

UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

Outreach Scholars Academy 2009
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Final Project Write Up

1. PROJECT TITLE *Developing Leadership Capacity in an Non-Profit Organization*

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project is done working hand-in-hand with a local, non-profit organization that is experiencing “growing pains” as it develops from a small, relation, and mission-driven organization into a larger, bureaucratic organization that is attempting to energize members and have an impact on the local community.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION/STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES/PROBLEM

I am a member and an officer in a local non-profit organization, Oyster River Parents and Preschoolers (ORPP), that provides enrichment, recreation and social interaction to preschoolers and their families who live in the Oyster River School District (Durham, Lee & Madbury, NH). ORPP currently has a membership of approximately 170 families, yet routinely relies upon the same small group of individuals to run the organization, schedule and man events, and connect with other area organizations. Simultaneously, a recent membership poll suggests that over half of the organization is less than highly satisfied with the organization and its activities. The organization is at a point where it wants to become more involved with the larger community and begin advocating for its particular demographic group (preschool age children and their families) in terms of recreational needs, educational policy, and community development; however this cannot be done with a relatively apathetic and uninvolved membership base.

This project’s aims are to develop the leadership capacity of the ORPP Board of Directors through A) increasing the total number of members on the Board, and B) increasing the leadership performance of individual board members through assessment and coaching. It is hoped that these actions will allow for greater communication to and involvement of the larger membership, resulting in increasing member satisfaction with and participation in the organization and its activities. Ultimately, this should lead to ORPP and its membership becoming a more recognized and visible stakeholder group in the local community.

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4. PROJECT DETAILS

Goals and Objectives – *To increase the leadership capacity of the ORPP Board of Directors (BOD), through both expansion of the BOD and increasing the leadership skills of individual BOD members through assessment and coaching. It is expected that this will lead to greater communication to and connection with individual members of ORPP, and increase member satisfaction and involvement with the organization.*

Target Population/Audience – *The immediate target of this project is the membership of ORPP. It is hoped that through dissemination in a peer-reviewed journal as a research article or case study, that this project will impact scholars studying leadership (particularly the new area of inquiry into “shared leadership”) and those scholars studying the particular dynamics of non-profit organizations.*

Methods – *An online survey of ORPP membership has already been administered, and will be re-administered in the spring of 2010. Leadership assessment and coaching will be conducted based upon the work of Kouzes & Posner (2007).*

Evidence of External Collaboration and Partnership: – *As a member and officer of ORPP, I was already aware of the difficulties and challenges that the organization is experiencing. After expressing my interest in this set of challenges to the BOD, I received an enthusiastic response. All eight of the current members of the BOD have agreed to undertake the assessment and coaching activities over the summer and fall of 2009. I have worked with the Director of ORPP to develop the survey that sent out in May of 2009, and presented the results of this survey to the Board of Directors as part of a larger strategic planning process.*

Expected Impact: *The hope is that one year from now the ORPP Board of Directors will have expanded significantly and will have clear roles for individual board members. Additionally, there should be clear expectations about the need for members to be active within the organization, and Directors should be comfortable directly inviting members to take active roles in events or as liaisons to other community organizations. Ultimately, these changes should lead to a greater sense of involvement and satisfaction with the organization on the part of the larger membership.*

In terms of scholarly impact, I intend to write this project up as a teaching case study that would focus on the concepts of shared leadership and developing influence. This would be publishable in a journal such as the Journal of Management Education or the Case Research Journal. I also intend to write this as a case study for the journal Non-Profit Management & Leadership.

Scholarly Connection: *My recent scholarly work is primarily focused on the idea of emergent leadership, that is leadership that does not rely upon the formal “carrots and sticks” of a managerial role, but rather relies upon less formal*

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processes of influence. This project is very closely related to that work. Although it is focused on formal leaders (the Board of Directors) these leaders do not have the rewards and sanctions that leaders in traditional organizations are able to rely upon. Therefore, the individuals on the Board of Directors must focus even more on influence processes such as cultivating relationships, communicating a clear and compelling vision, and publicly modeling behavior for others. As such, this project is a clear extension of my work into a modified context.

5. EVALUATION PLAN

The outreach component will be assessed by the impact of the leadership capacity development efforts. Baseline data on member involvement and satisfaction has been collected, and these measures will be reassessed in May of 2010.

Additionally, individual BOD members will be interviewed to determine the impact of the leadership assessment and coaching on their individual leadership effectiveness and the organization as a whole.

The resulting case studies will be submitted to the above-mentioned peer-reviewed journals for publication. Additionally, the teaching case (to be submitted to the Case Research Journal or the Journal of Management Education) will be used in my leadership classes (both undergraduate and graduate) and I will receive useful feedback from the students regarding the utility and clarity of the case.