

Artifact: The Move to Champlain College

Lisa M. Tiffin

University of Charleston

In my desire to grow and advance into the larger strategy of college administration, I recently left my job at Roberts Wesleyan College – my alma mater and a place where I was invested in and experienced much growth – and took a position at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont. And while this move was about advancement, it also demonstrates DEL Outcomes 2 and 4.

My new position (as my old) is firmly rooted in the Advancement Department as the new Director of Government, Corporate & Foundation Relations. Advancement is critical for the success of any non-profit organization, and it allows me to perform work that fills me in a way that other challenges never have. This move also allows for my own career advancement as my previous organization was flat, people saw me in only one capacity, and I felt I could no longer grow or advance. The new position may seem like a lateral move, but Champlain has given me metrics and goals in order to advance in title and position. This gives me the pathway and the timeline I was seeking. As my previous President and personal mentor always advises me, “Sometimes you have to go slow to go fast” (D. Porterfield, personal communication, various dates 2018-2021).

DEL Outcome 2 encourages us to, “Make timely judgments to seize opportunities and to bring about those decisions by a) developing and rewarding creative action and b) diminishing assets and processes that no longer hold value” (DEL Learning Guide, 2020, p. 32). In taking the position at Champlain, I am reworking my life by thinking more creatively about my pathway.

Not only did I realize the position at Roberts no longer held value for me, but I realized by being open to creative options, I can have both pathway for growth and the opportunity to exercise my skills in building a new program. Champlain has not had anyone in this position for over a decade and gives me the learning experience from the top since I was offered twice a month meetings with the President to ensure I understood his priorities and learn from his guidance and experience. Additionally, this decision is the right timing for me. Though scary and risky, making the decision to jump to Champlain allows me the ability to learn from the top, gives me a proving ground in a new and larger context, and provides the opportunity for promotion with clear metrics, goals, and timeline for achieving that opportunity.

Managerial Capabilities

DEL Outcome 4 states we are to, “Model, design, and implement scholar-practitioner practices and processes to develop ethical leadership in organizational, community, or institutional contexts” (DEL Learning Guide, 2020, p. 35). Throughout my initial weeks at Champlain, I have tried to model and implement the practices I have learned through my research as a scholar at UC, including my ability to influence and impact the organization.

Through my research, learning, and development as a leader, I know I will be able to have an impact on my organization. In fact, Beck & Wiersma (2013) introduced a model that directly ties strategic leaders to organizational performance through dynamic managerial capabilities, which the authors build out of Teece, et al.’s (1997) and Teece’s (2007) work on dynamic capabilities. Beck & Wiersma (2013) explained how certain leadership skills they call dynamic *managerial* capabilities are “inextricable from the managers who possess them” (p. 409) and how these capabilities fit squarely within and complement organizational capabilities.

Managerial capabilities are built on three concepts. The first is human capital, which is the set of skills and learning a leader has acquired over their career (Beck & Wiersma, 2013, p. 410). This category includes not just the hard skills and job-specific knowledge one acquires over time but a measure of leadership skills such as practical judgment or wisdom that comes with experience and time. Similar to Aristotle's concept of phronesis, or the combination of knowledge and experience (Madsbjerg, 2017, p. 6), judgment is something that can be learned and modeled (Paes, et al., 2019, p. 171; Kane & Patapan, 2006, p. 712) and is an important hallmark of a mature leader.

The second aspect of managerial capability is social capital, which is basically the goodwill leaders have built up through relationships with others (Beck & Wiersma, 2013, p. 412). I recently had a conversation with Dr. Robinson-Neale about her dissertation, which focused on the aspect of relational capital and how people can more easily have conversations and move through the business of obtaining and granting with more ease if there is a relationship established (A. Robinson-Neale, personal communication, June 5, 2021). In essence, social capital builds on the trust a leader has established with followers both in their vision and in their capability to lead.

Finally, managerial capabilities include the leader's cognition, which are the beliefs, mental models, and personal reality a leader uses to make decisions (Beck & Wiersma, 2013, p. 413). We spent a lot of time in DEL 830 examining heuristics in Kahneman's System 1 and 2 Thinking (2013) and in Klein's (2011) ideas on the balance between expertise and reliance on assumptions or biases in decision making. For me, this area goes back to experience and learning and how we as leaders need to balance action and intuition, and, as Tichy & Bennis (2009)

advocated, stand ready to reassess our decisions as we prepare, make the call, and execute (p. 37).

Building a Program & Creating Buy-In

Applying the ideas of practical judgment, social capital, and mental models in decision making to the new challenge and opportunity for growth I've been offered at Champlain, it is clear to me the impact a leader who employs dynamic managerial capabilities can have. As I mentioned, Champlain College has not had anyone in this role – strategically fundraising through state and federal avenues, corporate partnerships and private foundation grants – for over ten years. And though by and large people seem fairly happy to receive the support a role like this provides, I am tasked with both building a new program and creating buy-in across the campus community as I implement new processes, policies, and procedures.

In the first ten weeks, I submitted \$4.25M in proposals and have had verbal pledges of over \$1M already. Additionally, I have submitted the first of my proposed process and strategies changes. Because of my DEL training, my first strategy to create buy-in has been to demonstrate knowledge and expertise. In week one, I helped Champlain submit two viable projects to Senator Leahy's office for the new earmarks and appropriations opportunities. I knew the college wanted to submit to the process, but when I arrived, I realized they had no idea on how to do this. Fortunately, one of the last projects I had completed at Roberts was the submission of a \$1M appropriations proposal to Congressman Morelle's office. By jumping in and guiding the team to a quick proposal, I gained respect. That respect grew when a couple weeks later Senator Leahy's DC office called to say one of our projects rose to the top of their over 300 proposals. We recently received a phone call from Senator Leahy himself to let us know our project is one of his priorities and he is requesting \$756K for us.

Trust & Ethical Leadership

In regards to DEL Outcome 4, it's important to also focus on the second half of the outcome – ethical leadership in the organization. One of those ethical considerations is trust and fairness. Sparr (2018) advocated for leaders to address employee motivation to change through a model that encourages fairness, leader sensemaking and reframing, and encouragement of an “and” mindset. Many times, employees do not embrace change because it feels unfair. Because of this, Sparr advocated for leaders to treat employees fairly and to show them how the new process is fair. Leaders need to reframe the issue for employees and model this reframe. One way to do this is to shift from seeing change as an either-or proposition and help followers find and adopt the “and” in embracing both-and or either-and thinking. This concept runs parallel to Covey's ideas for “win-win” solutions (2004).

Certainly, the leader's judgment affects the organization, and I continually remind myself that organization boils down to people. At Champlain as I've demonstrated my leadership, most of the people I come across seem to feel supported by this new role; however, there will always be people afraid of change. As Marchiondo, et al. (2015) explained, leadership can be “conceptualized as a mutually-recognized role that emerges through a relational process of leadership claiming and granting” (p. 903). In other words, as people claim role responsibility and as other people grant or allow them to take it, over time the identity as leader solidified.

At Champlain, the Finance team had taken over responsibility for approving and tracking grants in the absence of a role like mine. As I have stepped into my role, there has been tension as they adjust to another department making those decisions and another person changing processes. My process has certainly included Tichy & Bennis's “redo loops” (2007) as I help Finance adjust to new roles and gain their trust as key partners in resourcing the College. And the

idea of partnership has been key for me. As I work to build the program and obtain buy-in to my vision for the role and the possibilities, I have been cognizant of the idea of support and the need for reframing. Dorst (2015) noted, “Reframing . . . is the key to achieving innovative solutions” (p. 39) and advocated for people to approach problems from different lenses in order to find new and optimal solutions. Part of my goal at Champlain has been to reframe the issue with Finance in particular and my role with the rest of campus in general as another way for Advancement to support them, rather than as a power grab or as a way to control the process.

Conclusion

In terms of my work at Champlain, I have relied heavily on my leadership model of Conversational Leadership. Part of creating that buy-in and gaining trust comes from the daily conversations and interactions. As Stacey (2012) noted, “Change can only happen in many, many local interactions” (p. 15). One part of conversation we often forget about is listening, which is key for engendering trust, empowering people to share their concepts and ideas, and in discovering what is and isn’t working. Over my first ten weeks at Champlain, I have engaged in what a coach called “aggressive listening” (C. Crowley, personal communication, January 22, 2020) as I have met with people seeking funds as well as with key players who are involved in process. This process and the research I have engaged in through the DEL has led me to see this type of give-and-take conversation as empowering and motivating to a level that can inspire organizational change. The strategy seems to be working, as one group I met with jokingly requested a few skin cells so they could clone me and my services.

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