Announcing the Virtual Studio on Virtual Leader Development Studios

We are looking for people (scholars, teachers, consultants, artists) who currently use studio approaches in their leader development work. We take the term studio broadly, to include various forms of often arts-based methods that involved active participation by the leaders in open-ended explorations. Generally this has been very embodied work, working physically in a high-touch environment. This sits in contrast to the trend for more virtual (online) education. This project seeks to explore the tension between the high-touch, very physical approaches used in studio methods and the possibilities of online methods – could it be possible to use studio methods in a virtual environment?

Overview:

The Virtual Studio on Virtual Leadership Development Studios (VSoVLDS) is a studio in the sense of collective inquiry around a focused topic. The studio will not be a physical space, but rather a group of people who are all involved in leader development work who will interact in a virtual environment. The group will interact to discuss issues and support each others' projects which will investigate the topic of Virtual Leader Development Studios in various ways, including design and active experimentation.

Guiding Questions:

- How do we develop better leaders?
    - is it possible to do this?
    - is it possible to do this in a primarily virtual environment?
    - what do we mean by "better" leaders?
        - more effective, more ethical, more beautiful?
    - how would we know if we are succeeding?

Potentially Critical Issues/Variables:

1. *Virtual Environment*. What do we mean by a virtual environment? Teaching in ways other than face to face have been around since at least the great correspondence course boom of the 1920s. More recently, we have seen the rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Small Private Online Courses (SPOCs) in higher education and waves of pundits proclaiming that this will be the disruptive change that revolutionizes higher education. A variety of questions arise:

- Does virtual imply 100% online or does it include blended approaches that include some online and some face to face?
- Will it be synchronous or asynchronous or a mixture of the two modes?
- How do you deliver content?
    - Video, Text, Quizzes, Gamification, …
- How do you facilitate interaction between students?
- What does interaction with the instructor look like?
- If you need/want to assess the work, how do you do that?

– Are there possibilities for auto-assessment (the holy grail of scalability)?

2. *Leader Development*. The global leader development industry is very large. Nonetheless there are many questions and issues about how we develop leaders and how effective this is. Right at the start is the difference between trying to develop individual leaders versus developing leadership and what that difference might imply. We have chosen the phrase leader development because we think that better describes what is being done in most cases. The primary methods we see being used are:

- *Teaching leadership theory*. This is commonly a significant part of the approach in academia. The implicit assumption seems to be that if individuals develop a more sophisticated understanding of leadership, that will translate into them being better leaders.
- *Examining leader exemplars*. Here the approach is to study specific leaders who are generally recognized as being great leaders and learn from those examples. Does leading translate across contexts? Can we learn useful lessons this way?
- *Competency/skills training*. Many providers of leader development training have developed competency models and offer specific skills training tied to those models. And certainly there are many individual skills that are useful for leaders to be good at. Is leading simply a collection of skills?
- *Reflective practice*. Working at how to pay attention to your own practice as a leader and learn the meta-skill of how to improve that practice.

3. *Studios*. Although studios have a long history, especially in the arts and design worlds, the idea of studio approaches to leader development is relatively new. Many arts-based methods for leader development come from studio environments and thus can easily fall within this idea even though they may not be using the term, studio. Studios have been conceptualized in a variety of ways, which raises a variety of questions/issues for leader development studios.

- Barry & Meisiek (2014) argue that the essence of the studio approach is "learning by making". For leader development, this raises the question, "making what"? What do leaders make? What is the medium of leadership? What are the tools and practices of making that are important for leader development?
- Hetland et al (2007) describe studios in terms of studio practices, in particular, demonstration, students-at-work, and crits. Again, this raises the questions, what do leaders do (different conceptualizations of leadership will answer this differently), how do we create/find a way to allow students to work on this in the studio, and how do you structure a crit about it?
- Sawyer (2012) argues that the essence of studios are complex, authentic, real-world projects & guided problem solving. The projects address ill-defined (wicked) problems, and have just the right amount of constraints. How do you define such problems, including the constraints and address the issues of personal risk and real world authenticity?
- Taylor & Ladkin (2014) argue that studios are about learning from craft masters. Does that imply that leader developers must be master leaders? Are all good

leaders also master leaders or is there a difference between being good and being a master?

- How do studios differ from gamificiation? How are these two shifts away from traditional classroom pedagogy alike and how are they different?

Plan/Schedule:

1. Engage participants and identify funding needs and possible sources
       1.1. Project Definition (March/April 2015)
       1.2 Invite Participants (April/May 2015)
       1.3 Develop Virtual Platform (April/May 2015)
       1.4 Explore funding needs and possibilities (April/May 2015)
2. Discussion of individual projects and issues (June-September 2015)
3. Support for projects and discussion of progress/results (September 2015 – May 2016)
4. Conclusions, processing and writing/communicating results
       Initial Results presented/discussed, perhaps in a stream at the AoMO conference in Bled, 1-4 September 2016 or some other forum.

The Studio Platform:

The primary platform will be web-based. An existing, open platform (Google, Ning, Basecamp, etc) will be used to minimize both development and use costs.

Participation

If you are interested in participating, please respond to Steve Taylor (sst@wpi.edu) with your initial thoughts on how you would like participate, not later than 30 May 2015.

References

Barry, Daved, & Meisiek, Stefan. (2014). Discovering the Business Studio. *Journal of Management Education*, 1-23. doi: 10.1177/1052562914532801

Hetland, Lois, Winner, Ellen, Veenema, Shirley, & Shreidan, Kimberely M. (2007). *Studio thinking: The real benefits of visual arts education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Sawyer, R. Keith. (2012). *Learning how to create: Toward a learning sciences of art and design*. Paper presented at the International Conference on the Learning Sciences, Sydney, Australia.

Taylor, Steven S., & Ladkin, Donna. (2014). Leading as craft-work: The role of studio practices in developing artful leaders. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 30*(1), 95-103.