

Leading a geographically dispersed, semi-virtual, autonomous team to deliver a bespoke MSc requires facilitating shared leadership and high emotional intelligence

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CABS LTSE Research Paper Submission

Theme: Post-Experience Education

Leading a Geographically Dispersed, Semi-Virtual, Autonomous Team to Deliver a Bespoke MSc Requires Facilitating Shared Leadership and High Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

The qualitative case study considers the essential features of leading a geographically dispersed, semi-virtual, autonomous team to deliver a bespoke MSc in Healthcare Leadership. The study takes place over 4 years and utilizes thematic analysis of an autoethnographic approach to the role of Cohort Director and analysis of bespoke student evaluations that assess the programme against key learning outcomes that take into account team-based learning and delivery by a team of colleagues.

Context

The MSc in Healthcare Leadership at Alliance Manchester Business School (AMBS) at the University of Manchester (UoM) is a bespoke MSc for the National Health Service (NHS) Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (EGA) Programme. The programme is a 2-year, cohort based, blended (online and face-to-face delivery) work-based programme for NHS mid-level and senior healthcare leaders with a dual academic and applied focus that confers both a MSc in Healthcare Leadership and a leadership development award. The programme employs an innovative model of programme delivery, that includes a team of colleagues that work closely with participants in the programme for the 2-year programme duration.

The team is comprised of a University Lecturer that serves as the Cohort Director that leads the team of Associates of the University. The team are geographically dispersed and work in a primarily virtual environment. Working nearly autonomously, the experience of working in the team is more like working in a mini organisation of 3 than in working as a team in the larger university setting. The role of Cohort Director is pivotal in setting the tone and norms and culture of this micro organisation.

Methodology

Autoethnographic case study

Originally associated primarily with anthropologists and sociologists, and the social sciences, broadly, ethnography is a qualitative research method that uses fieldwork to

describe human social phenomena. It focuses on culture by examining large groups over time. As are many methodological approaches, it is enjoying an expansion from its historical roots into additional disciplines and fields. Watson (2011) suggests that ethnographic studies have a role to play in addressing a dearth of leadership research that examines contextualised leadership and management practice.

Autoethnography differs from ethnography in that autoethnographers are both the subject of the research and the researchers. A form of qualitative research, autoethnography foregrounds the researcher's subjectivity by using researcher self-reflection and writing to analyze personal experience and relate this to broader social meaning (Adams *et al.*, 2015).

Autoethnography moves from the breadth of the social lens that is the focus of ethnography to the narrative perspective of the situated individual. The *auto* is the self where discovery is centred; the *ethno* is the self shaped by her/his social milieu; and the *graphy* is the writing of self as the primary mechanism of revelation (Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013, p. 320).

The autoethnographic researcher adopts a hyper-reflexive stance (Hayano, 1979) and conducts a 'study within a study' that involves in-depth self-disclosure and analysis. The result is reflection inward and observation outward.

Data

The study spans 4 years. There are 3 teams of 3 colleagues, including the Cohort Director, which remains the same across the teams. Each colleague works directly with 16 students per cohort and collectively with 48 students per cohort. The study therefore includes 144 students.

Data Sources

- A 4-year reflective journal of the Cohort Director
- Bespoke student evaluations that assess the programme against key learning outcomes that take into account team-based learning and delivery by a trio of colleagues.

Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis of the reflective journal of the Cohort Director is conducted.
- Analysis of the student evaluations

Main Findings

Shared Leadership

Leading a geographically dispersed, semi-virtual, autonomous team of colleagues to deliver a bespoke MSc in Healthcare Leadership requires purposeful strategies to facilitate shared leadership. Shared leadership is characterized by dynamic, interactive,

and reciprocal influencing among a team where the goal is to mutually lead the team toward team and organisational goal attainment (Bradford and Cohen, 2008; Pearce, Manz, and Sims 2009)

The following are the among the most essential attitudes and behaviors required to purposefully facilitate a shared leadership approach.

Attitudes

- A productive balance between confidence and humility
- Respect for the immense talent of colleagues
- Willingness to be vulnerable and share areas in which help from colleagues would be welcomed and beneficial
- Willingness to support colleagues in areas in which they would benefit
- Humour

Behaviours

- Quickly building and maintaining rapport that is 'authentic-in-role' (ie authentic while maintaining appropriate work boundaries) that encourages sustained engagement
- Quickly establishing and maintaining trust so that the team
 - identifies its collective and individual members' strengths so that team members can 'play to their strengths' in supporting each other.
 - is willing to share challenges and engage in collective and supportive problem solving
- Horizon scanning for potential interpersonal tension and proactively addressing this
- Addressing conflict with collaboration and compromise
- Developing a team culture of supportive challenge

High Emotional Intelligence

Leading a geographically dispersed, semi-virtual, autonomous team of colleagues to deliver a bespoke MSc in Healthcare Leadership requires high emotional intelligence. A 2-year cohort-based leadership development programme is effective to the extent that it can effectively address the emotional intelligence of students and to do so requires high emotional intelligence on the part of teachers working with those students. Leading the team of colleagues that work directly in this highly emotive environment also requires high emotional intelligence.

The Yale-based MSCEIT Emotional Intelligence Test is used to structure the findings.

Perceiving Emotions

Emotions are framed as data that is used to accurately read and our own emotions and those of colleagues and then to read the environment.

Using Emotions to Facilitate Thought

Accurately perceived emotions influence what and how we think. *Emotional empathy* allows us to connect to others.

Understanding Emotions

A complex emotion vocabulary facilitates *cognitive empathy*, understanding why others feel the way they do and how emotions change over time.

Managing Emotions

Managing ours and others' emotions facilitates our decisions about how to act using both logic and emotions.

Learning Meets Learning Objectives

The programme evaluates the programme using bespoke evaluations designed to measure key learning outcomes that take into account team-based learning and delivery by a trio of colleagues. Student feedback of learning on all modules has been consistently high. For example:

| Cohort | Module | Response Rate | % Strongly Agree or Agree their learning met the learning outcome * | % Strongly Agree or Agree applied learning in workplace |
|--------|--------|---------------|---|---|
| 4.1 | 1 | 50% | 94% | 96% |
| 4.1 | 2 | 50% | 87% | 90% |
| 4.1 | 3 | 18% | 74% | 80% |
| 4.3 | 1 | 20% | 92% | 100% |
| 4.3 | 2 | 20% | 90% | 100% |
| 4.3 | 3 | 20% | 90% | 100% |

* based on 10 questions directly related to learning outcomes

Impact

Innovative curriculums and delivery approaches are needed to meet the current challenges in higher education and meet the needs of organisationally placed middle and senior level leaders. Traditional student and peer evaluations of teaching remain important for assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning. An additional and under-utilised source of data is robustly collected and analysed reflections of teachers. The autoethnographic case study is a methodology fit for this purpose. It can also serve to generate conceptual frameworks to support additional research as it is here.

Future Research

A study of others in the role using semi-structured interviews to test out the findings from the autoethnographic case study is planned.

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