

Association IMPACT* Interviews Dorothy Mitstifer

Subject: Knowledge Management / Keeping the Edge

- What will the future role of associations be in helping people embark and stay on a path of personal continuous improvement? How will the programs associations offer in this area today differ from the ones they will have to offer in the future?

Let me set the stage for knowledge management. The literature deals with both the technical and human aspects of knowledge management, and of course associations have an interest in both. Although it is helpful to have the tools and products, the intellectual assets are the most difficult and important to manage and to advance. Needed is a dynamic knowledge-based theory (Sveiby, 2001) that takes into consideration the whole system of knowledge transfers/conversions

1. between individuals
2. from individuals to the external structure (the intangible relationships with customers and suppliers)
3. from the external structure to individuals
4. from competence to internal structure (the concepts, models, templates, computer systems, and administrative tools/processes)
5. from internal structure to individual competence (competence of the professional/technical staff as well as the support/managerial staff)
6. within the external structure
7. from external to internal structure
8. from internal to external structure
9. within internal structure

These knowledge transfers/conversions form a coherent strategy for maximizing value creation of the whole system. Herein lie possibilities for organizational programming. It isn't enough to deal with personal continuous improvement in isolation; intellectual capital grows out of a coherent strategy. Drucker (1999) urged management to focus on productivity of the knowledge worker. Thus, knowledge transfer and creation of new knowledge should be the focus for the future.

The value-adding capacity of individuals includes investment in the future (training, knowledge development) and collaborative leadership (relationships, teamwork). As I see it, development of a collaborative climate may be the most pressing issue today. Investment in information sharing technology may be a waste of money if there is a highly competitive climate. If the structure rewards individual accomplishments to the exclusion of team productivity, interactive databases are useless.

Interestingly, I began writing about knowledge management in 2000, challenging my professional colleagues by stating that "The cutting edge trend of 'knowledge management' in the business world is a popular approach to utilizing formal and informal intellectual capital to increase the effectiveness and quality of work life and the business enterprise" (p. 1) and challenging my association (Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society) to prepare professionals to function effectively in knowledge management environments.

- As work at every level becomes more complex, what are some of the personal development topics and training areas that associations should focus on?

My recent work in developing a leadership development model, which leads to organizational leadership, focuses on four basic components: strengthening self-awareness, developing relationships and teamwork, understanding alliances and political realities, and understanding the elements of a promising future of the organization. These components coupled with a leadership theory as a foundation and framing as a communications tool will enable individuals to assume organizational leadership. The ability to name and frame issues is a core skill in effective collaboration. When leadership is widely shared, success is demonstrated in the following ways (Mitsifer, 2006, p. 154):

1. A consensus is formed around desired outcomes.
2. No one loses.
3. Ownership is pooled.
4. Fear and hope combine to motivate cooperation.
5. People make things happen.
6. Non-positional leaders fill key roles.
7. Reliable information is gathered.
8. A flexible system of self-direction is used.
9. Individual talents are tapped.
10. Individuals with initiative and entrepreneurial spirit are involved.

Thus, my bias for programming topics relates to my Reflective Human Action Leadership Development Model (Figure 1). These include the (a) basic components of leadership development, (b) the principles and core features of a leadership theory, and (c) the skill to frame issues by understanding diverse perspectives, embracing a wide range of views, and finding intelligent choices about a shared future.

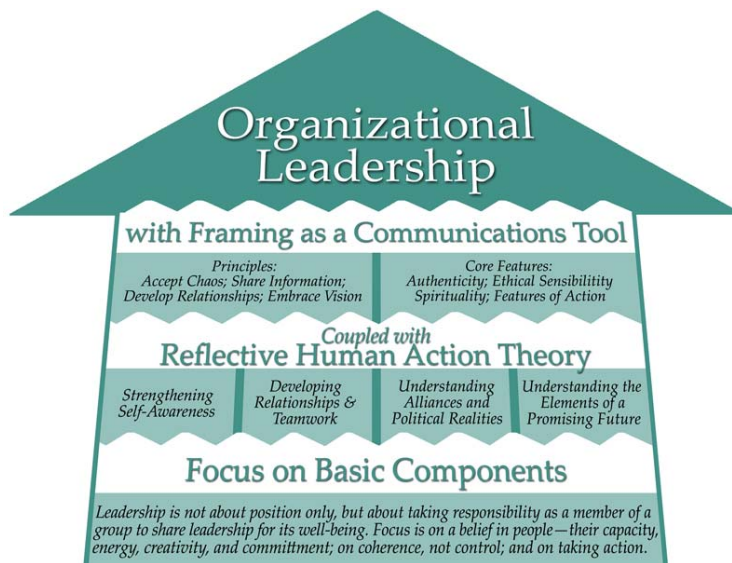


Figure 1. Reflective Human Action (RHA) Leadership Development Model. © 2005 by Dorothy I. Mitstifer. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

- Do you see a trend away from specialization and more toward employees who are versatile and flexible?

I agree with Tom Friedman that the deep skills of specialists and the broad and shallow skills of generalists need to be replaced with the skills of versatilists, who “apply depth of skill to a progressively widening scope of situations and experiences, gaining new competencies, building relationships, and assuming new roles” (2005, p. 291). The versatilist will need more lifetime learning opportunities to achieve that level of competence.

- How can associations motivate people to rise to the challenge of making themselves more competitive and employable in the market place?

Friedman poses a new social contract between employers and employees: “You give me your labor, and I will guarantee that as long as you work here, I will give you every opportunity—through either career advancement or training—to become more employable, more versatile” (p. 292). What better motivator could be found for self-development?

- What will be the rewards for individuals and associations who can absorb the new technological tools in our world?

Technology must certainly be a strong partner and support system for the human dimension of the organizational enterprise. Being able to capture the tacit knowledge (the personal know-how rooted in individuals) and the knowledge created through practice and through participation in groups will help the institution leverage its intellectual capital.

- What will be the consequences to associations that do not rise to this challenge of helping individuals manage knowledge and keep the edge?

The most valuable resource of the organization is the knowledge of its people. McGregor (2006, p. 332) says that there are three basic questions: “Do we *know* what we know? Do we *share* what we know? Do we *use* what we know to the best effect?” The value created from these questions adds competitive advantage but also innovative knowledge and the capacity for responsible environmental citizenship. Thus, I think that knowledge management is essential to remaining relevant in Tom Friedman’s flat world. Greenes (2006) states in *KM World* that the current world situation requires individuals and teams to learn before doing, learn while doing, and learn after doing. He describes the need for fast learning in order to “swarm and adapt at the speed of change demanded from a level playing field” (p. 19). Survival demands it.

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