

Leadership Skill Building through Assessment and Reflection

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Background on Competency Based Education

The National Center for Healthcare Leadership (NCHL) Competency Model is divided up into three core domains: Transformation, Execution, and People (National Center for Healthcare Leadership, 2015). The model aims to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities, or competencies, which are optimal for the success of healthcare leaders and managers. Although several graduate healthcare administration programs accredited by The Commission Administration of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) have selected and adapted the NCHL model as the foundation of their competency based curriculum, the model's competencies are not exclusive to the field of healthcare management. The NCHL competency model can be applied to a broad range of disciplines.

Marymount University's Masters in Healthcare Management (MSHCM) Program has adapted the NCHL model to formulate its competency based education program. Competency based education seeks to provide competency mastery and an assessment of the level of such mastery throughout the course of study. Frequently there is a capstone experience associated with competency based academic programs. The capstone experience provides students an opportunity to synthesize what students have gained throughout the program. In addition, the capstone experience may be used as a final assessment of competency mastery prior to graduation.

The graduate capstone course in healthcare management at Marymount University is focused on providing a thorough leadership and assessment opportunity. Professors of the capstone course specifically developed a leadership module that provided an opportunity to enhance student competency mastery of leadership, relationship building, and team participation. These competencies are key to being successful to the development of one's leadership skills and abilities to affect organizational change.

The basis of this module was: self-awareness, team development, development, assessment, and self-reflection. The module incorporated a leadership assessment tool (and book), *Standout* (Buckingham, M., 2011), to compliment the leadership development process. Through the capstone leadership module, the professors of the course aimed to provide a solid foundation for students to master key leadership skills that will ultimately be a foundation for success in the field. This article defines the process used and evaluates the student experience.

Leadership Skills

When assigned in groups, a leader will either emerge organically or be assigned. Oftentimes when building student teams, it is the student who least thought of themselves as a leader who takes on role for the group and discovers that they are born leaders. Komives, Owen, Longenbeam, Mainella, & Osteen (2005) theorized that a leadership identity is connected to various situations in the group dynamic such as developmental influences, developing self, group influences, students' changing view of self with others, and students' broadening view of leadership. This capstone leadership component aimed to enhance and assess students' leadership competencies through: self-awareness, team development, development, assessment, and self-reflection.

As discussed by Gardner et al. (2005) in their analysis of a self-based leadership model, authentic leadership is defined through self-awareness, relationships, and action. Furthermore, in examining leader-follower relationships a balance between self-awareness and self-regulation leads to a positive leader-follower relationship centered on trust and engagement (Gardner et. al, 2005). For these reasons, the professors of the MSHCM capstone course thought it essential to allow students opportunities for self-awareness, team development, development, assessment, and self-reflection. These opportunities are key components in the pathway of self-exploration, discovery, and leadership development.

Leaders must understand their own values and vision in order to be able to set a direction and to establish a consensus for following that direction. Throughout the capstone course, students were asked to not only analyze their own values, but to analyze the values and perspectives of other stakeholders within the healthcare delivery system. The culmination of this process of reflection and analysis was the leadership survey and *Standout* Assessment.

Self-reflection and analysis allow the emerging leader to identify particular strengths that may prove valuable in creating and maintaining a team consensus. Since leadership is a reciprocal relationship, having students think about and assess their own leadership competencies, is a key step to building on the mastery of those competencies. Self-reflection also allows students to analyze their leader-follower relationships. Using the *Standout* Assessment Tool, the professors had a forum to engage potential leaders and empower them to focus on and develop their leadership strengths.

Assessment and Survey

Graduate students of healthcare management participating in the capstone course were assigned to teams based on an interview with the class professors. Each team was responsible for conducting a "consulting project" with a real-world assigned client. Each team was asked to choose a leader at the start of the semester and comment on why they chose this particular person to lead their group.

During the course, all students read the book *Standout* by Marcus Buckingham (2011). The book provides a detailed profile of nine "Standout Strength Roles for Leaders." (Buckingham, M., 2011). The roles, or profiles, are: 1.) provider, 2.) influencer, 3.) pioneer, 4.) teacher, 5.) connector, 6.) advisor, 7.) equalizer, 8.) creator, and 9.) stimulator (Buckingham, M., 2011). After reading the book, students participated in a project conducted in three parts that included: an anonymous assessment and two self-reflective surveys.

Part 1 consisted of an online self-reflective questionnaire designed by the professors. During the Part 1 survey, students were asked to reflect on which "strength roles" they possessed. Students ranked the roles in which they most identified with and the roles they least identified with as well as assessing whether or not their teams were a good fit.

During Part 2 of the project, students were asked to complete an online leadership profile assessment. The online assessment tool link and code accompanied the *Standout* book. During the assessment, the reader was presented with a series of interpersonal and leadership scenario-based questions/challenges. The questions are meant to "pinpoint" the individual's "recurring reactions and behaviors (Buckingham, M., 2011)." Based on the individual's responses a complete leadership profile was generated in a pdf file. The profile details the individual's top two leadership strength roles (of the nine). These are the individual's primary and secondary leadership roles (Buckingham, M., 2011).

Part 3 consisted of the online follow-up survey that asked students to compare the results of the online assessment with their initial responses to Survey One, Part One.

Students were again asked to assess the fit of their team members as well as their chosen team leader. Additionally, students were asked if the information gained through the leadership assessment and reflection process was useful for their future team based interactions as well as their leadership development.

Results

Fourteen (14) graduate students completed the Part I Survey I. These students were asked to reflect on which “strength roles” they possessed. Students then ranked the role they most identified with and least identified with themselves. The results are listed in the Table 1.

Table 1

Strength role: Describes the student	Number of students who selected this role	Strength role:LeastDescribes the student	Number of students who selected this role
Advisor	5	Pioneer	4
Equalizer	4	Simulator	3
Influencer	2	Equalizer	2
Connector	1	Influencer	2
Provider	1	Advisor	1
Simulator	1	Connector	1
		Creator	1

In the Part I, Survey I, the students were also asked to assess whether the team to which they were assigned was a “good fit” based on the personalities and strengths of its members. Of the fourteen (14) students surveyed, thirteen (13) students agreed the team assignments were a good fit.

Team assignments were based on interviews conducted with both professors in which students were asked about: strengths, weaknesses, and prior experiences. Based on the interviews and the students stated project (topic) preference, the teams were assigned accordingly. Team leaders were responsible for coordinating and facilitating interactions between the client and the team, and between the team and the professors. Team members were responsible for: meeting deadlines for assigned tasks, providing input, and contributing to project milestones. All teams had three or four participants.

Part 2 consisted of an interactive online leadership assessment tool, which accompanied the *Standout* book. The tool presented the participant with various leadership and follower scenarios. The answers provided insight to the participant’s leadership traits and roles. Based on the assessment, the participant was given a leadership profile based on the *Standout*-defined roles. All students in the capstone course participated in this portion of the survey/project.

Part 3 consisted of the online follow-up survey that asked students to compare the results of the online assessment with their initial responses from Survey I, Part I. This portion of the survey allowed students to fulfill the purpose of our project by reflecting on their own leadership abilities and determining what leadership qualities each student believes he or she possesses. Students were able to compare their beliefs with the outcome of an assessment. Ten graduate students completed this survey. See Table 2.

Table 2

Top Strength identified during assessment	Number of students in each role
Connector	4
Provider	2
Advisor	1
Creator	1
Influencer	1
Teacher	1

It is interesting to note that in the Survey I, five of the fourteen students surveyed believed the “advisor role” best described them. However, the assessment indicated that only one student met this description.

In addition in Survey I, only one student described him/herself as a “connector” but the assessment identified four students in this role. Also, the assessment identified two students as a “teacher” and “creator” respectfully; yet, none of the fourteen students who participated in Survey 1 selected these roles to describe themselves.

The reasons for these differences listed above vary. Students’ perceptions of themselves may be based on what the student want to believe he or she is rather than the strength role that actually describes the student. In addition, the difference between the survey result and the assessment result could be the student’s lack of understanding of the roles as defined by *Standout*.

All students surveyed did agree with the online assessment profile results. In addition, all the students reported that the survey results were either very useful or somewhat useful when taking on new leadership roles. It is important to note, that this is consistent with the professors’ notions that self-assessment and reflection opportunities help to enhance leadership development.

Students were again asked to assess the fit of their team members as well as their chosen team leader. Of the nine students surveyed, six students or 67% indicated that the team assignments were a good fit. Eleven (11) percent or 2 students were unsure.

Additionally, students were asked if the information gained through the leadership assessment and reflection process was useful. Of the ten students, all agreed that the information was very useful.

For future use of this survey and the *Standout* tool, the professors will provide students an opportunity to read the book and complete the online assessment prior to assigning the teams. This will allow for the professors to place the teams according to the *Standout* roles. After the teams have had their initial meeting. The Part I Surveys will be given. This new order will allow for teams to be balanced based on *Standout* roles. Additionally, students will be self-reflecting and assessing based on prior experience exclusive of the capstone. In this way, the professors will be able to gain a clearer picture of whether or not the capstone experience is truly beneficial to enhancing leadership and team skills.

Overall, the study proved that allowing students the opportunity to work in teams, conduct self-assessment, and to self-reflect is extremely beneficial to leadership development. In the future, the leadership module presented in this capstone course would benefit from altering the process of assessment and survey. Furthermore, an expanded participation of the survey portions of the module would enhance the analysis of this project’s effectiveness in enhancing the mastery of leadership competencies.

Appendix One: NCHL’s Competency Model



References

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