

Leadership Puzzle: How Might Educators Develop Agents For Positive Change?

Abstract

Roundtable discussion will focus on a leadership course implementation that helps to develop students as agents for positive change. Agents for positive change are rare and unique, and they are not born but developed. The goal of the roundtable discussion is to create an optimal course design. The intended outcome of the session is planned to answer the question on how the course might be developed and how educators might help to develop agents for positive change while bringing positive students experience, self-awareness and goal setting.

Key words: agents for positive change, leadership development, self-awareness and goal setting

Introduction

Today the society faces various social problems. To solve these problems, transformational changes are required in order to achieve a positive social effects. Some modern change theories suggest that any significant change begins with a change in a particular individual mindset.

In this case, leaders for positive change are extremely important and rare, especially those who have clear vision, persistence, ready to ask difficult questions, form relationships built on trust and lead by example.

It is worth noting, however, that such leaders are not born, but develop. In this sense, universities are an important link for the agents for positive change development. One of the development directions, to which universities do not pay enough attention, is goal-setting and self-awareness. It is believed that young people entering certain education program and study areas already formulated their professional and personal goals. However, due to the variability, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of our world, it becomes more and more difficult for young people to navigate and to find their own life and professional areas of interest and development.

Thus, the purpose of this round table is to create an optimal course design and teaching methodology for the positive change leaders development. To this end, it is proposed to discuss the current results of the cross-training leadership course in one of the Russian universities, test-drive one of the course assignment and reflect on the section activities. The anticipated section results are planned to answer the question on how the course might be developed and how educators might help to develop agents for positive change differently. The discussion is aimed at educators involved in teaching the leadership and change management disciplines. Section exercises can also be a part of the university mentoring program and in this case it may be interesting for the career office specialists.

Theoretical Foundation

Positive social change

Today modern society faces various kinds of social problems, such as social and gender inequality, diversity, environmental pollution, access to education and medicine. To solve these problems, structural and transformational changes are required to achieve positive social change.

Despite the fact that the positive social change phenomenon has become popular for research, there are various approaches to its definition. In this paper, the authors share the Stephan opinion on the positive social change and is understood as “a process that was taken in nature, and includes bottom-up dynamics”. This approach assumes that any change in organizations, industries, regions and even at the country level begins with a change in self-awareness, behavior and relationships between people. (Anderson et al., 2006; Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010).

Thus, any positive social change begins with a change in a particular individual mindset and those leaders are called the agents for positive change.

Agents for positive change

Agents for positive change have similar characteristics as change leaders. According to various studies, the most frequently mentioned characteristics are clear vision, persistence, asking complex questions, leading by example, strong relationships. (Carnall, 2007)

Clear vision. A “change agent” does not have to be the person in authority, but they do however have to have a clear vision and be able to communicate that clearly with others.

Persistence. Since change does not happen overnight, it is vital to have lasting sustainable change effects that matter to people, that they could accept and see the importance.

Ask difficult questions. It would be easy if someone comes and tells how everything should be, but this is someone else’s decision.

Knowledgeable and leads by example. If someone wants to create a “change”, you must not only formulate what it looks like, but also show it to others.

Strong relationships built on trust. All of the above doesn’t mean anything if leader doesn’t have strong relationship with the people you serve. People will not want to grow unless they trust a person who promotes change.

If society is aimed at positive social change, then the leaders development teaching program should be dealt with, starting from school and continuing at the university. In this sense, the university is a key element for the positive change leaders development, since the university student already has accumulated life experience, most likely faced various social problems, and also chose a professional development trajectory.

Session Description

Roundtable discussion session will last for 60 minutes.

Session will be divided into the three consequent blocks (Table 1).

During the first part of the session we will share our experience in designing and managing leadership course helping to develop future agents for positive change. This course was implemented in one of the Russian regional universities. The course was implemented for BSc Management students. We will focus mostly on formal and informal results, as well as teaching technologies used. We will finish this time slot with the point of view that will be used in the further work.

The second part of the roundtable will be devoted to finding other exercises and solutions to identify future agents for positive change as well as to develop them. This will require participants' group and individual work. According to authors experience most of leadership problems occur due to goal setting and self-awareness. The authors suggest to address these issues.

The third part of the round table will be connected with summing up the group work results and drawing up final recommendations for agents for positive change development.

Table 1

Session description

Time slot	Activity	Participants engagement
25 min	Presentation from authors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership puzzle course experience (Appendix A) • Authors' reflection on the current results: insights and problems • Point of view: How might the educator help students with goal setting and self-awareness in order to become future agents for positive change? 	Active listening Questions for speakers
20 min	Individual assignment from the course Leadership puzzle. (game "Faces")	Brainstorming Mind-mapping

		Visualization
15 min	Session reflection	Oral presentation Discussion

References:

1. Anderson, P. J., Blatt, R., Christianson, M. K., Grant, A. M., Marquis, C., Neuman, E. J., Sonenshein, S., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2006). Understanding Mechanisms in Organizational Research Reflections From a Collective Journey. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 15(2): 102-113.
2. Butin, D. W. (2005). *Service-learning in higher education: Critical issues and directions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
3. Collin A. Carnall (2007). *Managing Change in Organizations*. 5th edition. Pearson education. p.382
4. P. Hedström and Petri Ylikoski (2010). Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (1)

“Leadership puzzle” course

Participants: 1st and 2nd year students, BSc "Management".

Course: Leadership puzzle

The entire course is built on the principle of an inverted class. Participants work on their own project throughout the course. This course helps to identify and develop future agents for positive change.

Place in the curriculum: This discipline refers to the cycle of major disciplines and a block of disciplines that provide basic major training.

This discipline is based on the previous experience and basic subjects: ethics; career development; economic theory; .

Key competencies: This course is designed to acquire and develop key skills for positive change agents:

- clear vision;
- empathy;
- goal-setting;
- self-awareness

The leadership development course was never used in university curriculum before. This case is the course implemented in 2017/2018.