

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP: THE CONTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL SPIRIT HARMONICS IN LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Individual Spirit Harmonics are those consonant and dissonant values that contribute both to harmony and disharmony in a given management situation. By classifying these values associated with these harmonics into Affective, Cognitive and Behavioral aspects that are associated with experiential learning, we can, through pre and post-testing determine if an increased awareness and hence learning has occurred. Moreover, we can also gauge if what we have attempted the students to learn, was actually what they were supposed to learn due to changes in their perceptions of these values.

INTRODUCTION

“What Simulation Users Think Players Should be Learning From Simulations” is the title of an article authored by Jerry Gosenpud (Gosen) and John Washburn, presented at the ABSEL 1994 Conference. In this paper questions were asked concerning participants’ learning in simulations; Is it the same or different from what is intended by teachers, trainers, and designers?, Is learning identifiable and measurable?, Does more learning take place with superior performance? (Gosenpud, et. al., 1994) The authors also go on to state that if we know what simulation participants are learning and what teachers want students to learn, we can better assess if that learning was intended and whether or not to what degree that learning occurred.

In a subsequent paper, Gosenpud (1996) stated that “we can see the behavioral changes that result from learning but we cannot see the learning itself.” The question that then arises is this; can we “see” that learning has taken place by changes in the level of understanding or changes in perceptions through the cognitive process.

To determine what students should be learning, learning objectives or goals should be explicitly stated to some degree and priorities assigned and rank ordered as to not only the most important goal, but also in regards to secondary goals. These should be explicitly stated in the syllabus or at the beginning of the exercise. In doing so, both the teacher and student will have some idea as to *what* needs to be accomplished to fulfill the overall objective. The only question remaining is *how* that is to be accomplished and to discover the most appropriate method

for delivering that experience (learning). This can be accomplished in one of several ways. Either a particular methodology is used which leads the participant in the experience through a scribed set of behaviors, the behaviors used are left to the discretion of the participant, or some combination of the two. The method decided upon, although generally set by the instructor can, or may vary slightly in its application by the participant.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the changes in perceptions of the characteristics that lead to initiative and leadership (Individual Spirit Harmonics) and determine whether through this change, a heightened sense of awareness of the importance of these factors (either by association or disassociation) has taken place due to the simulation. If a change has taken place, understanding and learning have taken place due to a change in the perception of how these factors affect ones leadership through their own experience. Moreover, we attempt to determine if the students’ perception of themselves as being a leader changed due to a change in the way these characteristics are perceived?

To better understand the relationship that exists between leadership and Spirit Harmonics, we need to briefly look at these concepts individually. Leadership is defined as the process of inspiring, influencing, and guiding others to participate in a common effort. (DuBrin, 1998) Individual Spirit Harmonics are those consonant values (those that bring equilibrium or harmony) and dissonant values (those that bring disequilibrium or disharmony to a given decision situation. (Wheatley, 1992) A balance must be maintained between these values. The acceptance and resolution of dissonance, Wheatley argues, is the process that permits systems to regenerate and move to higher levels of awareness and effectiveness. In this sense the “system” has learned. At every moment in time, each decision situation has its own blend of forces, some consonant and some dissonant. Teams or organizations do not evolve or learn by suppressing their dissonance, rather they move to higher levels of effectiveness by understanding and embracing it. (Heermann, 1997) We can draw similar conclusions by considering the individual as a “team of one” and what drives this team. (Micklich, 2000) Initiative is seen as a collective driver of various underlying factors that contribute to leadership. Knowledge of these factors and

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changes in how they are perceived can contribute to understanding the importance of leadership.

For learning to take place in this manner, active involvement is required. This type of involvement should be more of a hands-on experience rather than hands-off approach where a managerial event situation is being portrayed as a concept that is studied (as in the case approach.) According to Lau and Jelinek (1984), involvement learning places primary emphasis on the process of interaction and thinking, rather than on rote memory of factual context of the area being studied.

The general learning model as put forth by Kolb, Ruben, and McIntyre (Figure 1) describes how individuals learn from experience. It is a circular transformation process that begins with some Concrete Experience followed by Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and then relates those to prior academic knowledge or work experience through some Active Experimentation. This in turn forms the basis for some Concrete Experience. It is in and through this process that perceptions about concepts and characteristics can change bringing about some form or degree of learning. What then, are some factors that affect how those perceptions are formed?

For learning to reach its greatest potential, we must, look at experiential learning as being associated with the whole person in both their affective (feeling) and cognitive aspects being in the learning event. (Hoover, 1974) In citing Carl Rogers, Hoover states that a third learning dimension of behavior can be added to the affective and cognitive dimensions. This third dimension is the behavioral dimension. This behavior exhibited is a reinforcing mechanism to the affective and cognitive dimensions. It is the action part of experiential exercises. If we want to ensure that the goals and objectives of the simulation are met, a high quality experience must be used. This would necessitate a high intensity learning experience in which the learning individual functions at a high level or arousal and activity on all dimensions – cognitive, affective, and behavioral. (Hoover, 1974)

METHODOLOGY

A simulated organization environment is used where the class becomes a corporation, with its respective levels of management; corporate, business, and functional. The students role play over the course of the semester, a role which they have chosen. This organization is then charged with defining its mission, determine the scope or major issue of a strategic nature, and develop a strategic plan that will address that scope or issue. The method used to develop this plan is left, in part, up to the class and hence the process by which their perceptions can change.

The instructor's role is to facilitate the project and serve as an information resource, guiding the students and providing feedback when and where needed, if needed. This type of simulation is aimed at addressing all three

dimensions toward attaining its objectives. The affective in the emotional attachment they have a given situation or certain aspects of it, the cognitive dimension in knowing and coming to agreement in a given situation, and the behavioral, where action is given to the results of both the affective and cognitive dimensions.

The main objective of the behavioral simulation is to gain a better understanding of strategy development in an organization-type setting. Underlying this process is the gaining of an understanding of how those factors affect the leadership process. A secondary objective is that the participant may discover something about themselves that they previously did not know. These objectives are stated in the course syllabus and covered on the first day of class.

Using the general learning model by Kolb, et. al., the participant starts with some Concrete Experience by virtue of prior management and leadership experiences. Reflective Observation occurs each time the participant encounters a decision situation in that they needed to look back on what may or may not have occurred in prior situations. Abstract Conceptualization occurs as the participant attempts to visualize the potential consequences of a given behavior. This in turn becomes some Concrete Experience if the level of awareness and effectiveness is or has changed from one similar experience to another. Then we can say that some learning has occurred. After experiencing the simulation, (Reflective Observation), the student may discover that they indeed, have leadership potential where none may have previously existed.

For training (experiential learning) to be effective, specific feedback must be given to participants for use as a basis of behavioral change (Woodworth, et.al., 1980). Mentioned in the article were various forms of feedback, all of which addressed an "after the fact" situation. However, can this type of feedback be as effective as feedback that occurs within the confines (context) of the simulation?

In order for perceptions to change, behaviors need to be changed, and as well as an associated change in the level of understanding for this to occur. What is needed initially is knowledge of what behaviors to change, but also a desire to want to be able to change those behaviors. This is based on the changing of perceptions of values that underlie them. In terms of those dimensions cited by Hoover, knowing which behavior to change is seen in the cognitive dimension, and wanting to change is seen in the affective dimension. Ideally, the changing of behavior, in the behavior dimension, must or should occur in "real-time" and if so, has when the change occurred, learning taken place? Reflective observation from the Kolb's model is implied here.

Individual Spirit Harmonics are those consonance and dissonance values that can either bring harmony or disharmony to a situation. These harmonic values are ones that give rise to the development and better understanding of what it takes to be a leader and hence leadership. Learning would take place when perceptions of these values and their relative importance changed over time and how did that

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change affect the level of awareness and understanding on the part of the participants. In other words, how can we better understand the relationships that exist among these areas? Table 1 lists both the consonance and dissonance values in six areas as suggested by Heermann. Table 2 shows these values reclassified according to the affective, cognitive, and behavior dimensions suggested by Hoover.

It is important to understand that we are considering only the consonance values and whether the perception of these values as they relate to leadership change during the course of the simulation. (Dissonance values, those that contribute to disharmony, can be implied from looking at the consonant values in the opposite. They are not a part of this study.) If those perceptions have changed, then learning has occurred.

Learning can occur as a result of both an increased awareness of an association or disassociation of an element (value) over time. Any factor with a degree of significance, either positive or negative could carry the inference that learning has occurred. Specifically, it is felt that those values most closely associated with a sense of cohesiveness would show positive increases from the beginning of the simulation. These increases would be consistent with the unity that would be provided by the firm's mission statement.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This study was conducted in two parts; a pre-treatment survey and a post-treatment survey. The treatment in this study is the behavioral simulation.

For the pre-treatment, students (n=41) were given a survey that asked them to indicate their perceptions of certain values in several areas. These being the consonant values at they relate to leadership, and whether they currently saw themselves or did others see them as being leaders. At the conclusion of the simulation, the students are given the same survey and are asked to indicate their perceptions again. When doing so they were to look back on the semester and the project when answering the questions.

In addition, in the post-survey, students were also asked if they saw the class project contributing to the development of leadership skills, did they assume a leadership position within their group, and how did they perceive the role of leadership in the coordinating activities within the organization.

The results of a paired-differences test ($\alpha = .05$) along Affective, Cognitive and Behavioral dimensions is shown in Tables 3 – 5 and the results of the questions concerning their perceptions as a whole and relationships to leadership are shown in Table 7.

When looking at the results in Table 3, the Affective dimension, we find that Belonging (1.160) is very significant, followed by Trust (.846) and Energy (.483) in measuring a degree of association. Significant levels of disassociation were found in the values for Completion (-

.771) and Compassion (-.518.) Possible explanations for these low scores are that even though the simulation had concluded, the "grade" and "outcome" (results of the strategic plan) had not been determined. For Compassion, an explanation would be the varying degrees of animosity that had built up via various decisions that were made during the simulation.

Table 4, the Cognitive dimension, showed the value Orientation, to be very significant with a value of 2.052. Surprisingly, Shared Vision/Values showed a significant disassociation of (-.540.) The Behavior dimension, Table 5, showed the values of Constructive Feedback (1.296), Competence (1.160), Mutual Support (1.138), and Aligned Execution (1.030) to be quite significant. A high level of disassociation was given to Organizational Support (-.947.) If there were the existence of silo teams within the organization, this would necessarily support the contention that they were seemingly unrelated or information is not being shared.

A modest (qualitative) correlation can be found between Shared Vision/Goal and Organizational Support. Organizational Support would be minimal or not as great if there was no relationship that existed between this and having a Shared Vision/Values.

When considering the results of Table 6 (results on questions of one's perception of being and being seen as a leader), we find very significant values for factors concerning the importance of leadership (2.133) and the global effect of Cognitive, Behavioral, and Affective dimensions (1.916). Of least significance was, how important was being a leader mean to you (.699) and if they currently saw themselves as being a leader (1.066.) Changes here indicate the participants not only saw the importance of these factors on leadership, but as a result now could see themselves as becoming a leader. This is due in part to the recognition of what it takes to become a leader.

In conclusion, it can be stated that learning has indeed occurred by virtue of perceptions being changed due to the simulation. These objectives being that an understanding or greater awareness of how these factors/values affect leadership and that through the simulation, students now perceived themselves as having the potential to become a leader. Of future consideration would be to investigate means of increasing those less significant values in the affective dimension.

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Table 1
Individual Spirit Harmonics
Consonant and Dissonant Values

Category	<u>Consonance</u>	<u>Dissonance</u>
Service	Contribution Aligned Execution Mutual Support	Depletion Uncoordinated Action Unsupportiveness
Initiating	Orientation Belonging Trust	Disorientation Alienation Mistrust
Visioning	Shared vision/values Compassion Presence	Ambiguous vision/values Callousness Aridness
Claiming	Goal/role alignment Organization support Competence	Nonalignment Nonsupport Deficiency
Celebrating	Appreciation Energy Wonder	Non-appreciation Burnout Disenchantment
Letting Go	Disclosure Constructive Feedback Completion	Withheld communication Criticism Incompletion

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Table 2
Aspects of the Learning Event:
Consonant Values

<u>Affective</u>	<u>Description</u>
Belonging	Feeling allied with and a part of the team
Trust	Feeling reliant and secure about team members
Presence	Deeply experiencing the purpose of the team
Appreciation	Feeling recognized and acknowledged
Energy	Experiencing vitality and aliveness
Wonder	Experiencing an unbounded sense of possibility
Completion	Feeling a sense of freedom when everything has been said
Compassion	Experiencing empathy and concern for another

<u>Behavior</u>	<u>Description</u>
Contribution	Generously and freely giving to another
Disclosure	Revealing previously suppressed attributes and opinions
Mutual Support	Providing reciprocal assistance
Competence	Developing skills and awareness needed to perform team roles
Constructive Feedback	Providing forthright responses that encourage growth
Aligned Execution	Fulfilling, in a unified way, customer and team needs
Organizational Support	Securing the necessary resources from the organization

<u>Cognitive</u>	<u>Description</u>
Orientation	Becoming familiarized and aware
Shared vision/values	Agreeing on what is possible and its underlying worth and merit
Goal/Role Alignment	Agreeing on the outcome and the means for achieving it

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Table 3
Affective Dimension
(alpha = .05)

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>
Belonging	.20	1.160	.253
Trust	.15	0.846	.403
Presence	.05	0.285	.777
Appreciation	.02	0.136	.893
Energy	.07	0.483	.667
Wonder	.02	0.141	.888
Completion	-.15	-0.771	.445
Compassion	-.07	-0.518	.608

Table 4
Cognitive Dimension
(alpha = .05)

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>
Orientation	.27	2.052	.047
Shared Vision/Values	-.10	-0.540	.592
Goal/Role Alignment	-.02	-0.147	.884

Table 5
Behavior Dimension
(alpha = .05)

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>
Contribution	.02	.147	.884
Disclosure	.02	.133	.895
Mutual Support	.15	1.138	.262
Competence	.20	1.160	.253
Constructive Feedback	.22	1.296	.202
Aligned Execution	.15	1.030	.309
Organizational Support	-.15	-0.947	.349

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Table 6
Leadership Questions/Variables

<u>Question</u>	<u>Variable</u>
On a whole, how do you see those areas in Section 1 being related to becoming a leader?	Global
How do you see initiative as being related to leadership?	Relation
What part do you see initiative being as a part of leadership?	Importance
How important is leadership?	Leader
How important does being a leader mean to you?	Leaderdim
Do you currently see yourself as a leader now?	Current
Do you currently see yourself as becoming a leader?	Becoming
Do others currently see you as being a leader?	Others

Table 7
Leadership/Initiative Questions
(alpha = .05)

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>
Global	.44	1.916	.063
Relation	.27	1.132	.264
Importance	.34	1.464	.151
Leader	.41	2.133	.039
Leaderdim	.17	0.699	.489
Current	.39	1.066	.203
Becoming	.63	1.885	.067
Others	.54	1.506	.140

Figure 1
General Experiential Learning Model

