

Volunteering & Leadership

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At the end of the LSM, the practicum (LDST 532) requires volunteering, so how does volunteering even relate to leadership?



What is Adaptive Leadership?

- “The practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 14).

What is Volunteering?

- “Any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual” (“Volunteering”).



Why is Adaptive Leadership Beneficial?

- People who practice adaptive leadership “get better results because they build dynamic teams that embrace change and channel fear into positive outcomes” (Gleeson).

Why is Volunteering Beneficial?

- You can “meet new people and build [a] community” (Rominger).
- You can “gain knowledge and understanding of other ways of life.”
- You can “gain a sense of purpose and become happier.”
- It can “boost your self-esteem.”
- It can “advance your career by improving job prospects.”
- There are physical and mental health benefits (Rominger).



Volunteering & The KLC Competencies

** The KLC Competencies offer a framework ... for effective civic leadership. [They] represent the type of leadership needed to truly create healthier communities” (O’Malley 1).*

- **Diagnose the Situation**
- “Continually striving to understand what is going on inside, how they are changing over time, and how they as a system interact with their organization as a system” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 184).
- The definition goes with volunteering because when you volunteer you have to understand what the organization does, how they are progressing over time, and how they interact with others.



Volunteering & The KLC Competencies

Manage Self

- 1: “Identify your own strengths, vulnerabilities, and triggers” (O’Malley 5-6).
- 2: “You need to know the story others tell about you” (5-6).
- 3: “You need to distinguish yourself from your role” (5-6).
- 4: “Identify and choose among your own competing values” (5-6).
- 5: “Do what is needed, not what is comfortable” (5-6).

When managing self in terms of volunteering, these steps help when it comes to knowing what you want to do in volunteering. Also, you need to be able to step back and put yourself in another person’s shoes when it comes to volunteering, and, overall, do what is comfortable to you in volunteering for an organization that you support. Don’t just do it for getting credit, do it because you enjoy it.

Volunteering & The KLC Competencies

Intervene Skillfully

- **“Make conscious choices about what type of intervention is needed to fix the situation” (O’Malley 8).**
 - In volunteering, you must be aware of the best action steps to help your organization be successful.
- **“Capture the attention of their desired audience” (8).**
 - When you volunteer for an organization, it is best to involve the people that the organization aims to help.
- **“Understand and appreciate the role and necessity of conflict in making progress” (8).**
 - In volunteering there is bound to be conflict at some point, and it is important to accept that conflict is crucial for change within an organization.
- **“At the heart of this competency are two beliefs. First, leadership is about activity (interventions) not position (authority) and, second, effective interventions are intentionally designed and delivered” (8).**
 - What you do when you volunteer is more important than the position you hold in the organization. By realizing this, better outcomes will be made. Also, the actions you take should be thought out in order to make the most progress possible.

Volunteering & The KLC Competencies

Energize Others

- **“Start where they are, not where you are” (O’Malley 9-10).**
 - In volunteering it is best to be where the organization and clients are so that you can encourage more/ better progress to be made.
- **“Engage people across factions in a collaborative and inclusive way” (9-10).**
 - When volunteering, it is best to engage multiple people when working on a project/ activity in order to gain more perspective on it.
- **“Inspire a collective purpose” (9-10).**
 - Having a common purpose “creates hope within organizations and communities” (9-10).
- **“Pace the work” (9-10).**
 - When volunteering it is crucial to pace the work because “communities need to be ripe for change. Nothing zaps the energy out of people faster than forcing too much change on them too quickly” (9-10).

Volunteering & Adaptive Leadership Concepts

Develop New Knowledge

- **“Adaptation requires learning new ways to interpret what goes on around you and new ways to carry out work” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 243).**
 - When volunteering, it is crucial to stay up to date on big changes and how to improve.
- **“It’s not surprising, then, that in organizations with significant adaptive capacity, there is an openness and commitment to learning” (243).**
 - If you are open to learning about new ways to be a better volunteer, it allows for change in the future.
- **“When you approve an experiment that could generate new knowledge, give it time and resources by clearing something else from the to-do list of those responsible for conducting the experiment and extracting its lessons” (398).**
 - It is important to inspire new learning, but as a volunteer in order to do so one should share the responsibilities between all.

Volunteering & Adaptive Leadership Concepts

Run Experiments

- **“If you think the only way to get people on board is to make them believe your idea will work, you may have to call it a solution, express your confidence in it, but be prepared to explain” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 622).**
 - When tackling any challenge you need to be prepared for setbacks. It is important to stay true to your beliefs and keep the floor open for discussion.
- **“If your organization or community is in a state of emergency and the level of distress has reached overwhelming proportions. Frame your effort as a solution rather than an experiment” (622).**
 - When volunteering, things can change at any moment. When engaging in leadership, you have to be prepared to face any changes with confidence to inspire your team.

Volunteering & Adaptive Leadership Concepts

Get on the Balcony

- **“The first step in tackling any adaptive challenge is to get on the balcony so you can see how your organizational system is responding to it. Informed by this perspective, you will gain a clearer view of your company’s structures, culture, and defaults (its habitual ways of responding to problems)” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 120).**
 - When volunteering, you need to be able to get on the balcony to see what areas need the most help.
- **“Take some time to get on the balcony and consider your own organization’s structures and their impact” (36).**
 - It’s important to see how you and others are making an impact through your organization.
- **“A sanctuary can help you move up on the balcony to regain your perspective on the role you are playing, and revive your belief that, despite the setbacks, your efforts may indeed bear fruit in the long run” (655).**
 - Volunteering can have many ups and downs, depending on the situation, but it is important to see the progress from the balcony and don’t let it set you back.



Volunteering & Adaptive Leadership Concepts

Stay Connected to Purpose

- **“There is no reason to shoulder the difficult work of leadership if you do not have compelling, higher purposes to serve, whether saving the world, renewing your organization, or helping your community meet long-standing challenges and thrive through tough times” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 518).**
 - As a volunteer, you are giving your time for a purpose you care about. If you aren’t connected to the purpose, find a way to be more involved or educate yourself on the organization.
- **“It is vital to connect your everyday life with your sense of purpose. You can help maintain this connection through physical reminders and rituals” (526).**
 - When you are giving your time to help others, it is important to stay connected with yourself as well. Find purpose in everything you do.
- **“Your purposes provide the inspiration and energy you need to survive leadership’s choppy ride” (545).**
 - From leadership to volunteering, your purpose helps you to stay motivated and enjoy the reasons you do what you do.

Volunteering & Adaptive Leadership Concepts

Fall in Love with Tough Decisions

- **“Accept that you are going to have to make some tough decisions your whole life.... You can choose to be annoyed or anxious about these choices, or you can embrace them” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 255).**
 - When starting volunteering, hopefully the more experienced people will make tough decisions for you while you get familiar with the organization, but that’s not a guarantee. Be prepared that from day 1, and especially as you get more involved in your volunteer organization, you will be entrusted with more power and subsequently more decision making power. It could be anything from deciding what group to serve for your next event, or deciding how many cans of soup to give to the homeless person in front of you at the shelter.
- **“Nothing is forever. Rework your decision. If you are struggling with a decision, then all the options likely have some merit.... If things seem to be going well, you continue. If not, you take corrective action” (256).**
 - If you feel that the organization you chose isn’t the right fit, don’t feel stuck! You can always change how you spend your time or even look at doing a special project within that organization that is more in line with what you wanted to do.
- **“Tough does not necessarily mean important.... Rarely are the stakes as high as people imagine them to be.... Try thinking of yourself as just making the next move on the dance floor, and you may actually lighten the weight of the decision and even make better choices” (256).**
 - All I have to say is that this is way too common. Relax. Take a deep breath. Remember your life outside of this decision.

Volunteering & Adaptive Leadership Concepts

Speak from the Heart

- **“Why speak from the heart? It communicates the values at stake, the reasons that make it worthwhile for people to suffer and stay in the game” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 269).**
 - This first quote is so apt for volunteer work where often times you’re helping a fairly desperate situation. Volunteer work can exhaust you and your peers emotionally. Help keep others and yourself inspired by speaking from the heart and connecting to your purpose.
- **“Your ability to speak from the heart is reflected just as much in the ‘music’ of your voice and demeanor as it is in the particular words you say. Have you ever been in a meeting where the chairperson kept people from breaking apart or breaking down by maintaining a poised presence and a strong yet calming tone of voice” (269)?**
 - This second quote is another one to keep in mind when things get tough. If others are feeling anxious, you can be a calming and focusing presence by speaking and behaving confidently.
- **“When you are leading people through adaptive change, it is their hearts (not their heads) that hold them back. And they will not let you into their hearts if you are not willing to let them into yours” (270).**
 - Emotional vulnerability is a prerequisite for connection. In fact mutual emotional vulnerability might literally be the definition of connection. In volunteering, a good place to start sharing about your heart is why you want to volunteer with this particular organization and why or how does it inspires you.

Volunteering & Adaptive Leadership Concepts

Lean into Incompetence

- **“No one learns anything by repressing their ignorance or incompetence. And when people in an organization do not push past the frontier of their competence, they do not learn what it will take to resolve the adaptive challenges facing them” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 287).**
 - Starting in an organization or job can be scary as you feel eyes on you and the need to impress. Start getting comfortable with failure, it’s coming no matter what. The best you can do is to try to not hide it and turn it into a learning moment. Plus, showing a positive attitude through an adverse learning moment is a great way to stand out to other people in your organization.
- **“Acknowledge what you do not know, or explicitly try on a new role where everyone knows you are new to that effort. By doing this, you let people know you are willing to do whatever it takes to master the new skills needed to tackle your organization's thorniest challenges” (287).**
 - If you want to get more involved at your organization, volunteering or otherwise, take a chance! Put yourself out there to do something hard. You will improve your peers’ view of you and maybe even inspire them along the way.





Volunteering & Adaptive Leadership Concepts

Get Permission to Fail

- **“Broaden your definition of success on a particular adaptive intervention. Judge your initiative on criteria beyond ‘it worked’ or ‘it didn’t work’” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky 259).**
 - Smart experiments should give you more data than a binary good or bad. Each interaction in your organization tells you something about the people involved and the system. I like to think of myself as Sherlock trying to uncover minor details that could prove central to my case in the future. Also side note, you need to get permission from yourself too. In volunteer organizations, your time is more precious than in an organization where you could be replaced. Take advantage of this leeway to get really experimental.
- **“Prepare your constituents. Manage the expectations of those around you to prepare the ground for possible failure of your effort. You will foster a shared sense of ownership and reduce the possibility that they will turn you into a lightning rod for failure or hold you to an unreasonable standard” (259).**
 - Of course, you don’t want to take things too far or shake people’s confidence in you too seriously. You can get the best of both worlds by sharing that what you’re doing is experimental and may need a few iterations. So long as the first version shows promise, you’ve got a shot to continue your work.

How Does Volunteering Contribute to the Overall Practice of Leadership?

- Volunteering contributes to the overall practice of leadership because it aligns with the foundational support of learning what it means to become a better person for yourself and for others you interact with. This promotes your experiences in how to get onto the balcony, how to speak from the heart, being connected to the purpose, intervening skillfully, energizing others, managing self, and diagnosing the situation.



How Can You Get Involved?

- Decide what causes you care about
- Find a place to volunteer
 - In person or online
 - Use what you are passionate about to research volunteer opportunities near you
 - Explore volunteer opportunities at <https://volunteer.ku.edu/>
 - Look at different volunteer programs offered through KU Center for Community Outreach (<https://cco.ku.edu/>)
 - Attend KU volunteer fairs
- Reach out to places to apply to be a volunteer
- Start Volunteering!



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