

Community Leadership

A partnership between community organizations and Municipal Affairs

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Social Networking



“Put an organizational chart in front of most employees, from line workers to executives, and they will tell you that the boxes and lines do not really capture the way work gets done in their organization. But most will be quick to acknowledge the critical influence that networks of **informal relationships** have on work and innovation of any importance.”
The Hidden Power of Social Networks”, 2004.

Research shows that appropriate connectivity in well-managed networks can have a substantial impact on performance, learning and innovation within an organization. Benefits also accrue within well-connected networks between organizations. In its simplest form, a social network is a map of all of the relevant ties between the nodes being studied. The network can also be used to determine the social capital of individuals and an organization. We all recognize the importance of social networks, but how do we begin to understand the nature of networks and how they help or hinder our ability to address challenges?

- Social networks are dynamic, shaped by strategy, infrastructure and current work .
- Information doesn't flow unchanged through the network. People add context, interpretation, bias and meaning as the information gets passed on.
- Unlike the formal communication pathways implied by an organizational chart, most learning and ideas are generated between people who informally meet and talk about their work.
- The shape of a social network helps determine a network's usefulness. More open networks, with many weak ties and social connections, are more likely to introduce new ideas and opportunities to their members than closed networks with many redundant ties.
 - In other words, a group of people who only do things with each other already share the same knowledge and opportunities. A group of individuals with connections to other social worlds is likely to have access to a wider range of information.
 - For individual and organizational success, it is better to have connections to a variety of networks rather than many connections within a single network. Similarly, individuals can exercise influence or act as brokers within their social networks by bridging two networks that are not directly linked.

Some organizations are “mapping” their formal and informal networks to examine the potential for capitalizing on connections and also to assess the potential for expanding resources.

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“When will they learn that once the trees are gone, the water is gone, once the animals are gone, and the fresh air is gone, that they can't eat money”

Aboriginal Elder



The Importance of Emerging Leaders by Brenda Herchmer



Their successes should have been cause for community celebration.

Yet praise for the successes ignited by the emerging leaders in their towns wasn't always unanimous. Too often those in senior positions seemed more intent on reminding them of their place within their respective hierarchies.

Unfortunately, this seems to be a recurring theme in much of the community leadership coaching I'm involved with these days.

One such initiative is focused on using parks and recreation to create the places, spaces, and culture that will encourage people to get physically and socially engaged in their communities.

This particular initiative issued a call for partner communities, offering \$10,000 in cash as well as in-kind support of about \$50,000. The application for funding was not that of a typical proposal as the terms were not spelled out in black and white.

The fuzziness, or perhaps the openness of the call, inadvertently seems to have attracted young, or young-in-spirit, early adapters already demonstrating community leadership by connecting the silos and working across business, government and the community sectors.

Somewhat ironically, these "early adapters" aren't usually those in senior positions of authority. Most were already working intuitively and doing all the right things – albeit behind the scenes and often in isolation. Even though they didn't always have the full set of community leadership tools, they were passionate about improving their communities and were fearless in tackling big issues with energy and drive.

In one community, a planning team of three managed to pull together an amazing cross-section of community leaders who worked together in a meeting to identify community issues and priorities. As testament to the credibility of these three and the correctness of their path, every single person at that meeting agreed they wanted to stay involved in moving forward the development of a citizen-driven Community Strategic Plan.

While things were fine when the planning team was below the radar, positive media coverage resulted in a higher profile. It was then that the higher-ups, more concerned with politics, image, and who gets the credit, were quick to slap them on the wrist leaving them disheartened and discouraged at a time when they should have been celebrating.

In another case, a remarkable young woman was able to convince almost ten percent of her entire community to participate in a day and a half of intense strategic planning that resulted in a clear consensus and direction for the town. And yes, there were noses out of joint there too.

So, what's up with that? The world seems to be lamenting the lack of young emerging leaders and yet it seems when they surface, we hold them down. It might just be that we need to rethink what we mean by leadership and management.

According to Gary Hamel, author of *The Future of Management*, most management is based on *intellect*, *diligence* and *obedience*. It's easy to see how this fits the old needs of an industrial based economy. It reflects a hierarchy in which people at the bottom do what they are told to do by people at the top who supposedly know more.

Now, says Hamel, you can buy intellect, diligence, and obedience from anywhere for almost nothing. The three higher levels we need to add to the stack, if we are to move from old-style to future management, are *calling or passion*, *creativity*, and *initiative*. If we don't add these three new levels, clearly demonstrated by these new and exciting emerging community leaders, we won't be able to ensure stronger, healthier more vibrant communities or, in fact, create anything of value.

So what do we need to do?

Simple, we all need to get over thinking that a formal position of authority makes one a leader. It is *passion*, *creativity* and *initiative* that makes a leader.

Additionally, every one of us needs to take responsibility for recognizing, supporting, and celebrating leaders – regardless of their title.

Books Worth Reading

“The Tipping Point”

by Malcolm Gladwell



The “Tipping Point” is that magic moment when an idea, trend or social behaviour crosses a threshold, tips, and then spreads like wildfire. Gladwell notes that when an epidemic tips, when it is jolted out of equilibrium, it tips because something has happened and that change has occurred due to one or more of these agents: The Law of the Few, The Stickiness Factor, The Power of Context.

The “**Law of the Few**” are people who have the power to spark word of mouth epidemics. Three types of people are involved:

Connectors

- know everyone who strategically connect people
- use the six degrees of separation
- find the patterns of acquaintanceship and interaction in which people arrange themselves fascinating
- their importance is also a function of the kinds of people they know
- they see possibility and while most of us are busily choosing whom we would like to know, and rejecting the people who don’t look quite right, connectors like them all

Mavens

- people who accumulate knowledge
- tend to be very socially motivated and have a need to share information
- have the ability to simplify everything
- not so much what they know but how they pass it along – effective in getting people’s attention due to having no personal agenda but are more service oriented
- not a persuader – the motivation is to educate and help – they are both teachers and students

Salesmen

- Critical to tipping word of mouth epidemics
- Have skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced
- Have a natural exuberance and build positive relationships by offering a level of service and expertise people can’t find anywhere else
- Their energy and enthusiasm, but mostly their optimism, is powerful and irresistible
- Skilled at knowing when crowds are with them by reading movement and rhythm and whether they are imitating expressions and emotions as a way of showing support

You will have to pick up the book to get read about the Stickiness Factor and the Power of Context. In the meantime, think about the Law of the Few and where you might need some extra help to get your good ideas out there and create the change you want to see.

Challenging our Thinking—is it worth it?

Talking about thinking is a most awkward subject to handle as it seems to always involve resentment. In our world of politeness and consensus, it is almost a “taboo” subject to inquire about the quality of our thinking. To step back and ask questions about how and why we are thinking in certain ways is usually taken very personally, even if the intent is to improve the “group’s” decision-making.

Thinking is so closely involved with our ego (except in young children), to criticize someone’s thinking or to suggest an inadequacy (even if you include yourself in the critique), is to threaten that person’s ego. Very few people can detach themselves that they can look at their own thinking on some matter.

Many people see thinking as such an ordinary function, as much a part of life as seeing, hearing or talking, we don’t feel we need to be taught any of these things. Why do we need to pay attention to how we think about thinking or to learn thinking skills?

Here are some thoughts from “Teaching Thinking” by Edward deBono:

- “We assume that if we could only increase our knowledge, we could throw out doubt, indecision and problems. We pile on the knowledge and we think that if we generate enough data an idea will emerge. Knowledge is not a substitute for thinking. We teach a knowledge subject on the assumption that thinking skills will be developed in the course of our having to deal with the knowledge. If thinking skills are an objective then the byproduct approach is not a very effective method.” Academics who are very knowledgeable in their own field and lack knowledge outside their fields shows the difference between knowledge and thinking.
- We often mistake the demonstration of fluency and argumentation for thinking skill. These are tools of thinking, not thinking itself. “Very able pupils react to an idea by making an initial judgment, then use reason and skilled argument to back it up. The argument may be flawless, yet the thinking may be appalling because it only includes those major perceptual errors of looking at only part of the situation or ignoring the magnitude of effects.” We confuse debating skills with thinking: “I can prove you wrong, therefore I am right.”
- “Education prides itself on its success in training critical intelligence due to the belief that if we can find fault in systems and ideas, we may escape the tragedy of being dominated by them – but does it enable us to construct more usable systems?”
 - Critical thinking is valuable but can never be the whole of thinking—we need to engage in generative thinking as well. Here are three reasons deBono identifies as to why we tend to adore critical thinking:
 - It is possibly the easiest form of intellectual achievement and it is a joy to operate since there is something definite to work upon and some definite result.
 - It allows us to work in a comfortable self-contained environment of the available data without having to worry about getting fresh data. We look for internal validity, internal consistency.
 - Education was for a long time in the hands of the church and critical thinking is of paramount importance in the religious world, as it is the only weapon against heresy and deviation. It is a world that relies on internal validity if it is not to collapse (but all this is very far from the practical, messy world in which people have to think to solve their problems).”



So, what do you think? Are we secure enough to have honest discussions about the strengths and weaknesses in our thinking? As you sit in groups discussing issues, is there room for learning more about thinking skills?

Evolving Beyond our Basic Instincts in Social Relationships

“All human relationships involve learning and choices about how to act and how to respond to the actions or presence of others. The foundations for these responses come from biological and social drivers that ensure survival, status, dominance and a sense of belonging,” says Ken Low of Action Studies Institute.



In our very distant past, as we hunted and gathered food, these “survival “ responses were important to sustaining life. Times have changed since those early harsh days. We have evolved and function at a higher level and the demands of our lives, community and world require a higher level of thinking and functioning. Basic functions often hinder our ability to progress. “We can choose what to reinforce and what to constrain, and change our responses as we learn more about the consequences of different courses of action, “ advises Ken.

We know that when you plant a crop, you need to provide the right kind of experiences for the crop to grow – it not only requires nutrients, but time and commitment to take care of the plant. There is no principle of quick fix or procrastination when it comes to farming – you cannot reap the benefits if you take the easy route. You can’t wait to plant the corn until late fall or fail to provide light and nutrients. Likewise, there is no quick way to develop the kind of character and conduct we need for self-mastery. As we find ourselves assuming leadership roles, we need to ensure constant attention to our growth of “character” and “self-conduct”.

When we are in social situations, we have a choice about how to react to other people’s behaviour. All of us are “wired” to instinctively protect ourselves when challenged, but what are the negative implications of this for those who assume a leadership role in a community or group?

According to Stephen Covey, over the past 200 years, we have seen a continued emphasis on personal development – but more recently in our history we have seen the emergence of personality ethics over character ethics. Personality ethics focuses on image, attitudes and behaviours, skills and techniques to influence others. It focuses on developing skills in human and public relations techniques to improve or portray a certain image. It encourages people to use techniques to get other people to like them and to attain a positive mental attitude (“if you believe it you can achieve it”).



The basic thrust of personality ethics was quick fix influence techniques, power strategies, communication skills and positive attitudes. It’s not to suggest that these skills such as communication and facilitative skills, influence and positive thinking aren’t useful, but they are secondary to character development.

Putting all your emphasis on personality development is like cramming in school; you can get by, get good grades but if you don’t pay the price day in and day out, you never achieve the mastery of the subjects you study or develop an educated mind. If there isn’t a deep integrity and fundamental character strength, the challenges of life – especially in new, difficult or challenging situations— your biosocial drivers will surface and old habits will misguide/misdirect your thoughts and actions.

We have come to believe that success is based on technology, mass organization and personality techniques. Unfortunately, character and character development have become a very low priority.

Character skill development is a revisit to the universal principles that we need in order to demonstrate personal mastery over our conduct. Without striving for self mastery over our conduct, we cannot hope to provide sustainable leadership or to influence others to discover and nurture their own capacity to make wise decisions and take wise action.

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From the Editor...

Do you have a leadership story from your community or organization you would like to share?

If so, please give me a call or email me—I would love to hear from you...

Contributing Partners

Ken Low

Brenda Herchmer

Leadership Wood Buffalo

Debbie Berg

Duna Bayley—Editor

duna.bayley@gov.ab.ca

780-644-3095

803 - 10405 Jasper Avenue

Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4R7

Fax: 780-415-8594

Caring for Those who Cared for us... submitted by Leadership Wood Buffalo

“Caring for Those who Cared for us” was the title of a Case Study researched and presented by a group of Leadership Wood Buffalo (LWB) participants this year.

“It all started when two seniors were invited as guest speakers to one of our program learning days. They were speaking passionately about the past of our region and how some of the issues are still the same now... decades later” says James O’reily, a program participant.



One of the issues the seniors brought up in their talk was the need for a better and bigger Long Term facility for seniors in our region. This inspired a group of LWB participants to take on this community challenge as an action learning project to research and build more awareness amongst key stakeholders in Wood Buffalo.

The project team took the whole group of LWB participants on a tour of the available facilities for Senior Care in Fort McMurray putting them face-to-face with realities listening first-hand to professionals in the field about their successes, as well as their challenges.

During their tour and talk, the hospital professionals were trying to introduce fun ways to get the seniors to exercise. The Wii computer games were being explored to do that. The group quickly raised money on the presentation day and bought a Wii console for the Northern Lights Health Region, Continuing Care Unit.

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