Developing the practice of online leadership: lessons from the field

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Chapter 13
Developing the Practice of Online Leadership:
Lessons From the Field

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ABSTRACT

Online leadership largely develops through practice: taking the first steps into what seems a relatively uncontrollable environment is scary. Learning to adapt one's leadership style to suit conditions in the online world is an experimental process that benefits from coaching and guidance from experienced online leaders. This chapter distils 10 years of recent experience the first author gained helping senior managers develop an influential online presence at the same time as implementing digital strategies in three organizations. It starts with a brief review of face-to-face leadership theory, which most leaders encounter in traditional development programs, identifies how online practice differs, explores the phases of a typical leader's journey from conscious incompetence to conscious competence online, and highlights practical interventions that both develop capability and diffuse change organization wide. It concludes with a summary of useful characteristics for change agents supporting the enterprise transformation, which is usually the aim of a move to online working.

INTRODUCTION

Ubiquitous online connectivity has significant implications for enterprise leadership: globalization, democratization of influence (Shirky, 2010; Tapscott & Williams, 2006), cyber-security risks, access to big data, radical discontinuities fuelled by innovation, crowd sentiment, or market upheaval combine to produce a degree of complexity and unpredictability that undermine the efficacy of conventional conceptualisations of leadership, largely exercised face to face. Planning, direction and control of a reasonably contained enterprise in a relatively stable environment is no longer the norm. In what McAfee

dubbed Enterprise 2.0 (2006), direction comes through lateral interactions rather than detailed planning: networks of knowledgeable individuals across cultures combine their collective intelligence to interpret directional intent in complex conditions (Bonabeau, 2009), using the 'cognitive surplus' (Shirky, 2010) in the network and the so-called 'wisdom of crowds' (Surowiecki, 2005). Critically, then, formal power in the upper echelons of the organization no longer affords control. Leadership becomes a collective practice both amongst the top management team (TMT) and distributed more widely amongst those with insights relevant to the situation. It emerges when people forge collaborative relationships that become influential within an organizational system and share responsibility for outcomes (Bolden, 2011). Often those relationships are mediated by technology. The most influential forces shape the adaptation of the organizational system. Such disaggregation of power, reliance on meritocracy and community concern, *potentially* allows an enterprise to make better use of available knowledge in the network, better decisions, learn faster and become more agile and adaptable (McKenzie & Van Winkelen, 2004). In the long term, these are crucial factors for dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007, 2014; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) that allow organizations to 'survive and thrive in turbulent times' (Economist, 2009), because they heighten collective capacity to sense signals, seize opportunities and respond innovatively in what has been called a VUCA world - volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (Pasmore & O'Shea, 2010).

Distributed leadership supports collective sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) in VUCA contexts (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; McKenzie, Woolf, van Winkelen, & Morgan, 2009) and co-creates results through shared, collaborative activity (Edwards, 2011). But the context for exerting influence affects how leadership is distributed (Avolio, Kahai, & Dodge, 2000; Thorpe, Gold, & Lawler, 2011). The possibility of multi-media, many to many interactions through advanced information technology (AIT) collectively known as Web 2.0 has moved more work online; leadership practice is now enacted more frequently in virtual team settings (Hambley, 2007; Lipnack & Stamps, 1999; Ziek & Smulowitz, 2014). Hence the context for leadership as 'a social influence process' (Parry, 1998) increasingly depends on the quality and availability of electronic channels between highly interconnected network nodes who may be individuals or groups (Kolb, Prussia, & Francoeur, 2009). Avolio et al (2000) dubbed this intersection of technological infrastructure and distributed leadership influence 'e-leadership'. Online engagement distributes leadership influence further across time and space (location and the physical constraints upon leadership time become much less relevant). Leaders influence is more durable, because messages are searchable and their presence is enduring. These 'online breadcrumbs' leave a trail of evidence that re-enforce leaders' reputation and value systems for better or worse (Avolio & Kahai, 2003). Yet, as this chapter argues, e-leadership development cannot be separated from face to face leadership practice. An appropriate leadership style should be manifested *consistently* across all communication channels, whether these involve face-to-face interaction, traditional one-way broadcast (e.g. press, newsletters, videos, digital information etc.) or online dialogue (e.g. blogs, wikis, and virtual community spaces): unexplained inconsistencies in espoused views and values create impressions of inauthenticity, promote misinterpretation of messages, reduce trust and damage leaders' reputation, thus weakening their capacity to influence and guide the organizational ship. By implication, leaders must be mindful of how they manifest their presence and values both off-line and online. Developing organizational leadership that can work effectively in virtual and physical interactions across a complex, networked system (McKenzie & Aitken, 2012; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007) is clearly a high priority.

This chapter is an inductive exploration of the first author's learning about how to alter an entire leadership system. It draws from more than 10 years research and practical experience developing leaders at multiple levels in three different enterprises and helping them to adapt to the full implications of leading in a Web 2.0 enabled enterprise. Data comes from her personal reflections, educational presentations, peer reviewed publications and internal documents. The primary aim of the chapter is to offer practical guidelines for others working to integrate e-leadership and face to face practice, so that readers may appreciate the implications, considerations and consequences (both intended and unintended) of exhibiting what Cheuk encapsulates in the term Leadership 2.0 (Cheuk & Dervin, 2011). This combination of developing leaders and a moving the organization to a more collaborative networked model transforms the whole enterprise. Cheuk's insider research (Bartunek & Louis, 1996) on changing the enterprise ecosystem, whilst modelling on line leadership for others, provides a unique perspective and a wealth of examples of real, although necessarily anonymised, practical experiences of CEO's and Executives learning to 'work out loud' (Semple, 2012) in multinational companies.

There is no one-size fits all approach for developing Leadership 2.0 capability. The principles elicited are the essence of what is common in real world leaders' learning, but should be used with an awareness that organizational context, its history, trajectory, culture and narrative all play a role in the development pathway. The most basic tenets are to encourage leaders to be mindful of their moment to moment responses to distributed dynamics, to surface the entangled implications so they actively yet consistently influence the prevailing sentiment through appropriate channels and develop a leadership presence that remains authentic yet adaptive both online and offline.

Although it is important that leaders remain true to themselves in both contexts, their modus operandi and engagement style will change. As they venture into unfamiliar online territory, they are learning in public how to create an influential presence. This can only be done by trial and error. Unfortunately, mistakes can be amplified in the online space. Yet, in Cheuk's experience, the best trigger for unlearning ineffective leadership behaviours comes from successfully transforming mistakes into opportunities. In practice, that prospect generates a level of fear that needs active measures to be overcome. Most senior leaders benefit from ongoing coaching.

Encouraging regular mindful review of their behaviour and communication style is useful. However, the art lies in creating safe opportunities for them to experiment for real, listen to employees' responses, reflect on their practice and adapt. This represents at least 70% of senior leaders' development process. At the same time as practicing online leadership, they are modelling the intended leadership ethos for others, hence shaping what the organization becomes: ideally more collaborative, and better able to use valuable knowledge in the organizational network. Beyond the senior team, e-leadership champions and online community facilitators are powerful supports for encouraging reflexivity, overcoming fear and raising mindfulness of the link between action and consequences. Training provides a framework and foundation for future leaders' development often using lessons learned by respected e-leaders. In many ways, it is a classic action learning process (Coghlan & Coughlan, 2015; Coghlan, Shani, Roth, & Sloyan, 2014) in which organizational change and personal change co-evolve through cycles of practice and reflection, informed by sound theoretical principles. Both bottom up interventions and top down development are required to change the whole ecosystem.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?: THE BACKGROUND TO LEADERSHIP 2.0

Arguably, leadership development is at a crossroads. Adult learning theory emphasizes the importance of experiential and situated learning (Kayes, 2002; Lave, 1996) and the role of conversation and community for developing effective practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Consequently leadership development in many organizations follows a 70:20:10 principle (Rabin, 2013), proportionately using experiential learning in challenging real life assignments (McCall Jr, 2004); supportive coaching and mentoring from those with credible leadership experience; and content input derived from prior research. To date, little research has identified what challenging 'virtual life' assignments support learning, there are few role models with credible online experience and the content of most leadership literature came from research in different conditions.

Research offers little consensus about what leadership is and only limited advice about which style works best in any given context. Famously, in crisis a more controlling transactional leadership style is considered more effective than open, transformational leadership approaches, simply because delivering a fast response, *democratically*, in turbulent highly uncertain and ambiguous conditions is hard: unequivocal direction gives followers safety and clarity to act coherently (Snowden & Boone, 2007). However generally, once the chaos surrounding crisis recedes, research proposes leadership for a knowledge economy is about creating the conditions for others to perform; by listening to and valuing the plurality of followers' knowledge, expertise and capabilities, working with their needs, beliefs and values, developing their capabilities, and inspiring their voluntary and discretionary effort in the service of something they consider worthwhile.

Past research, generated by investigating face to face leadership, has been the source of content for development activities, guidance for coaching conversations and the design of experiential learning assignments. It will have also shaped senior leaders' views of good leadership practice. Research variously emphasized the personal traits, individual characteristics, behaviours, authentic, values-based styles, and meaningful relationship exchanges between leaders and followers as vital attributes (Northouse, 2016). Few traditional leadership theories comprehensively suggest suitable attributes for situations where power is more equally distributed. The somewhat paradoxically styled conception of Servant Leadership, first identified by Greenleaf (1977), identifies some factors relevant for leading in networks of equals, because it downplays leadership authority and direction, focusing more on developing others, being authentic, inspiring, valuing followers, exhibiting humility and stewarding the organization (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Yet, much theory and experience absorbed by senior leaders relied on assumptions about leadership being invested with superior authority from position power, which naturally endowed a responsibility to direct the organization through command and control of followers. How deeply embedded these assumptions are in leaders' current style affects how comfortable they will be operating in a networked online context.

Conventional leadership theory for face to face relationships assumes time, distance and localised cultural norms naturally bound leadership practice. In a virtual context, temporal, physical and cultural boundaries do not constrain leadership influence. This extends social reach and undermines the hierarchical nature of followership, allowing the values of distributed individuals and groups to gain leadership influence (Avolio et al., 2000).

Perhaps the only way we can presently define Leadership 2.0 is simply and generically: as "a social influence process" (Parry, 1998 p85) in a networked setting, where individuals and groups influence each other "to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2016 p6). Ultimately, distributed leaders are expected to

exert influence responsibly to co-ordinate the diverse factors shaping organizational outcomes, so that groups collectively realize organizational intent and satisfy critical local priorities. Thus, leadership involves helping others "understand why certain goals and activities need to be accomplished: As such it constitutes a process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to learn and accomplish shared goals in an organization" (Berson, Nemanich, Waldman, Galvin, & Keller, 2006 p579). Together, these definitions position leadership as an *ongoing* process rooted in interpersonal influence, allow for its enactment at multiple levels, but neglect the implications of translating the activities into an online context.

Early research examining leadership in an Enterprise 2.0 businesses distinguishes distribut*ive* leadership from distributed leadership, by virtue of the fact that there is "something special about leadership associated with the upper echelons, particularly in conditions of rapid and discontinuous change" (Brown & Gioia, 2002 p409). The TMT shapes the cognitive and affective context for others (Avolio, Sosik, Kahai, & Baker, 2014), and hence both the identity of the organization and how others identify with it. The TMT share responsibility for different aspects of engagement and communication; their choices and presence collectively co-ordinate the undulating flow of social influence in virtual communities, teams and distributed leaders, which otherwise could become unchanneled forces overwhelming the organizational system. Further, since the TMT make strategic decisions about which AIT to invest in, they continuously shape how leadership and new technology become entangled and mutually affect each other in forming the system. Brown et al. contend that the speed, ambiguity and complexity of such activities requires the TMT to focus on creating a 'holographic learning organization' (2014 p416) in which leading and learning are widely distributed and technology enables every element to be aware of the knowledge of the whole. Thus, the TMT need a strategic perspective on which technological advances could improve distributed leaders' information access and careful consideration of the ethical implications of those choices.

Further, being embedded in complex, interdependent and international value networks (Allee, 2000) means the views of knowledgeable stakeholders - customers, suppliers, competitors and multi-national legal, market and environmental interests also influence organizational performance. Leaders are nurturing, developing and adapting collective capabilities (Teece, 2007) within a broader ecosystem to ensure the enterprise thrives when external conditions change (Harreld, O'Reilly, & Tushman, 2007; Kleinbaum & Stuart, 2014; Teece et al., 1997). . Technology cannot discriminate between stakeholders' access, without TMT reviewing the risks and establishing appropriate boundaries for external online engagement. Thus, the TMT must judge the degree of virtual separation between organization and external business ecosystem, in conjunction with the ability of the internal leadership system to respond appropriately.

Research into shared and distributed leadership is in its infancy (Northouse, 2016 p365). When applied to what is called 'online leadership' most research is in the context of facilitating learning communities at middle manager level (Huffaker, 2010; Kim, 2000). Some has examined virtual team leadership in the context of distributed project groups, considering how leaders operate virtually across cultures to co-ordinate distributed and team relationships (Hambley, 2007; Ziek & Smulowitz, 2014). The more inclusive concept of e-leadership emerged in 2000 (Avolio et al., 2000) and emphasized the interdependence of technology and leadership as mutually informing elements at multiple levels as a system. Yet, there is limited work on e-leadership development and "how AIT can completely transform the way leaders are developed is hardly mentioned in the leadership literature at all" (Avolio et al., 2014 p126).

In the Leadership 2.0 development process, senior leaders and leaders of groups, projects and teams are all enacting adaptive and complex forms of leadership and learning (deRue, 2011; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) that combine face to face and virtual activities in the very midst of effecting

a technological transformation of the organization. Adapting to contingent contextual forces like valued heritage, local culture, turbulent sentiments, rapidly changing goal and task requirements and peoples' motivational and affiliation needs (Bass & Bass, 2008) requires versatility. Building collaborative relationships, capable of leveraging the value of heterogeneous knowledge domains that contribute to the evolution of the complex organizational system requires crossing functional boundaries (Carlile, 2004; Rau, Möslein, & Neyer, 2016). Dispersed functional groups have different expertise, norms, values and priorities that lead to different interpretations of leadership communications. Such conditions suggest a leadership development that encourages listening, sensemaking, empathy, negotiation and dialogue to evolve a shared understanding of what organizational goals mean at local level. This is renowned for being a difficult process (Bruns, 2013; Tabrizi, 2015). Of necessity, it involves mix of formal and informal communication across levels but between equals. Adapting that approach to the online context additionally requires understanding what is different about that environment.

WHERE NEXT?: IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP 2.0

The previous arguments raise many questions about what good leadership practice looks like now and in the future. In line with the literature, Cheuk highlights how online context fundamentally alters the dynamics of leadership practices in five fundamental ways, all of which are experienced as risk to leaders' reputation and credibility. She suggests that venturing into the unfamiliar context outlined in the literature creates anxiety, tension and fear for leaders who learned their craft in more conventional settings. Kahneman's work (2011) suggests this is a significant hurdle, because people naturally overestimate the risk of unlikely events occurring, and overweight risks that are salient for them in their decision making.

1. A Web 2.0 infrastructure allows for multimedia user content generation and real time, many-to-many networked interaction, thereby 'democratizing' the power in communications (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). Channels that demand attention could include anything from blogs to wikis, on line collaborative discussion spaces, webinars, phone conferences, micro messaging systems, to large scale organizational 'jams' - day or week long ideation sessions that bring together people from around the world into creative conversations as a stimulus for strategic innovation (Bjelland & Wood, 2008). Consequently, existing leaders suddenly become immersed in multiple conversations with many more staff than they would have previously. Whilst it offers opportunities to extend their communication reach well beyond the confines of physical proximity, it challenges them to develop ways to handle the abundance of content through multiple channels and they fear being overwhelmed (Jones, Ravid, & Rafaeli, 2004).
2. Despite its multi-media capabilities, most digital channels alter and often reduce the rich combination of visual, auditory, kinesthetic signals (Slater, Usoh, & Steed, 1994) naturally arising in face to face communications. This alters essential sensemaking cues (Weick, 2002; Weick et al., 2005). Manifesting leadership online and 'working out loud' (Semple, 2012) should prompt careful consideration of how to compensate for the characteristic limitations of the different online channels in order to exert influence. Thinking about when to be open and when to be more circumspect about sharing messages becomes a bigger issue. Leaders, who fear saying too much or interacting inappropriately, hesitate about engaging online.

3. Digital communications are generally recorded for posterity. Hence, whatever leaders say endures well beyond the immediate moment (Avolio & Kahai, 2003). Content becomes searchable, thereby prolonging its reach and range. The style and content of all communications continue to present leadership presence to strangers with unknown concerns in diverse contexts. Leaders give a powerful impression of themselves, conditioning perceptions of the organization and the TMT for new recruits and existing staff in different time zones and locations, long after their words were written or spoken or videoed. Further, once anyone has an equal opportunity to broadcast divergent responses across the leader's network, a leader's point of view unavoidably becomes work in progress. Many find this uncomfortable.

4. Historically, technology offered little more than an accessible and searchable storage medium, which systematically controlled how information was consumed and managed. People could ask questions of the content, but the information stored was moderated and managed and access routes controlled. Once technology supports multi-directional, *informal* information access, suddenly the basis of power changes and the risks increase. The same technology that gives everyone equal opportunity to voice their points of view also gives everyone more choices about who to follow. Anyone with a compelling message, presented in an authentic way, can gain a following. This increases the chance that someone with convincing information will emerge as a leader with a competitive message.

5. Moving beyond the carefully controlled environment of crafted and polished communications at planned events, leaders suddenly need to focus more carefully on how the content of their message and the process of communicating conveys who they appear to be and what they want to become known for. Inviting greater involvement in forming their thoughts and ideas about critical business issues, demands different judgements about when to speak and when to listen and how to handle difference and division constructively. When leaders and followers honestly 'work out loud' (Semple, 2012) together, it opens the door to unconstrained positive *and* negative reactions that requires skill to manage authentically on an ongoing basis.

Cheuk has researched and worked with these challenges over the past 10 years and publicly articulates the whole as Leadership 2.0 (Cheuk & Dervin, 2011). Clearly the physical face-to-face dimension of leadership will not disappear, so leaders are not asked to abandon previously effective practices. Followers are unlikely to be inspired by two different experiences of the same person. Leadership should be leadership, in whatever context. Arguably, in future, it makes little sense to distinguish between online and offline leadership. In the long term, the big question is how can leaders learn to harness the whole portfolio of digital and physical channels to engage with people, read the signals of forthcoming opportunities and threats to better inform strategic judgements? In the short term, that means learning how differences in digital channels shape peoples' experience of leadership. As capability advances, the next question is how to integrate effective online working with what leaders already do in face-to-face encounters, and make better use of time and energy by leveraging the technology portfolio so that leadership activities in the two spaces become complementary and mutually supportive.

These big questions prompt many practical concerns, which leaders need help with: What is involved in this process of influencing others on an ongoing basis, through multiple online channels? How can I project my leadership presence, when I won't physically know my followers or understand their world in any meaningful way? How can I manage the direction of the conversation, the abundance of content and its interpretation without physical presence? How could my online leadership activities complement physical events?

To suggest some answers, this chapter examines the key phases of leaders' experience as they develop their online practice, considers some effective forms of support for their development and how on leadership practice can be diffused more widely throughout the ecosystem. All the quotations, in italics below, are taken from an interview (by the second author) with Cheuk, (hereinafter referred to as Bonnie to distinguish the practical foundations from theory), as she reflected on her extensive experience, working with leadership teams in three separate organizations to support their transition to confident participation in digital and physical environments. The themes that emerge are strongly informed by theories of communication and sensemaking in uncertain and ambiguous situations (Dervin, 1998), by Bonnie's own blog, her own PhD research, as well as presentation and written material that she shared freely. The subsequent sections are the result of an inductive analysis by the second researcher within the context of the relevant leadership theory outlined above. A research project run collaboratively with Bonnie during 2014 provided qualitative evidence of how Bonnie actively models the process of working out loud which she encourages others to follow. Together the theory and practice suggest some general practical principles for leadership development in the light of the challenges that working online represent.

HOW LEADERS ACTUALLY DEVELOP THEIR ONLINE PRACTICE

This section explores some of the pivotal transitions points, where leaders need support if they are going to move forward, and suggest practical interventions that facilitate their capability development.

Step 1: Overcoming the Fear of Moving Into a Radically Different Space

Most leaders immediately recognise the risks involved in moving into the online space. Few naturally see its potential benefits. Learning happens best in a safe environment. Fear of things that threaten one's role or personal situation tend to disengage people from development opportunities (Lund Dean & Jolly, 2012). So, in the first phase of developing e-leadership, it is crucial to take steps to diffuse the many sources of fear that can prevent leaders both from taking their first tentative steps online and then sustaining involvement. Initially, established senior leaders benefit from some personalised support and coaching to demonstrate the benefits and help get them past their concerns.

The big, open unpredictable arena in which conventional communication control mechanisms are suddenly absent and the smallest communication error can be amplified many times seems threatening. Conversational etiquette is two-way, informal and frequent, *'so you need to realise that you cannot control what you want people to hear'* even though it is recorded for posterity. Followers will make sense of the message, interpreting it in the light of their issues and context. Naturally, leaders become anxious about the risk of posting something that could be misinterpreted or become a hostage to fortune later. In truth, the same risk is present in a physical environment, it just gets less attention because the scale seems more controllable. Bonnie deliberately raises this very point in coaching conversations with leaders. At times, personalised support has extended to ghost writing some of the early content to illustrate good practice; more often, it has been as simple as providing emotional backing. This takes the form of sitting with senior leaders, encouraging them to press the "send" button, showing them how the posts appear online. She then re-enforces positive behaviour by giving regular feedback on how often the post has been viewed, surfacing the positive value from comments received and creating a memorable story around the impact. Although this seems time consuming, the investment has multiplicative future value.

Positive stories become powerful 'use cases' that can convince others of the benefits of venturing on line, as well as providing evidence of leadership by example that serves to confirm the direction of the organizational intent.

Problems accessing and navigating around the technology system can become convenient excuses for non-participation. Time can be another big reason for avoiding the opportunity. *'I've got my P & L to run and if this doesn't work it is taking my time and taking away my resources.'* So, one of Bonnie's first priorities is *'to think through the user experience: from the first moment you send them a welcome email, to when they click through on different devices you have to make the online tools frictionless.'* Creating an environment where new online leaders find what they need and immediately appreciate the value to them requires advanced preparation. She develops a community of champions, those who are naturally positive about new ways of working, who 'seed' the online environment with key information and interesting conversations, so that senior leaders find relevant and exciting material on arrival. The aim is *'for them to see the value right away and think wow this will really save me time!'* That both quickly invalidates early avoidance strategies, and ensures people are less likely to go back to old ways of working.

Cyber security is high on many TMT agendas. Fears over leaks from online conversations are likely to be greater in organizations where external social media use has historically been blocked and where even email access is quite locked down. Working with the risk and compliance team to establish a simple guide to online etiquette that contains enough reminders about what it is safe to share and how to consider what should remain confidential is vital to pre-empt resistance. However, it is a delicate balance. Warnings to be cautious create tension and if they are too strong people interpret them as a mandate to stop sharing. Guidelines should be strong enough to steer appropriately open behaviour, but not so restrictive that they re-enforce fears. Following through on breaches is important too, so that people recognise there are real consequences of non-compliance.

Authority in an online world comes from the quality of postings. Content is king for gaining influence; role and position power have much less impact. However, when everyone is equal in the process of content generation, leaders can find it hard to know where to start the conversation. They are also aware that staff *'can talk with you, but they can also by pass you too. So, the network out there could leave you the lonely guy in the middle that no-one connects too!'* For any learner, being the odd one out is naturally a scary prospect (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For an established leader, who is still required to deliver on mainline business goals, working online can seem both disruptive of tried and tested routines and threatening to the security of their authority and subsequent ability to deliver results. To stimulate thoughts about suitable content, Bonnie starts her conversations with senior leaders by tapping into their most pressing concerns, *'What is the stay awake business issue? What are you trying to achieve?'* Immediately that removes the focus on digital, yet opens possibilities for discussing how online working could help them reach their goals. She draws on her wealth of positive stories to illustrate how other leaders with similar issues have benefited from extending the reach of their engagement activities. She cites examples that demonstrate the power of developing a following of people who don't report to you but aspire to learn from you, and *'the advantage of not getting a filtered view of the world'* The answer to the 'what is in it for me?' question also seems to be the answer to the 'why should I bother?' question!

Bonnie makes two further points in counterpoint to senior leaders' fears and resistance, *'By not engaging, you are sending a powerful message about your leadership. The time spent is a good way to understand your people.'* In addition you can *'leverage your investment'* of time by taking advantage of the digital long tail (Andersen & Nissley, 2007). *'No matter how much money you put into an event,*

and how good it is, when you say goodbye, that's it! If you leverage online it becomes searchable, the emotion can come back in 6 months' time or be felt by a new joiner in a year.' The message that leadership passion remains accessible to many more people long after the words are written or spoken can be a powerful convincer, when combined with help in composing messages that communicate what someone stands for as a leader, and the potential to save time, money and personal energy. As Bonnie points out, *'what once took twenty town halls around the world to engage people with the company direction of travel, now can be done with maybe three or four town halls combined with online engagement in between, allowing the leader to achieve more with less'.*

The organizational context tends to colour initial levels of concern over any move to Enterprise 2.0. Bonnie's first major experience of transforming an organization by introducing leaders to the benefits of networked Web 2.0 culture was at the Environmental Resource Management (ERM) consultancy (Cheuk & Li, 2013). Here people were more familiar with a less hierarchical and more collegial way of working. Leaders were less inherently wary of transferring established community knowledge sharing to an online platform. Whereas, when she moved to the banking industry, the essential conservatism and concern for information security that are part of the norms of the industry presented a bigger mental barrier to work through. Adjusting the leadership development process to honour the most fundamental norms and demonstrating how online working does not compromise them is critical to success.

Step 2: Developing a Distinctive Communication Style to Re-Enforce and Amplify Reputation

Once leaders have taken their first active steps into this new environment, concerns over style, timing and how to manage conversations in a convincing way herald a second stage of leadership development activity. Often this is the hardest, because it all comes down to judgement in context. There is no right or wrong answer about how often to post, how chatty and personal to be, the extent to which you share personal views beyond the business issues, when to respond, how to turn small mistakes into big opportunities, how to handle controversial topics or some of the surprise and unintended consequences of what has been said. Much depends on the situation and the individual leader.

Obviously, individual leaders come into the online world with various styles that have worked well for them. Caution is required. The online world magnifies poor offline leadership behaviour like aggression or excessive ego. In that instance, Bonnie advises that, before ever stepping into the online space, focused development and reflection on how to achieve results differently is the only safe response. Most leaders with a well-established face-to-face persona have unconscious habits, traits and values that characterise them for others. Some people are naturally more cautious, conservative and risk averse; some more adventurous; some serious and reflective, some naturally like to talk and are more outgoing and *'bubbly'*. Generally, the message is don't try to change their inherent nature but raise conscious awareness of how they manifest it, by encouraging leaders to be more mindful of and reflect more on their how communications and actions could be interpreted. As Bonnie tells them, *'when people meet you in the lift, they want you to be the same person they know from your online posts.'*

For some leaders, that means openly blogging about events outside work, sharing what is on their mind, reflecting on everything, whether that is a holiday experience, a child's wedding or big societal issues like whether Great Britain should leave the EU (Brexit). Others feel uncomfortable opening up so much, preferring to project a view of themselves as *'a serious business person'*. So, they decline to share personal experiences or seemingly trivial reflections. Style may also affect the frequency of

posting to either online conversations or blog posts. Some leaders post less frequently, but have such an engaging style and tone that it still connects. Others post very regularly in a more reflective mode. Both are equally valid stances. There is no right or wrong answer about style. Consistency is the important factor. In Bonnie's view, what is important is to *'be yourself'* and *'have a view'* then *'articulate how and why you have come to that view and invite others to join in, not just to support your view but so you can learn their views as well.'* That usually requires extra effort to be explicit about what people can expect. She encourages leaders to invest considerable, conscious effort to make it crystal clear that they are open to and want to hear alternative views, however surprising or contentious they may be and to reflect carefully on what it takes *'to create the chemistry between you and your people'*. For example, when starting to blog, rather than just say welcome to my blog, it's worth expressing, in their own words, sentiments like, *'I really want to hear from you and I don't mind if you are honest, blunt and direct. I welcome surprises and constructive comments, because that is how I get to learn from all of you.'* It is worthwhile to set expectations explicitly rather than leaving it to subjective interpretation, by saying something like, *'I am very busy, so that means I may only post every 4-6 weeks and I can't actively engage in all the conversations, but I promise I am watching and listening.'* Then people are less inclined to feel their valuable comments are being ignored.

Sharing deeply held views is likely to come across more authentically, because emotion will infuse the messages, making it easier to *'create a chemistry with people you have not met'*. However, by encouraging leaders to generate content about what they really want to change in their world, what they are they passionate about, what they want to be known for as a leader, it is almost inevitable that the content of their blogs will create controversy. Perhaps the safest topics to start with are topics that most people will enjoy: but, in Bonnie's experience, leaders are lucky if they avoid hitting up against something controversial quite early on. The challenge then, is to manage the ensuing conversation constructively, listen and show respect for others' contributions and engage in dialogue that generates some deeper understanding of one another.

Online leadership activity leaves a trail of 'breadcrumbs' from previous digital material leaders created. Over time this creates an impression of who leaders are, what beliefs and values they hold and how they will address issues and concerns in any engagement. Online reputation and trust is still fragile if controversy arises before a leader has established an online presence that manifests a pattern of open, authentic and balanced behaviour: people have no reference point against which to make sense of a specific response. For example, if a leader shuts down a conversation once in 500 times, it is easier to attribute this to the nature of the issue rather that a lack of openness. That makes a far less negative statement about open leadership than if the occurrence represents only one in ten instances, as can happen early in the development of leaders' online presence. Nevertheless, dealing with controversy and different points of view offers the best opportunities for coaching, reflection and impactful learning. The traditional role of the communications department vetting messages for possible faux-pas and stepping in with scripted plans is not the answer. The key is to encourage leaders to think creatively about how to turn an apparently divisive or controversial topic into something positive in the long term; turning small mistakes into bigger opportunities. Bonnie recalls a situation where a senior leader of a new environmental consultancy was keen to promote engagement with the new online collaboration platform. He publicly offered a prize of two round the world tickets for the best profile on the new platform. This created an outcry, because the high carbon footprint of flights was anathema to organizational values. However, the leader turned it round by acknowledging the point and using it to engage in a discussion about what sustainability really means, what were the factors affecting it and how could the organization

really make a difference. It became a real win/win solution, because the leader gained credibility and a bigger following through the ensuing conversation and the organization developed deeper understanding of its collective values for a sustainability policy. In the end the two flight tickets were not awarded, but no-one was disappointed (Tan, 2008).

A more experienced leader's recent blog post about the problems with Brexit also became quite divisive. The leader responded to the heated discussion by making explicit his acceptance that everyone is entitled to their views, and so long as everyone respected each other it was a good opportunity collectively to build understanding of where the two sides were coming from. This example models an authentic and genuine desire to engage with the big issues, without trying to impose one's views on other people.

Bonnie neatly summarises both these examples of good leadership in a networked communication model, *'It is not rule by democracy, but rule by better understanding of where decisions and judgements come from.'* That doesn't require censorship, but dialogue so that each side builds a better understanding of the other. Managing that process can be challenging. For example, it may be tempting to slip into corporate speak when someone contradicts you, which undermines perceptions of authenticity. The best leaders start to explore the source of the different views, using what they learn to build a bridge to a deeper understanding of the differences between both sides of the argument and then explore what similarities might unite both sides. Public spaces can leave some people feeling more reticent to comment, particularly if the issue is sensitive or divisive. When people are physically present, it's easier for leaders to identify those who are quiet and draw them out. Online, some senior leaders choose to acknowledge the hidden voices and give them the option to comment anonymously via separate mail box. Actions like these say a lot about a leader's respect for others, their recognition of how power can distort debate and their desire to treat people as equals.

There are obviously times when a topic is confidential or the full story is too sensitive to share and would unnecessarily unsettle a wider audience. Listening to online sentiment and thinking about the audience is key to judging what should or should not be shared beyond the bounds of physical conversations. However, it is often possible to identify a wider angle on the topic that could be shared to gain a deeper insight into the feeling on the ground.

Teaching judgement in these situations is hard. But as Bonnie argues, judgement is a part of leadership, wherever it is exercised. And traditionally judgement is developed through active, practical learning: sensing, trying something, reflecting, modifying and revising the approach. Hence supporting practice with mechanisms like coaching conversations to formalise reflection, in a safe environment is vital for senior leaders with an existing reputation to manage.

Step 3: Spreading Leadership 2.0 Across the Whole Organization

Developing on line leadership throughout the organizational system requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses change from both top down and bottom up. Senior leaders, who do it well, can become role models for others. Coaching is one approach to raise awareness of how leadership can influence outcomes, but it can only be part of a solution for changing a whole ecology. The more personal one-to-one solutions are resource intensive. Further, in Bonnie's view, there is a danger in recruiting a whole raft of so called 'digital coaches'. The label evokes the wrong image, because the change is not just about *'going digital'* but about leadership as a comprehensive practice. In addition, coaching seems a fluffy, woolly, unmeasurable process, so value for money becomes a big consideration in scaling it. Nevertheless, using coaching strategically is a necessary part of the overall transformation process. In

Bonnie's organization, digital coaching is deliberately embedded in the induction process for new hires to welcome them into the online environment. This tangibly demonstrates that online leadership is considered central to the organizational way of working right from the start of employment.

Bonnie often involves senior leadership in sharing experiences during leadership development programmes to focus attention on live business topics like leading for innovation and growth in a complex world. Online techniques are deliberately positioned as part of a portfolio of communications tools for achieving these business goals, rather than something outside of the core business focus.

In formal development programmes, staff are educated to rethink their basic communication principles by learning how to host better conversations. This includes time to think about how to make the communication more personal, show vulnerabilities and uncertainties without undermining people's confidence in the leader, how to put difficult topics on the table, confront people in a constructive way, open dialogue up, listen and invite people to share. Another simple but expedient technique Bonnie uses what Dervin (1998) calls 'verbings'. By increasing the use of verbs rather than nouns - e.g. thinking, acting, existing, reflecting rather than thought, action, existence, reflection - different points of view become less concrete, less normative and hence less finished and more open for discussion. This is a subtle way of inviting others into the conversation to share their perspectives and contribute to more informed sensemaking on route to a final decision. Leadership development emphasizes the value of listening, showing respect for other peoples' point of view manifesting a degree of humility alongside ideas for developing a capacity to deal effectively with surprises and things that may be hard to hear. Much of the learning comes from the examples and stories of how others have achieved the results, which is more convincing than instruction.

In her own leadership of three organization's digital transformations, Bonnie also runs regular awareness session to show people what is happening, share stories about the positive benefits others accrue from participation and listen to feedback which informs revisions to the transformational approach. She also facilitates a community of champions' network, who become positive advocates across the business and amplify the effects of all the other activities.

Bonnie sums the impact of the whole process up as 'knowledging' (Cheuk & Dervin, 2011), blurring the lines between sender and receiver, top and bottom of the organization. In this way, the TMT can find the connections between the authentic, distributed voices and strategic goals, spot threats and opportunities more quickly and incorporate a broader spread of knowledge and expertise into a distinctive way forward for the organization. And because everyone has been involved in the conversation, more people actively engage with the final strategy. It becomes a win/win situation.

Step 4: Ascending to the Next Level

The final stage of leadership development is one that most organizations have yet to achieve. Ultimately the goal would be to reach a point where leadership is a seamless experience of online and offline activities that become an integral part of how people making sense of what is happening inside and outside the organization. Once people fully grasp the potential of online, they can weigh up which is the most appropriate and effective channel to engage with relevant people in the organization and balance the mix. They can also think about how to blend the different channels, link and re-enforce content from one to another. Then Bonnie argues, they can really leverage the time and effort they invest in communication activities to optimise the reach and range of influence and maximise opportunities to hear from different groups.

With repeated experience of reflecting on their online communication styles, leaders learn to be more informal and mindful of how to host good dialogue. Bonnie is now beginning to see signs that online working also improves face-to-face interactions, increasing leaders' sensitivity to the impact of their communication practices.

Even so, Bonnie finds most organizations are cautious about extending leadership online presence externally, except for prepared statements on a web site. Engaging with a wider stakeholder community amplifies the risk of incautious, informal communication being interpreted in ways that harm organizational reputational and create collateral damage. Clearly greater external engagement has benefits in terms of access to more insights, opportunities to influence market sentiment, and organizational reputation. However, the blend of content and channels should be part a very careful communications plan. To date, few organizations have made great strides with this. In Bonnie's current organization they are just beginning to consider the possibilities now that they have a mature online leadership team with several years of experience of good practice.

Emerging technology for big data analysis of external information will become part of the portfolio for engaging with the outside world. Bonnie sees the potential for leaders to better gauge sentiment for themselves, identify emerging issues and patterns from unstructured online conversations more effectively. This would give leaders faster access to insight and intelligence and deliver real strategic benefits.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR LEADING ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

When organizations invest in implementing collaborative, social, networked technologies, they are embarking on a journey that can transform both the leadership and the whole enterprise, because it changes how decisions are made, how strategy is developed and how innovation arises. Hierarchical relationships become networks of knowledgeable equals all contributing differently to the overall performance of the business. Inevitably that creates tension for those who are learning to operate effectively in such different conditions. Current familiar ways of working, relating to others and leading will at times seem contradictory to the new requirements to work, relate and build virtual presence. That tension must be worked through for the organization to get full value from their investment. Leadership support and development is a critical strand in that process.

Enterprise transformation is a long-term change programme. Its impact can, however, be tangible. At ERM, the intent to move to a more collaborative culture took four years and won awards. The fact that greater engagement and collaboration in the service of a common purpose produced a measurable increase in company value delighted the CEO.

However, to sustain the momentum, simultaneous top-down and bottom-up movement was required, to foster a new style of egalitarian and distributed leadership throughout the ecosystem. Such a big challenge requires a certain type of a change agent to join things up in the middle. That person and their small team are leaders in their own right. This requires some quite distinctive, additional attributes, because as change agents they are both the earliest movers and first among equals in that process. Analysing Bonnie's approach suggests some important attributes,

- A multi-disciplinary knowledge and the capacity to understand how to translate the complex business issues which keep leaders in different functions awake at night into digital communication.
- Deep appreciation of the potential and risks of digital technology to outline a vision of what is possible and recognize how technology could help leaders address their business issues.
- A capacity to thrive amidst uncertainty and tension, and the practical know-how to work through difference and use it constructively and creatively.
- An ability to coach, teach, inspire and develop others, which benefits from,
  - A capacity to listen and empathize with the concerns and fears of groups of people across the organizations, use a range of positive stories and creative solutions to allay those concerns and encourage learning. Without sensitivity to potential sources potential resistance, change can grind to a halt (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).
  - Practical knowledge of the art of what good communication and dialogue entails. The challenge of engaging others and helping groups bridge the differences between deeply held points of view through real and honest dialogue is often woefully underestimated (Isaacs, 1999; Kolbaek, 2012). Yet it is a critical skill for change agents and a vital part of the organizational learning process.
  - A passion for the benefits of working collaboratively.
  - An evidence base of past online breadcrumbs that model the sort of online behavior others can learn from.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

The process of developing unconscious competence in online leadership remains work in progress. Concern to distinguish online and offline leadership are, in practice, a false dichotomy. It seems important now, because rapid technology advances have allowed complex global business infrastructures to emerge faster than leadership research can blend offline and online practice into a seamless theoretical position. Once leaders become unconsciously competent in leveraging the technology investment to increase the reach and range of their engagement and communication activities being mindful of how to translate their leadership style to suit the different conditions becomes unnecessary. Research to understand how recipients experience a leadership 'persona' manifested across physical and virtual spaces and what that means for sustaining influence would be useful. Over time, leadership practice in both spaces will evolve together, as learning that develops new styles of communicating and relating online alters face-to-face leadership approaches.

In a recent review of the e-leadership literature, Avolio et al emphasize the co-evolutionary nature of the relationship between leadership and technology. Rapid ongoing advances in AIT capability, using robotics the semantic web and big data for decision making will continue to affect the leadership dynamic, just as 'the leadership dynamic affects the faithful or unfaithful appropriation of AIT' (Avolio et al., 2014 p105). Further, research will be required to identify how people learn to integrate these different modes of interaction into a total leadership system, particularly as technology continues to evolve faster than human behavior. This raises many ethical and practical considerations about the locus and mechanisms of leadership for future organizational practice, which may benefit from sensing and tracking positive and negative sentiments and distributed and distributive leadership responses.

CONCLUSION

Transforming the Means for Organizing

Introducing collaborative technology and developing online leadership capability are two strands of a major change program that transforms where and how work is organized. Initially the process depends on moving leaders from a predominantly command, control and competition mind-set to one in which co-ordinate, converse and collaborate play a bigger role in decision making, strategy development, change management and innovation. Like most change programmes, it starts with bold ideas but emerges out of the accumulation of many small steps to address the fears of those who are instrumental in realising the change - namely those with leadership influence. The chapter outlines how to develop leadership practice that engages and influences others online, but argues that leadership style should be manifested consistently both online and offline.

Each organization starts the journey from a different set of norms, values and degree of confidence with technology. Such contextual variables are integral considerations in the design of a process to evolve a complex ecosystem of people, processes and technology that constitute what we think of as 'an organization'. In addition, each leader starts with a unique and distinctive style of leadership. This chapter has outlined some principles for developing leadership judgement to intervene effectively within a complex ecosystem. It may start with senior leaders developing online presence, but at the same time, it only becomes sustainable if the process of developing leadership throughout the network, occurs simultaneously. The development process requires a mix of developmental approaches to educate both ends of the leadership spectrum. By considering leadership theory and research through the lens of 10 years of successful practical experience supporting digital transformation, this chapter outlines a systemic approach to developing what the first author has called Leadership 2.0 that is better adapted to a Web 2.0 world.

The insights offered are designed both to support senior leaders' learning, through coaching and emotional support so they become more willing to enter what appears to be an environment fraught with risk, and, at the same time, re-enforce commitment to a new leadership style from the time people join the organization and throughout their ongoing development. In this way, the change gets embedded across the whole ecosystem and becomes self-sustaining. Such a process depends on the capabilities of a small team of digital change agents with the vision, knowledge and leadership skills to model the way forward for others, so the chapter concludes with some ideas about what those capabilities might look like.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Change Agents: The key individuals who are motivated and tasked with promoting and encouraging change. In the context of this chapter, the change is around transforming business practice to increasing collaboration and knowledge sharing through effective use of internal social technology platforms.

Ecosystem: The complex interactive system of people, processes, and technology that constitute what is understood as organisation. In this chapter, whilst we acknowledge that generally a business ecosystem would include a range of organisations in the external business environment, we are largely focusing on the relationships between elements of the internal ecosystem that generate what is locally understood by organisation.

Leadership 2.0: A set of alternative management values and practices driven by a set of coherent assumptions about the nature of human communication which enable an organisation to take advantage of Web 2.0 technologies. Leadership 2.0 challenges the standard information transmission model, emphasising 'knowledging' as an evolving process of meaningful knowledge exchange through dialogue. Employees are encouraged actively to seeking information to meet their unique needs rather than being spoon fed.

Leadership Development: The ongoing process of educating and developing leadership thinking.

Mindfulness: Paying attention to what is happening from moment to moment without being biased by presuppositions; becoming more acutely aware of one's own role in framing interpretation of sensory input, possibilities, and constraints.

Networked Organizations: A non-hierarchical perspective on organizations that assumes that the collective evolves as a result of social interactions facilitated by technology networks. The shape of business outcomes is affected more by key influencers in the network who gain authority from their knowledge and connections rather than through their hierarchical position.

Reflection: A process of (re)consideration and (re)evaluation of past (re)action or future behaviour and action which relies on questioning. It may be internally generated by a mindful individual or elicited in developmental dialogues with peers or coaches.