INTERNET-BASED WORKPLACE COMMUNICATIONS
Industry and Academic Applications

Kirk St.Amant & Pavel Zemliansky
Chapter III

Millennium Leadership Inc.: A Case Study of Computer and Internet-Based Communication in a Simulated Organization

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Abstract

Technology, communication, leadership, and work processes are inextricably linked in contemporary organizations. An understanding of these topics and an ability to apply these understandings in the workplace is becoming increasingly critical for workers in all sectors. In this chapter, we discuss some of the competencies that are vital for success in the contemporary workplace, and provide a description of one approach to developing these skills: a simulated organization designed to create a dynamic classroom learning environment. We explain how simulations help students develop "real-world" competencies in effective communication and writing practices in mediated and geographically dispersed contexts, and we present how educators, students, and professionals may benefit from this approach.

Introduction

For many years, scholars and educators have investigated leadership in proximate settings—that is, in settings where leaders and subordinates are co-located with one another (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978; Fiedler, 1967; Mintzberg, 1994, 1973; Yukl, 1989, 1981). Contemporary organizations, however, often utilize geographically dispersed work groups. As a result, distanced leadership has become a timely and relevant issue. Various degrees of geographical dispersion exist. Some organizations employ "telecommuting," a practice in which members may work at home, on the road, and/or at the office. Others have teams and operations that are globally dispersed. In these emergent organizational forms, computer and Internet-based technologies are the primary means through which organizational members and leaders communicate (Benson-Armer & Hsieh, 1997; Hymowitz, 1999; Townsend, DeMarie, & Hendrickson, 1998; Van Aken, Hop, & Post, 1998). Technology, communication, leadership, and work processes are inextricably linked in geographically dispersed organizations.

In this chapter, we present an approach to teaching and learning distanced leadership and mediated communication competencies in the classroom. Specifically, we: (1) discuss the role of simulations for approximating "real-world" dynamics within the classroom, (2) present a course design that allows educators to do so, and (3) give examples of computer and Internet-based communication from this course. Leadership in Groups and Organizations, developed by the authors at Rutgers University. Our approach is grounded in theory and empirical research in organizational communication, leadership in virtual teams/organizations, and written communication. The objectives of this chapter are to explain our approach to using simulation as an instructional model, highlight the outcomes of this approach, and discuss how educators, students, and professionals may benefit from such a design.
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Background

Leadership and communication are central to successful distanced work relationships (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002; Wiesenfeld, Raghubram, & Garud, 1999). And, leadership and communication are closely related phenomena (Witherspoon, 1997). For instance, literature is interactive and dynamic. It constitutes an ongoing process of interactions between leaders and followers (Connaughton, Lawrence, & Ruben, 2003). Leadership is also enacted through communication. Leaders' communication competencies are critical to leadership practice. Indeed, many of the behaviors that characterize exceptional leaders are communicative in nature (i.e., a leader may have an excellent vision for the future; but unless he/she can articulate it to stakeholders, that vision may not become a reality). To be an effective leader, then, one must be effective in their communication with multiple audiences.

For educators, a critical question arises: Can leadership and communication competencies be effectively taught in the classroom? We suggest here that they can be taught and learned if one follows certain criteria (see Connaughton, Lawrence, & Ruben, 2003; Prince, 2001). One criterion of leadership development programs is to provide learning opportunities for students to apply and practice their knowledge, allowing them to experience the consequences of their actions (Prince, 2001). In other words, in order to develop their leadership potential, students need opportunities to lead. And, given contemporary organizational realities, students not only must have opportunities to lead others who are co-located with them, they also must practice leading in dispersed organizational and team settings.

Distanced Leadership & Communication Technologies

Distanced leadership—leading others who are not co-located with you—can be more complicated than leadership in co-located settings (see Duarte & Snyder, 1999; Fisher & Fisher, 2001; Haywood, 1998; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1998). Proximate settings allow organizational members and leaders to communicate frequently and spontaneously, provide opportunities for leaders and members to interact immediately if necessary, and foster the chance for work relationships to develop and grow (Davenport & Pearson, 1998). Leading over time and space, however, is more complex than leading co-located teams because: (1) trust among leaders and team members may be swift and precarious (Jarvenpaa, Knoll, & Leidner, 1998); (2) communication among leaders and team members may be complicated by diverse cultural and organi-

Written Communication

From the perspective of leadership in the contemporary organization, written communication is a critical communication competency (Ruben & DeAngelis, 1998) and a topic of scholarly interest (Nystrand, 1982; Raloth & Rubin, 1988; Reed, 1996). Effective written communication in the workplace is all the more critical due to the burgeoning array of options that the Internet and associated tools and technologies make possible.

There is no question that technologically mediated, text-based communication is becoming an even more primary means for conveying information in organizations than it was previously, but its importance and functionality hardly stop there. Given the increasing reliance on Internet communication and other workplace applications of information hardware and software, "writing"—broadly defined—has also become a significant activity for knowledge networking (Bartha, 2002; Drucker, 1998; McInerney, 2002; Nonaka, 1998), implementing team projects, providing formative and ongoing leadership (Connaughton, Lawrence, & Ruben, 2003), forming and maintaining relationships, and establishing and managing one's communities of practice and personal identity (Wenger, 1998).

The Traditional Paradigm in Teaching and Learning

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Mediated communication is central to these distanced work arrangements, and this may add another challenge to effective leadership. Distanced leaders often must use technology (e.g., email, video conferencing, computer-assisted meetings) to communicate with distanced employees. Understanding which media to use when, as well as making sure employees have access to equal media critical to effective distanced teamwork (see Connaughton & Daly, 2004), but are not always put into practice.

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The Traditional Paradigm in Teaching and Learning

As the previous sections have shown, Internet-based discourse is increasingly vital for dispersed organizations and individuals within today’s workplace. Given
this importance, a very fundamental challenge for communication instruction is: How should we prepare students with the knowledge and competencies necessary to fully comprehend and lead in a world of traditional and mediated communication, both of which define the contemporary workplace?

All too often, the process of teaching-and-learning communication has been thought of as an event in which an educator constructs and disseminates knowledge about communication concepts and skills using the accepted instructional technologies of the day—books, articles, lectures, and the Internet. The process is generally regarded as effective when there is evidence that the educator’s intended message was transferred from teacher to learner—when message sent (MS) = message received (MR) (Ruben, 2004). Traditionally, educators test this process through assessments of the MS = MR correspondence. And, the more a learner is able to show that the appropriate knowledge has been acquired (through writing and speaking), the more successful the instructional effort is judged to be.

**Limitations of this Paradigm**

There are several potential problems with this way of thinking when it comes to teaching workplace communication competencies in the 21st century, however (Ruben, 1999; Connaughton, Lawrence, & Ruben, 2003; Connaughton & Quinlan, 2004). Perhaps the most important is that the ultimate test of a person’s knowledge and skill acquisition is generally not in the knowing, per se, but rather in one’s ability to use knowledge appropriately, which in many domains involves the translation of knowledge into behavior (Ruben, 1999). So, for instance, while we want students to understand concepts, principles, and skills of mediated communication, we also want them to be able to appropriately apply this knowledge in their work. From the perspective of many workplace leaders, the difficulty recent graduates have effectively translating conceptual knowledge into practice application continues to be one of the primary sources of frustration (Ruben, 2004). Knowing that the Internet is important in the contemporary workplace, hearing about the types of traditional and electronic messaging used in organizations, and learning about the functions performed by organizational Internet-based communication does not ensure one’s ability to perform Internet-based tasks effectively.

A second limitation of traditional approaches to teaching-and-learning as they relate to organizational and workplace communication competencies is that the traditional paradigm tends to emphasize the transmission of knowledge from an acknowledged expert to individuals in isolation, not in teams. However, teaching-and-learning about communication outside the classroom—and most particu-

larly, in the workplace—is typically a collaborative enterprise. As Ruben (1999) has noted: “This leads to some very paradoxical situations. For example, what is likely to be called cheating—and viewed as a behavior to be extinguished—in a classroom environment, might well be called collaborative learning in the workplace, where it would be regarded as behavior to be idealized, reinforced and nurtured.” This is certainly an issue relevant to written communication instruction. For a number of very logical reasons, writing is often taught and learned as an individual behavior. And students are evaluated on an individual basis. Yet in most organizational settings, many if not most of the writing activities one engages in are group endeavors.

A third concern with the traditional model is that the structure of classes, the physical layout of classrooms, and traditional approaches to testing convey a number of meta-messages about knowledge creation, acquisition, and use. The embedded message with the traditional teaching model is that there are a small number of informed sources (teachers) possessing the organizational and workplace knowledge that should be acquired by a large number of uninformed, passive learners (students). In the workplace, however, one’s audience of evaluators for communication outcomes is generally quite diverse. In such settings, success involves creating messages that are well received by authorities, leaders, experts, and by peers, subordinates, and members of the general public. And, it is often the case that discourse that works well for one group does not resonate with others. The traditional classroom model may be criticized for creating dependencies on experts, and thereby doing too little to promote the acquisition of skills that assist an individual in evaluating and selecting among the wide array of competing information and information sources that one confronts outside the structured classroom environment.

Still an additional concern with the traditional teaching model is that while the workplace environment is dynamic, ever changing, and complex, the traditional classroom environment is typically quite static, syllabus-bound, and relatively simple. When compared to classical approaches to instruction in written communication, the contrast is quite striking. In the workplace, employees create messages for diverse audiences of varying sizes, composed in some instances for a single or small group of individuals they know, and others times for a large and anonymous audience of strangers. Individuals typically manage multiple writing assignments simultaneously, utilize multiple display media, and frequently engage in recursive writing—preparing multiple drafts for review and revision before the final. In the typical classroom, students create messages for one person (the instructor), manage at most a couple assignments simultaneously, typically utilize a very limited array of technologies, and generally approach written assignments as a bounded event. Students complete a test or write and submit a paper, wait for a grade, and that task is then complete. Contrarily, in the
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Experience-Based Learning: An Alternative for Teaching Communication in the Internet Age

Creating the realism of the workplace in an academic environment is a critical educational goal, when it comes to communication education. Experiential learning, and especially instructional simulations, can be a powerful vehicle for this purpose.

The theoretical foundations for experiential learning and simulations, games, and other forms of interactive, experience-based learning have been in place at least since the writings of Aristotle and the practices of Socrates. They were then reframed and popularized in the works of Dewey (1938, 1966), Bruner (1961, 1966a, 1966b), Flavell (1968), Mead (1934), Postman and Weingartner (1969), and others.

When properly designed and implemented, experience-based instruction—including simulations, games, and other structured activities—represent an attractive alternative to traditional classroom approaches. Experiential models accommodate more complex and diverse instructional goals, foster interactivity, and promote collaboration and peer learning (Ruben, 1999). These approaches also allow for addressing cognitive and emotional and values-based learning topics widely regarded as vital to workplace success. They are also of increasing importance in writing as the role of text-based communication becomes pervasive in a wide array of organizational contexts (Consortium, 2002; Goleman, 1997, 1998).

Teaching Writing for Use in Contemporary Organizations: A Pedagogical Model

Given this backdrop, we designed a teaching and learning environment to engage the complexities of communication and writing in contemporary organizational contexts. Our students in the course Leadership in Groups and Organizations at Rutgers University, formed Millennium Leadership Inc. (MLI), a start-up leadership and communication consulting organization. MLI is simultaneously a classroom activity and organizational experience. As a classroom activity, MLI is a simulated organization that seeks to engage students in organizational and
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leadership processes, and to foster critical inquiry and self-reflection about these processes. As an organization, MLI is a not-for-profit consulting organization that provides services to clients on internal or external communication matters.

Every semester, students form various divisions (e.g., Human Resources, Public Relations, Field Operations, Research & Development), and based on students’ resumes, the professors select a student “group manager” for each division. Together, divisional members write MLI’s mission, vision, and goals statements; they design and execute tasks; they manage internal conflicts; they coordinate with each other; they engage in problem solving and trouble shooting; and they interface with an actual client on a project of educational, social, and civic import. With each of these responsibilities, students actively learn lessons that translate to organizational life in various ways. Specifically, the students learn how to lead and participate on project teams via communication technologies, and they learn about communication and writing via these media.

Although students have the opportunity to meet face-to-face twice per week, most of their intra-organizational and intra-team interactions take place online—through email, Instant Messenger, or Web board (Yahoo groups). Each semester, our students create different norms for communicating with one another through these mediated means, and we observe and discuss how their choices affected the organization’s culture and work processes. Computer and Internet-based communication is the linchpin of MLI. Students discover firsthand how technology may enable and perhaps challenge communication between organizational members.

Since the course’s inception, students in MLI have served one client, the Rutgers Environmental Health and Safety (REHS) department. REHS agreed to build a collaborative relationship with MLI for two reasons: (1) to gain assistance in developing and executing a communication plan that would encourage university-wide compliance with Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations, and (2) to support the purpose behind the collaboration—providing opportunities for experiential learning within the university (see Connaughton & Quinlan, 2004, for more details). As the next paragraphs reveal, this relationship was a fruitful one, not only for REHS but for MLI students and educators. It has led to three innovations in teaching and learning about communication, leadership, and writing:

Innovation 1: The MLI Model Complexifies the Notion of “Audience”

At MLI, students are not only writing for the “teacher”; they are continuously creating messages for multiple audiences including peers, coworkers, group managers, the CEO and President, and their client. By creating several messages with each of these audiences over the course of the semester, they learn to become attuned to individual needs and to what messages may resonate with certain audiences and not with others. They also learn that they must attend to these many stakeholder groups, particularly in making and communicating a decision.

On one occasion, the group manager of the Planning Division sent an electronic memo to all members of the other divisions reporting how the Planning Division would take over certain responsibilities. The text of that email was construed by members of other divisions as invasive and disrespectful of their abilities to execute their tasks. The email caused such disharmony that the President met with the five divisional managers and facilitated a discussion about motivations, intentions, perspective-taking, and moving forward. The session was heated at times, as meetings like this can be in professional contexts. But it concluded on a positive note, with divisional leaders expressing understanding of how others felt and why they acted the way they did. Moreover, they discussed how email was perhaps not the most appropriate channel for this sort of discussion, as recipients lacked nonverbal cues and could “read into” the textual message things that the sender did not intend. At the next class meeting, the CEO and President updated other MLI members of the meeting’s process and outcomes, and they helped students make sense of why the conflict developed and how, as leaders, they can deal with similar conflicts in the future.

On another occasion, students applied their knowledge of multiple audiences to assist REHS with enhancing its website. In evaluating the website, they thought of the many stakeholders that would visit the website and how they may perceive it. When providing recommendations to their client, students learned that they should be sensitive to the fact that one REHS staff member had created the website and that he would be in the audience listening to their final presentation and ideas for its enhancement. Thus, in presenting their ideas in written and oral formats, students learned how to do so in a palatable way. They began by noting general principles of effective websites (e.g., easily accessible, consistent, adaptable to users, tested and debugged, current, documented, etc.). They then acknowledged the strengths of the REHS website before proposing general suggestions and concrete action steps, offering examples of other institutions’ websites. The document that captures these ideas, presented to their client in written and mediated forms, includes clear and concise language (see Figure 2 for a sample).
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On another occasion, students applied their knowledge of multiple audiences to assist REHS with enhancing its website. In evaluating the website, they thought of the many stakeholders that would visit the website and how they may perceive it. When providing recommendations to their client, students learned that they should be sensitive to the fact that one REHS staff member had created the website and that he would be in the audience listening to their final presentation and ideas for its enhancement. Thus, in presenting their ideas in written and oral formats, students learned how to do so in a palatable way. They began by noting general principles of effective websites (e.g., easily accessible, consistent, adaptable to users, tested and debugged, current, documented, etc.). They then acknowledged the strengths of the REHS website before proposing general suggestions and concrete action steps, offering examples of other institutions’ websites. The document that captures these ideas, presented to their client in written and mediated forms, includes clear and concise language (see Figure 2 for a sample).
Figure 2. Sample of electronic/written MLI document for enhancing REHS website

REHS Website Strengths:

Our initial task in evaluating REHS’s website was to take a look at the site and pinpoint areas that work well for the site. Some strengths of the page are:

• The website provides very detailed information. For example, the BioSafety page has all valuable information.
• The site map is very organized, the color coding makes it easy to follow.
• The homepage has color and a logo, making it more friendly and less sterile.
• There is a hit meter (counter) on the page, so you can get an idea of how many people visit the site.

Suggestions for Future:

To help us better evaluate the REHS website, we found it helpful to look at other schools’ environmental health Web pages. Many of our observations and suggestions stem from this examination, noting strengths and design elements REHS could use. After looking at these sites, we found that the following improvements would make REHS’s website stronger and more useful for its stakeholders:

• The website itself is hard to find. Perhaps there is a way to have it listed under Rutgers’ websites on the Rutgers homepage. For example, to find “REHS” a user has to go to “E” on Rutgers “A-Z”. That may be difficult for users. One idea would be to list REHS under “R” for consistency.
• There is a great deal of information, but perhaps it is a little too much information. Break down information into smaller sections, so it is less intimidating.
• The wording should be easier to understand (less technical terminology). Audiences other than technically oriented ones will use the website as well.
• The website must be integrated with the other recommendations outlined in this document: include the revised Einstein logo, events REHS participates in and supports, as well as programs REHS might be running.

Innovation 2: The MLI Model Multiplies the Number of Different Media Utilized

Students engage in three genres of communication during their MLI experience: traditional written communication, mediated communication, and oral communication. Traditional written communication is practiced through periodic reflection papers in which the students are asked to critically ponder organizational experiences at MLI and write about them (e.g., “Think of a time, either at MLI or in your experience, when a leader has attempted to institute change. Assess the leader’s communication strategies, using readings, lectures, and in-class presentations to support your points”). It is also practiced in their final examination in which students are asked to synthesize theory from leadership studies and organizational communication with their MLI experiences.

On a daily basis, students practice mediated communication. They use several channels such as listservs, Yahoo groups, email, and Instant Messenger to coordinate and communicate daily operations. For instance, one semester, the Planning Division (responsible for overall coordination of different divisions within MLI) decided to create and maintain an internal listserv to update all MLI members on the activities of other divisions. Students in this division learned how to implement and maintain this communication tool. They also learned how to convince group managers that such a service was critical to organizational processes so that the group managers would submit weekly updates to the Planning Division for the listerv.

Students also become frustrated when peers do not respond to their electronic messages, and they let each other know why timely responses are critical to organizational processes. One semester, the Research & Development group manager had such difficulties with her members not responding to her emails that she finally called a face-to-face team meeting to ascertain what the underlying issues were. In doing so, she learned that there were a variety of reasons for lack of response: one team member regularly checked a different email account than the one the group manager had an address for; another team member was not aware that she should be regularly checking email, thus only checked it once a week. Through these frustrating iterations, the group manager and her team members learned of the importance of setting expectations and norms for communicating via technologies.

Students also come to realize that not everyone prefers the same channel as they do for communication (e.g., some really like using Instant Messenger and others do not) and that not everyone has the same access to certain channels as they...
REHS Website Strengths:
Our initial task in evaluating REHS's website was to take a look at the site and pinpoint areas that work well for the site. Some strengths of the page are:

- The website provides very detailed information. For example, the BioSafety page has all valuable information.
- The site map is very organized, the color coding makes it easy to follow.
- The homepage has color and a logo, making it more friendly and less sterile.
- There is a hit meter (counter) on the page, so you can get an idea of how many people visit the site.

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do (e.g., some students do not have Instant Messenger capabilities 24 hours a day). Both of these challenges lead to team members’ lack of communication, and attributions about team members. For instance, one team member in the Creative Division was embarrassed to admit to his group manager that he did not have a computer at home; thus, he was unable to participate in Yahoo groups and Instant Messenger meetings after a certain hour every weekday and on the weekends. This unknown inequity in technology manifested in his team members initially believing that he was lazy and unwilling to contribute to work processes. In reality, he was very enthusiastic to participate and when he did face-to-face or over the telephone, he proposed novel ideas. In this case, the MLI President and CEO (the authors) intervened by asking the student if there was something wrong that they could help with, learning of his communication obstacles, and then meeting with the group manager to brainstorm other communication ideas. His group manager worked with the student’s needs and made sure to disseminate electronic memos to the team before 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and to give team members phone calls if important things came up on the weekends. That way, the student could stay in the loop.

Despite these challenges, most of the students prefer to use mediated communication for running MLI on a daily basis. Not only are most of them comfortable with using communication technologies, but the fact that they live in different parts of New Jersey and New York makes using communication technologies for everyday communication a necessity. This is one of the ways that MLI mirrors a geographically dispersed organization.

Students also practice oral communication at MLI. They do so in two ways. First, each division prepares and delivers a professional development presentation for MLI members (see Figure 3 for a description of this assignment). To do so, they research their topic (e.g., workplace diversity) and organize a 45-minute presentation that will be educating and engaging. Students also practice oral communication by delivering a final presentation to their client. With PowerPoint to enhance their talk, they create a 20-minute presentation that sells their ideas to the client. In one such presentation, students practiced integrating websites into their PowerPoint presentation so that they could show samples of websites they perceived to be effective to their client. One MLI member had previous experience in building PowerPoint presentations that visually displayed websites. As with all MLI activities, the professor (MLI CEO) asked this student to train other MLI members on how to do this. In the end, not only were the clients impressed with the presentation, but students had received training on how to integrate visual and textual data into their own future presentations.

Figure 3. Professional development presentation assignment

**Presentation Length:** 45 minutes–1 hour

**Purpose:** To teach MLI members about a topic in such a way that they can put what you are teaching them into practice immediately. Your presentation should enable members to better themselves professionally and enhance their division and organization. This assignment is designed to give you practice in developing and leading professional development presentations, for they are used regularly as methods of continuous education in many leading organizations.

**Evaluation:** Based on content, style, audience involvement, and team involvement in preparation for and/or execution of the presentation.

A successful professional development presentation will:

- Teach us things we do not know about the topic (e.g., lessons we cannot glean from our readings/lectures). If you’d like suggestions on where to look for materials, please let me know. I would also encourage you to remind us of things we already know about your topic to refresh our memories. Spend most of your time, however, teaching us new ways to look at old lessons or examining new lessons altogether.
- Apply those lessons to MLI. Why should MLI members care about your topic?
- Incorporate pertinent examples to emphasize your points.
- Involve the audience—be interactive and engaging; do not talk to us for 45 minutes. Include some sort of activity (activities).
- Get the audience to think critically about the topic and get us to think about the complexities of your topic.
- Have a fluid and sensible structure to the presentation (what your topic is, how it is created, its importance to organizations, etc.).
- Make the presentation appear professional.
- Have a clear handout(s) for everyone.
- Be sure to use complete citations for sources, both on PowerPoint slides and on handouts.
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Innovation 3: The MLI Model Provides Opportunities to Practice Developing Messages

At MLI, students recognize quickly that they will be preparing different types of messages and drafting them over and over again. During the course of the semester, they gain experience writing press releases, boiler plates, executive summaries, memos to their client, survey items, interview questions, print advertisements, and internal memos (using email, Instant Messenger, Yahoo groups, etc.). The CEO and President (the professors) as well as the group managers insist that members write and re-write and re-write these documents. For example, in creating the boiler plate and press releases to be disseminated electronically to the Rutgers student newspaper and other media outlets, the Public Relations Division worked with its team and with its client, getting feedback and making several revisions before arriving at the boiler plate that they sent to REHS. All iterations of feedback are sent through electronic mail. Figure 4 shows the initial boiler plate copy submitted to the MLI CEO and President (the professors) and the first round of feedback on it. REHS will be working with a communication undergraduate intern on revising these documents even more before disseminating them to media outlets. Students also learn to plan ahead for drafting different messages. One semester, students developed a timeline to do so (see Figure 5).

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Figure 5. Timeline for developing press release

MLI Creative Strategy Memo
Project: REHS

Objectives: To highlight the recent success of REHS in the Rutgers community, and make the public aware of the actions of the REHS in conjunction with the EPA. With special focus given to the groundbreaking relationship REHS has established with the EPA as well as tremendous amount of monetary fines REHS has allowed Rutgers to escape.

NOTE: This is an opportunity to let our client “shine” and the Rutgers community feel involved in this leadership position.

Strategy: To convince the Rutgers community of the positive attributes REHS has established within the university. Thus, gain the support of the students, professors, and researchers alike.

Execution: A final (client-approved) version of this release will then be submitted to the Daily Targum.

Target Audience: All Stakeholders, REHS members, MLI members, student population, and laboratory users.

Key Copy Points:

- Leadership of Rutgers within the university community in relationship with EPA
- Effectiveness/success of REHS
- Brief history/explanation of goals and functions of self-audit
- MONETARY PENALTIES AVOIDED
- Necessity of involvement and cooperation of community members
- Stress ongoing and continuous process of the self-audit and reparations

Mandatory: MLI letterhead, client approval, contact info (Rutgers student newspaper staff will need quotes from REHS and related parties)

Time: This press release should be submitted to [PR group manager] by 9/30 (a.m. preferred) for review. Please then be ready to receive it back with comments 11/1. Another version will be submitted to [professors] on Thursday before forwarding to the client for their feedback.

Lessons for Industry

Several of the lessons our students learn during their MLI experiences are relevant to industry. One lesson that is reflected in the MLI experience is that distanced leaders must learn to select the appropriate medium to use for sending particular types of messages. This is a lesson also supported in research. Research shows that some media are better than others for sending certain kinds of messages (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986; Fulk & DeSanctis, 1995; Rice, 1993). Face-to-face communication, for example, is considered to be the “richest” medium because recipients can interpret multiple communication cues (e.g., nonverbal, voice inflection, and words) and give and solicit feedback immediately. This suggests that, when using Internet-based or other mediated communication tools is desirable or necessary, distanced leaders will also periodically use face-to-face communication when possible.

Another valuable lesson to include in training programs involves choices about when to use face-to-face and when to use communication technologies when trying to achieve various leadership objectives. Research suggests that managers should use rich media to communicate highly uncertain information and lean media for less ambiguous information because the latter (e.g., written messages and email) do not always allow for immediate feedback (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). However, physical distance often prompts leaders to use lean (e.g., email) rather than rich media (e.g., face-to-face) (see Connaughton & Daly, 2003). And, in fact, mediated communication may be a better choice than face-to-face under certain conditions. Although we have not empirically tested this contention in MLI, in a previous study with leaders of geographically dispersed teams in global organizations, Connaughton and Daly (2003) discussed several leadership objectives which leaders perceive face-to-face and mediated communication channels to be well-suited for. Figures 6 and 7 present those data.

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Figure 7. Appropriate channels for achieving additional leadership functions over distance

<table>
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<th>Channel</th>
<th>Build Trust</th>
<th>Maintain Trust</th>
<th>Inspire</th>
<th>Set Goals &amp; Vision</th>
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Located in Hong Kong has an inferior videoconferencing system, problems may arise. Some locations may have highly sophisticated media (e.g., videoconferencing, high-speed broadband access) while other locations will have very limited equipment (e.g., telephone and 56K baud modem connections). Connaughton and Daly (2004) argue that the consequences of this disparity are grave. The "sophisticated" team members are able to communicate with one another in very different ways, and in the process, may exclude the "media poor" team members. Connaughton and Daly suggest that inequity in technology may create a perception of extreme isolation as well as an implied status hierarchy. Effective distanced leaders are conscious of possible inequities in technology and find ways to deal with or correct them.

The MLI experience also offers other suggestions for training organizational leaders and employees. Not only should distanced leaders and employees be trained on which medium to use to send a particular message and on issues of access to technology, distanced leaders and employees should also be trained on

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Figure 8. Communicative tactics to highlight in training programs for distanced leaders

**Distanced Leaders Should**
- Engage in small talk with distanced individuals in face-to-face settings and in computer-mediated exchanges when appropriate.
- Regularly distribute company-wide information to remote employees (e.g., a virtual newsletter).
- Notify distanced employees of news that affects them at the same time as local employees receive the news.
- Match the appropriate communication technology to the desired leadership objective.
- Be specific and detailed with directions given over email.
- Initiate follow-up phone calls to important email messages.
- Forward email messages only to relevant parties.

**Distanced Leaders Should Not**
- Use email to discuss emotionally charged issues (e.g., disagreements, conflict).
- Deliver bad news over email.
- Assume that once an email message is sent, it will be read and understood.
- Relate information only one time and in only one way.
- Assume that everyone has access to the same sort of communication technology.
- Assume that meanings are shared.
- Allow email interaction to replace telephone/videoconference and face-to-face interaction entirely.

* This checklist is adapted from original research done in global organizations. The original version of this checklist can be found in: Connaughton, S.L., & Daly, J.A. (2003). Long distance leadership: Communicative strategies for leading virtual teams. In D.J. Pauleen (Ed.), Virtual teams: Projects, protocols, and processes (pp. 116-144). Hershey, PA: Idea Group, Inc.
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<tr>
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<th>Build Trust</th>
<th>Maintain Trust</th>
<th>Inspire</th>
<th>Set Goals &amp; Vision</th>
<th>Handle Conflict</th>
<th>Give Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>Most Effective</td>
<td>Most Effective</td>
<td>Most Effective</td>
<td>Most Effective</td>
<td>Most Effective</td>
<td>Most Effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video-conference</td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
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<td>Effective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Somewhat Effective</td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>Effective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

located in Hong Kong has an inferior videoconferencing system, problems may arise. Some locations may have highly sophisticated media (e.g., videoconferencing, high-speed broadband access) while other locations will have very limited equipment (e.g., telephone and 56K baud modem connections). Connaughton and Daly (2004) argue that the consequences of this disparity are grave. The “sophisticated” team members are able to communicate with one another in very different ways, and in the process, may exclude the “media poor” team members. Connaughton and Daly suggest that inequity in technology may create a perception of extreme isolation as well as an implied status hierarchy. Effective distanced leaders are conscious of possible inequities in technology and find ways to deal with or correct them.

The MLI experience also offers other suggestions for training organizational leaders and employees. Not only should distanced leaders and employees be trained on which medium to use to send a particular message and on issues of access to technology, distanced leaders and employees should also be trained on

Figure 8. Communicative tactics to highlight in training programs for distanced leaders*

**Distanced Leaders Should**

- Engage in small talk with distanced individuals in face-to-face settings and in computer-mediated exchanges when appropriate.
- Regularly distribute company-wide information to remote employees (e.g., a virtual newsletter).
- Notify distanced employees of news that affects them at the same time as local employees receive the news.
- Match the appropriate communication technology to the desired leadership objective.
- Be specific and detailed with directions given over email.
- Initiate follow-up phone calls to important email messages.
- Forward email messages only to relevant parties.

**Distanced Leaders Should Not**

- Use email to discuss emotionally charged issues (e.g., disagreements, conflict).
- Deliver bad news over email.
- Assume that once an email message is sent, it will be read and understood.
- Relate information only one time and in only one way.
- Assume that everyone has access to the same sort of communication technology.
- Assume that meanings are shared.
- Allow email interaction to replace telephone/videoconference and face-to-face interaction entirely.

* This checklist is adapted from original research done in global organizations. The original version of this checklist can be found in: Connaughton, S.L., & Daly, J.A. (2003). Long distance leadership: Communicative strategies for leading virtual teams. In D.J. Pauleen (Ed.), Virtual teams: Projects, protocols, and processes (pp. 116-144). Hershey, PA: Idea Group, Inc.

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Effective practices for communicating over distance. In some ways, communication over distance is like communication in proximate settings (e.g., writing should be clear; attention should be paid to how a message will resonate with who it is crafted for). But, in other ways, communication over distance is unique. For instance, distanced leaders must be more conscientious about finding set times to communicate with dispersed team members (see Connaughton & Daly, 2003). After all, they will not catch them in the hallway or coffee room. They must make time to communicate with them, and may choose to do so using Internet-based channels. Communication over time and space is also unique because the social or relational aspects of work must be consciously built in to mediated communication. There are not opportunities for spontaneous hallway chatter (e.g., “How are you?” “How was your daughter’s soccer game?”) when people are separated by physical distance. Distanced leaders must therefore use mediated communication tools (e.g., email or Instant Messenger) to send social messages to distanced employees. This requires forethought, as electronic channels are often used only to send task-related messages (e.g., to give directives or updates). Other communicative behaviors for distanced leaders that should be integrated into training workshops are included in the checklist in Figure 8.

**Future Trends**

As noted above, there are benefits to the MLI model. Yet educators also face challenges in facilitating a simulated organizational experience. For one, such a model is time intensive—for both students and educators. MLI is a living, breathing organization and thus, operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Professors and instructors leading courses like this must be prepared to live within the MLI mindset every day during the semester. Additionally, educators must find a client for students to work with and make sure that the relationship between their academic department and the client is in no way damaged by the MLI experience. Doing so requires constant oversight and coaching. Furthermore, some university colleagues may not initially “buy in” to the MLI experiential learning model, and educators may face resistance to and lack of support for such novel educational initiatives. We found that once we documented and publicized the student learning outcomes and demonstrated that external stakeholders perceive such collaborations favorably, resistance was minimized and the MLI model was championed. Still, educators should recognize that these obstacles may initially exist.

In the future, scholars and educators should work closely with organizations in various sectors to conduct longitudinal research on outcomes of leadership development programs, specifically on the impacts on writing/communication in organizations post-graduation. Currently, we have exemplary models of leadership development in higher education (e.g., U.S. Military Academy; see McNally, Gerras, & Bullis, 1996) and in the corporate arena (e.g., General Electric; see Melum, 2002). But educators and industry professionals lack a complete theory of how to develop leaders. Longitudinal studies of leadership development programs are in progress at Alverno College, Yale University, and the U.S. Military Academy (Horvath et al., 1999; Mentkowski & Associates, 2000). Such results will help educators better prepare students for leadership and communication in organizations and will assist professionals in designing workshops to enhance mediated communication and leadership in their organizations.

Scholars have often assumed that face-to-face communication is necessary when leading geographically dispersed teams and organizations. Although this is an empirical question, there is evidence to suggest that it is a perception that some distanced leaders hold. Connaughton and Daly (2003), for instance, interviewed distanced leaders in complex global organizations who were quite insistent that face-to-face is the optimal medium for communication. Email and telephone calls were regarded as necessary and helpful but not preferred for some leadership functions. None of these leaders perceived mediated technologies as optimal for personnel issues, conflicts, and relational development. Yet in interpreting these results, one must acknowledge that these responses may be tied to experience, training, and generational differences. It is quite possible that as people become more experienced with using various technologies for communication, the presumed primacy of face-to-face interactions may fade. This is an important area to explore in the future, as it will influence how organizations train distanced leaders and employees.

**Conclusion**

The experiences our students have had at MLI mirror many experiences that individuals working in geographically dispersed teams and organizations have had with technologies. Teachers of professional writing and composition courses, as well as students enrolled in these classes, can benefit from the MLI model because it provides an innovative framework and methodology for addressing an essential set of communication competencies. Professionals may be interested in this approach because it provides a promising model of collaboration between the workplace and the classroom, a collaboration that benefits industry and higher education. Administrators who develop writing and professional communication programs may find this instructional approach informative because it encourages increased dialogue between the academy and the marketplace, the
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benefits of which are many (e.g., providing students with "real-world" workplace competencies, enhancing the department/program’s reputation with key constituencies and contributing to students’ professional development; see Ruben, 2004). Thus, in many ways, the MLI model provides a useful approach for integrating the world of work and the world of the classroom for the benefit of all involved. Ultimately, of course, executing this model effectively involves a continuing effort to understand and analyze the changing world of work and the increasing role of mediated communication and distanced leadership, as well as working to ensure that the classroom provides the best possible preparation for our graduates relative to these evolving realities.

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Endnotes

1 Whereas some organizational scholars have coined the term “e-leadership” to refer to leaders who engage in many leadership behaviors primarily through electronic channels (see Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Cascio & Shurygailo, 2003; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003), we use the term “distanced leadership” to refer to leadership in dispersed contexts.

2 Ruben (1999) provides a broad discussion of the limitations of the traditional teaching and learning paradigm that provides a foundation for an exploration of how these issues relate to teaching and learning relative to organizational and workplace capacities in particular.

3 A good deal has been written about the appropriate use of experiential learning methodologies in communication. These include: Lederman (1984); Lederman and Ruben (1978, 1984); Ruben (1977); and Ruben and Lederman (1982a, 1982b). Among the contributors to the early writings on experiential learning include those addressing simulation (Boocock & Schild, 1968; Gamson, 1969; Greenblatt & Duke, 1975; Tansey & Unwin, 1969), games (Abt, 1970; Coleman, 1969; Pfeiffer & Jones, 1969-1977; Ruben & Budd, 1975; Ruben, 1978), and group learning approaches (Bradford, Gibb, & Benne, 1964; Schein & Bennis, 1965).

4 Although space does not permit us to include the syllabus here, please contact the first author for a copy of it.

5 That is, inequities in technology not only limit information sharing, but also affect people’s perceptions of others and can have other unintended and long-term consequences for relationship development.

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