

Distributed Leadership Development – growth through change

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The challenge for the public sector to deliver more for less has never been greater. Organisations don't have the time or resources to send staff off on development courses and much of such training has little practical relevance. What is being sought is real leadership development that occurs whilst tackling critical challenges at work, greater discretionary effort and staff flexibility.

There is a lot written about shared or distributed leadership and the need to promote and develop authority and accountability at all levels. In this short paper we explore how leading and being involved in change can provide a unique opportunity for professional development (PD) as well as organisational development (OD).

PD is often seen as an activity undertaken by an individual in order to improve his or her own performance.

'Professional development consists of reflective activity designed to improve an individual's attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills. It supports individual needs and improves professional practice'. The Training and Development Agency 2007

Where as OD is much more focused on organisational problem solving through interventions based upon behavioural science.

'Organisational Development is a planned and systematic approach to enabling sustained organisation performance through the involvement of its people' Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

When we set out to develop a change process neither of

these objectives were at the forefront of minds. We wanted to develop a way of helping organisations to introduce new ways of working. Both PD and OD have been unintended consequences. Because they were not the primary objective a model of development has emerged that is unlike any other. It is characterised by a focus on learning by doing, learning from each other, with each other and for each other. We call this Distributed Leadership Development (DLD)

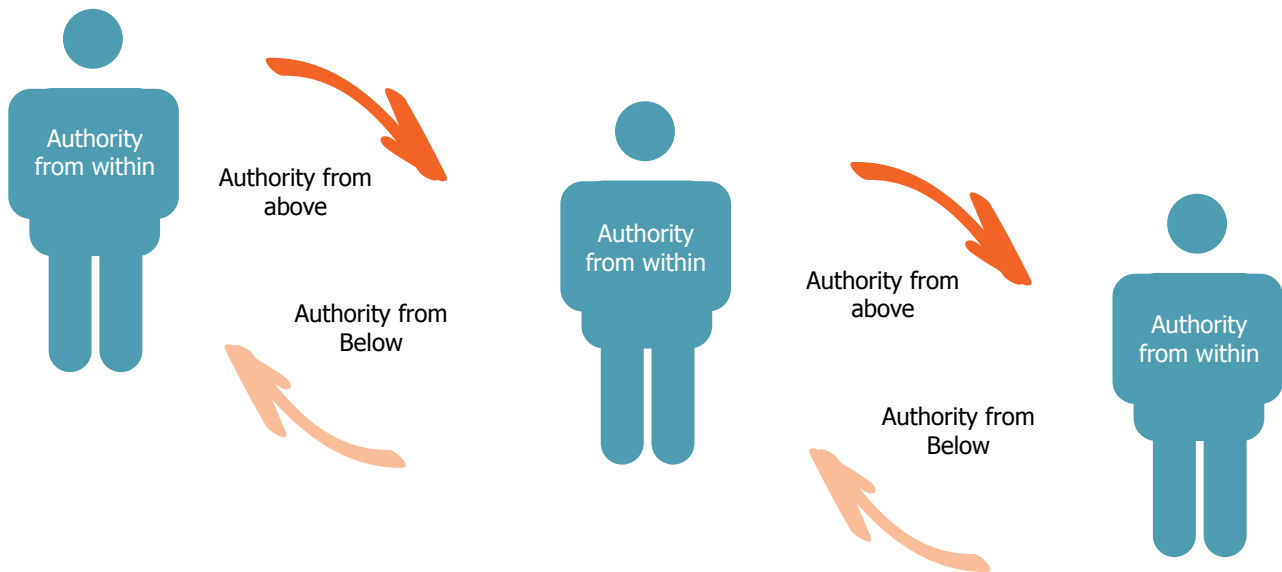
The change process challenges how 'things are done around here' such as:

- How decisions are made
- How problems are identified and solved
- How people show trust and respect for one another
- How people communicate with one another
- How people deal with change
- How people are developed
- How responsibility and accountability are assigned
- How authority is shared

Challenging the status quo in this way raises fundamental questions about leadership, followership and self. During a period of disruption having the right structure and clear accountabilities is central to effective and sustainable change. A robust change process that clearly defines roles will contain anxiety and allow learning to take place.

Everyone involved in change wherever they are in the organisational hierarchy will have people above them who will delegate authority to them and people below who will sanction their position. They will all face the challenge of taking up their own authority.

The Distributed Leadership Development (DLD) model



Adapted from A.Obholzer - The unconscious at work 1994

Authority from above

The rational description of authority is that leaders have certain rights over their subordinates, including giving orders, rewards and discipline. But at the same time they are accountable for both their own actions and those of their subordinates. For their part subordinates are obliged to carry out the commands of their superiors, provided they fit with the organisations impersonal system of rules. Thus from the rational point of view authority and accountability are not attached to individuals but invested in positions within a hierarchy. The change process allows leaders at every level to experience and develop the skills of:

- Sponsorship
- Delegation
- Boundary management
- Setting clear objectives
- Providing challenge and support

Authority from below

Followership or sanctioned authority although always important has become even more crucial with the advent of the information age and dramatic changes in the workplace. The political and emotional aspects of change play an important role. Individuals are more inclined to follow leaders who inspire self-confidence and encourage people to take up their own authority than to submit arbitrary rules and regulations. The change process illustrates and provides opportunities to practice:

- Creating and communicating a shared vision
- Consulting with a wide variety of stakeholders
- Collaborating with others
- Overcoming resistance
- Cross functional team working

Authority from within

An individual may be appointed to a position of authority, sanctioned from below, yet still be unable to exercise authority competently on account of being either undermined by their own self doubt or having an inflated picture of the self resulting in authoritarian attitudes and behaviour. The process is designed in such a way that each individual has the opportunity reflect upon their learning, receive feedback from their peers and test new ways of being.

The change process develops individuals through:

- Reflective practice
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Taking up ones own authority
- Promoting resilience, confidence and new skills
- Dealing with difficult situations

Conclusion

Being involved in the change process provides a unique development opportunity. At City College Norwich, for example, they have recognised this and time spent working in a change team is formally recorded as Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

In a short space of time the process can not only deliver strategic and operational objectives but also bring about cultural and behavioral change at all levels in the organisation. By involving board members, the leader and his/her leadership team, a wide cross section of the managers and staff as well as other stakeholders DLD can deliver simultaneous multi-level development, truly the learning organisation.

■ *Pat Collarbone taught for 28 years in inner London and established a reputation for innovation and achievement during her headship of a secondary school in Hackney. In 1996 she established the London Leadership Centre at the Institute of Education, University of London. She has been Director of Leadership Development Programmes at the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the Executive Director of the National Remodelling Team (NRT) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA).*

Pat is an acknowledged expert on educational leadership development and workforce remodelling and has advised the Department, NCSL and TDA. In 2000 she led the development of the National Qualification for Headship (NPQH). More recently she has been working on a remodelling and leadership project in the Further Education sector. She is the author of the book 'Creating Tomorrow: Planning, developing and sustaining change in education and other public services'.

Pat received a DBE in 1997 in recognition of her services to education.