] can appreciate the value of 'active' learning strategies that bring a sense of live experience into the classroom through cases, simulations, and the like, they contend that the best way to test theories and make them actionable is through real experience.

In work-based learning programs, participants work and learn with others and experience the give-and-take of inquiry. Network leadership materializes as they come to see that solutions are far more robust when others get involved in the process and participate. As can be seen in Figure 1, an impressive 15-year leadership work-based learning program was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among the findings of which was enhanced communication and collaboration within and across our nation's public health agencies.[9]

Figure 1

Another Example from the Field

The National Public Health Leadership Institute - 1991-2006

[Purpose of the program[10] was to strengthen the leadership competencies of senior public health leaders and to build a network to address the nation's public health challenges. Action learning projects were prominently featured.]

Findings:

1. One of the most consistently reported practice changes was enhanced communication and collaboration within and across public health agencies.
2. It was also reported that the experiential nature of action learning projects promoted skills for developing collaborations.
3. An alumni network was created called The Public Health Leadership Society.
4. Among the specific competency changes were:
   - communicating more effectively with the public and with policymakers
   - negotiating with other leaders to achieve win-win outcomes
   - forming teams of leaders to address health challenges, and
   - discussing leadership challenges with others to gain their ideas

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The Vogt Leadership Fellows Program

Among the many activities of the Boston Consortium that emulate a learning style based on work-based learning is the Susan Vogt Fellows Program. This year-long program, begun in 2001, brings together promising staff normally in mid-level management positions, who wish to develop their own leadership capability while developing stronger connections among their colleagues at member schools. The program is entirely based on work-based learning principles, thus while attending learning sessions, fellows engage in an important change project at their host institution that is sponsored by a committed supervisor or executive. Participants choose the learning sessions based on their just-in-time work needs and on the learning requirements of their project. Instructors, in turn, purposely organize these sessions to challenge popular thinking. Time is also allocated to experiential activities that simulate the lessons under consideration. Throughout the year, participants also assemble into 6-8 person learning teams whose role is to provide them with a safe environment in which to test their assumptions and try out new leadership behaviors. Peers in the learning team serve as a sounding board to one another in overcoming obstacles in their change project, in debriefing in-class and work-based activities and experiments, and in helping to distill lessons from reflection on their everyday lived experience.

Among the goals listed for the Vogt program are to contribute to a "network of agitators for the good" within and across member schools. To support this goal, fellows develop a customized personal learning plan and an organizational action project for which they typically need to recruit managers and executives throughout the network. In evaluations of the program, participants have reported being stimulated by the experience of peer challenge and support, by feelings of empowerment as they gain access to people and information, and by the growth opportunity of working on personal learning goals outside of their comfort zone. These internal processes have produced greater collective self-efficacy arising from beliefs that their interventions will produce affirmative results. Finally, now that a critical mass of fellows have experienced the profound change in their leadership practices from having experienced a work-based learning culture of reflection and inquiry, there has been evidence of cross-fertilization of collective leadership throughout the Consortium.

Member Interorganizational Behavior

Work-based learning tends to produce both individual and team reflexivity, a critical reflection that goes beyond passive or unconscious questioning of current cognitive structures and approaches to an active challenge of the team's and its members' norms and values.[10] Participants learn as they work by taking time to reflect with like others who offer insights into their workplace problems. Work teams learn as they overcome blockages that they themselves and others erect to deter project accomplishment. What transpired in the Consortium was both individual learning for the participants, who learned from engaging collective reflection on their individual actions, and social learning for the network as a whole, which began to occur as school members engaged collective reflection on their coordinated actions.[11]

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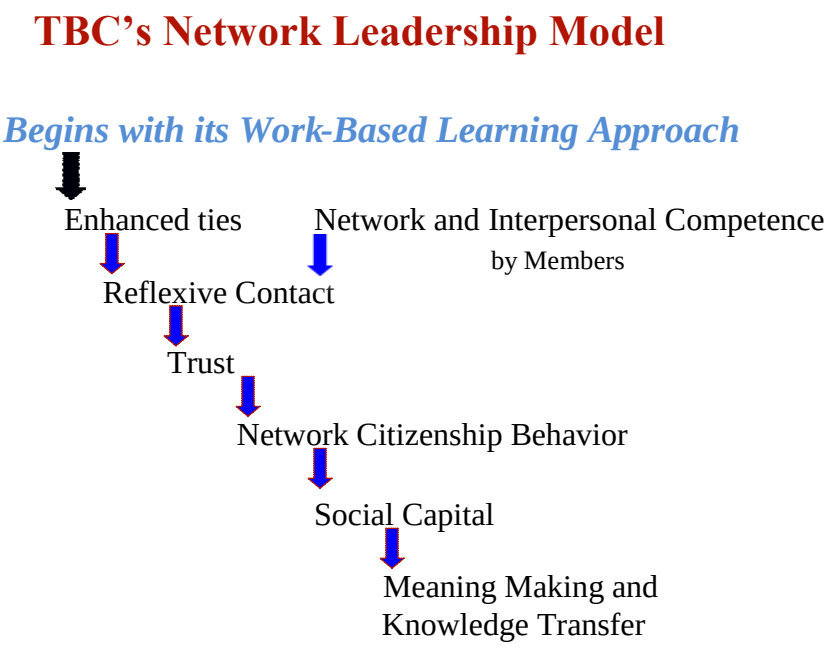
Aside the efforts of TBC's directorate, the individual schools themselves contributed to network collaboration through their own ability to handle, use, and exploit interorganizational relationships – an attribute that has been referred to as network competence.[12] Network competence, in turn, is shaped by the prior disposition and capability of each organization to engage in collaborative behavior. Meanwhile, those individuals, who work at the boundary of their own organization initiating and stabilizing relationships with external stakeholders, learn to bring out their own acuity of intergroup competence along with an extension of trust. Intergroup competence implies the ability to see things from the perspective of another and incorporates a range of learned skills, such as the ability to use inquiry and responsible feedback, to reframe mental models, to empathize with multiple perspectives, and to advocate for and engage in systemic change.[13] Trust may be thought of as the expectation that one's partners can be relied on, will behave as predicted, and will act fairly. It arises from the prior history one has with one's partners and is bolstered by a sense of continuity of participation and reliability.[14] TBC's network leadership model, incorporating these aforementioned elements and others to follow, is displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2



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Network Citizenship Behavior

We are proposing that a critical ingredient to the willing transfer of knowledge in a network is the development of what we call, "network citizenship behavior" or NCB. The concept of internal organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is already well-established in the literature. It refers to employee behaviors that extend beyond role requirements, that are not directly or explicitly rewarded, but that promote effective organizational functioning.[15] The literature on OCB has differentiated the object of citizenship behaviors as other individuals (e.g., helping others who have work-related problems) or the organization as a whole (e.g., attending to functions that are not required but that help the organization's image).[16] There has also been more recent work suggesting that citizenship behavior can occur as a group-level phenomenon (e.g., having people in my work group put in extra time on the job).[17] We are introducing *network* citizenship behavior to refer to activities on the part of members of a social network to contribute to the viability and success of the network over and above their involvement in regular network services. Readers are urged to consult the Network Citizenship Behavior questionnaire in Figure 3 to obtain a sense of the ingredients of this new construct.

We believe that the continuing success of a hub organization such as The Boston Consortium has resulted from the social capital[18] (not just the nature and quantity of the relationships among member schools across the network, but their relatively intimate quality) produced from network citizenship behavior. Consequently, members of the Consortium derive unique capabilities because of the commitment of their staffs to reach out to across the network to develop shared meaning and transfer knowledge. They have developed a collective leadership characterized by interdependent, collaborative, and sustaining relationships with stakeholders who have now become partners.

Figure 3

Network Citizenship Behavior Questionnaire

A. Answer each question thinking about your membership in this network (using the scale below):

Not at All	A Little	A Moderate Amount	A Lot	All the Time
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

<u>Relative to this network, to what extent do you</u>:

1. Attend to functions that are not required but that help the network's mission.	1	2	3	4	5

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2. Keep up with activities in the network.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Keep abreast of policy developments that concern the network.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Willingly represent the network in public.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Offer ideas to improve the functioning of the network.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Seek to increase the reach of this network.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Take action to protect the network from potential problems.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Develop my own expertise in the network domain.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Seek a leadership role within the network.	1	2	3	4	5

B. Some of the explicit network activities in which I have engaged are

a) at the policy level:

b) at the operating level:

*Courtesy: J.A. Raelin, *The Leaderful Fieldbook* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2010)

Case Examples of TBC's Network Leadership Model

The model of network leadership deployed by the Boston Consortium and highlighted by the practice of network citizenship can be exemplified by countless examples of both explicit and tacit interventions by TBC over its history. Here are three examples based on select interviews conducted by the authors.

Our first case example of a Vogt Fellow alumna exemplifies how TBC's particular leadership approach resulted in both formal and informal instances of express network citizenship activity. Lori Cawthorne is the associate director of human resources at Suffolk University. During her Vogt experience, she formed a bond with a handful of fellow colleagues from other schools with whom she has maintained a consistent friendship now for the past four years. She and her compatriots continue to get together several times a year to exchange personal and professional "tips" and keep each other informed about their career challenges. But it has been Lori's formal project activity, initiated as a fellow and

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augmented through her participation in the TBC's Diversity Community of Practice (a group of a dozen managers who meet four times a year to advance their respective school's diversity agendas), which has made a significant mark in the Boston higher education community.

Her project was to investigate the parameters of diversity mentoring, not only in higher education but in all sectors. Once she had a grasp of diversity mentoring as a concept, she launched into action, creating a prototype for a mentoring program at Suffolk featuring a unique "speed dating" reception matching interested mentors with relatively new staff from diverse backgrounds. While anticipating a full program launch, she has also been coaching two other colleagues interested in creating their own diversity mentoring programs. Lori has also widened her reach by networking through the New England Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC) as well as through the LifeMoxie Mentoring Council.

A second example of the network potency of TBC comes to us from the world of purchasing through the auspices of Mike McNamara, Director of Procurement Services at Northeastern University. Mike revealed that in the university sector, there was already a cooperative spirit among buyers dating at least back to the Second World War through the National Association of Educational Procurement. Locally, the Massachusetts Higher Education Consortium (MHEC), served as a purchasing consortium even prior to the establishment of the more generalized Boston Consortium. Nevertheless, TBC formalized already established relationships among university buyers, provided a means for steady contact, and originated a number of initiatives in the domain of indirect strategic sourcing. For example, seven schools came together to agree on a single source for office supplies, and a current effort is underway to participate in so-called "reverse auctions" for specialized products and services.

Due to TBC's efforts to spur the creation of a learning culture and bolster continuous contact among local university suppliers, Mike believes that a unique trust has evolved within his community that is nearly entirely cooperative. None of his counterparts see themselves as competitors. In fact, he routinely extends himself to other schools if there is an opportunity to share knowledge. Recently, for instance, he and his staff did a presentation on e-commerce at one of the smaller colleges in the Consortium. He knows of colleagues who have extended themselves even beyond the Boston area universities. Mike noted that this is one of the reasons why he has been so satisfied and so committed to be working in higher ed procurement.

David Barber, the Emergency and Business Continuity Planner at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, mentioned a number of key content areas whereby interventions by TBC led to enhanced network activity across the Consortium. He noted, for example, that it was the Boston Consortium that allowed acquisition by member schools of the crisis information management system, known as WebEOC, that none of them would likely have purchased on their own. He detailed how the network pulled together during the H1N1 influenza pandemic scare in 2009 to confront the virus when it became apparent that it was circulating among humans. He also pointed out that when he participated in a national simulation exercise on cyber attack through the University and College Caucus (UCC) of the International Association of Emergency Managers, he represented not just MIT but his colleagues both in the Consortium and throughout New England. It was TBC, he noted, that gave him the confidence to

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represent the network in this way.

Thus, Barber feels that TBC, though it did not cause schools to collaborate, cultivated the atmosphere of trust that now pervades the system, inducing a deeper commitment to share meaning and knowledge. Like Mike McNamara, he sees his counterparts within the Consortium as colleagues, not as competitors. The only competition he sees break out, he jokingly claimed, is when four of the Consortium schools play in a Boston-area hockey tournament, called "The Beanpot!"

Concluding Thoughts

The account depicted here along with the accompanying case examples point to a set of interacting conditions which set the stage for the evolution of network citizenship behavior – an individually based activity that leads to sponsorship of network contributions over and above what would be routinely performed by people formally tied to the network. We have seen that social ties and predispositions typically exist prior to the establishment of the critical trust that inspires the formation of NCB; for example, recall Mike McNamara's simple utterance that higher ed purchasing agents in the region are not competitors and have not been for as long as he has been in a procurement role. These conditions are thereupon institutionally endorsed by the network hub, the Boston Consortium for Higher Education in this case, which, as Lori Cawthorne and David Barber pointed out, superimposes a structural acceptance of trust or a trustworthiness that can be counted on by network participants over and above obligation.

Most social networks are self-organizing and formed by members to further their self and collective interests. Nevertheless, "weavers" are often needed to, if not organize these networks, minimally to sustain them once formed. These weavers, be they individuals or institutional hubs, like the Boston Consortium, are dedicated to mobilizing and documenting exchanges within the network. As Kroeger[19] has pointed out, using an exquisite application of symbolic terms from physics, the hub acts to transfer the "liquid" state of the interactions across organizational actors to a more "solid state" of reliable trust formation. It can point out where there are gaps in knowledge resources, where bottlenecks may be occurring within communication patterns, where access to new resources may be necessary, where special expertise may be required, or where clusters of connections may be formed from which the network can learn. Ultimately, a hub like the Boston Consortium seeks to establish the necessary trust to create the citizenship, social capital, meaning, and knowledge sharing that will serve the greater good of the participating members.

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