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A Case for Native American Leadership Principles in Corporate America

For

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Abstract

Numerous studies in the field of leadership have shown that many organizations are shifting away from a “traditional” hierarchical model of leadership. This project argues that the top-down leadership model adopted by many United States corporations is inadequate in terms of developing employee leadership, encouraging collaboration, and fostering organizational learning. Instead, this report recommends that corporations should seek to integrate Native American leadership principles to address these challenges. The data included in this project is qualitative and draws on knowledge from the fields of leadership, management, and indigenous studies. The purpose of this project is to demonstrate the feasibility of Native American leadership practices and principles as an alternative paradigm for addressing leadership and organizational challenges in corporate America.

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Introduction

A shift is occurring in the field of leadership. While many corporations still envision leadership through the lens of “the larger-than-life individual shouting commands, giving directions, and inspiring the troops” (Bennis 1999, 73), many researchers in the field are beginning to embrace a more collaborative and collective approach to leadership, where “leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good” (Rok 2009, 465). This project argues that, **the traditional model of top-down leadership adopted by the majority of United States (U.S.) corporations, fails to adequately promote employee leadership, encourage collaboration, and foster a culture of organizational learning.** In this report, the terms “top-down leadership” and “top-down management” will be used interchangeably. While it is recognized that there is a fundamental difference between leadership and management, this fact remains: the majority of individuals who occupy leadership positions in corporate America are CEOs, departmental and executive level managers, as opposed to line level positions, such as receptionists, administrative assistants and customer service specialists (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2013, 34).

The Sloan Management Review identifies top-down management as one of six silent killers of strategy implementation and learning, “A top-down

management style is often the main barrier to honest upward communication and organizational learning” (Beer and Eisenstat 2000, 33). In his book, *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge emphasizes the importance of organizational learning:

What if the high corporate mortality rate is only a symptom of deeper problems that afflict all companies...It is no accident that most organizations learn poorly. The way they are designed and managed, the way people’s jobs are defined, and most importantly, the way we have all been taught to think and interact...create fundamental learning disabilities (Senge 2006, 18).

Considering the fundamental role that employee learning plays in the knowledge economy, it seems logical to examine how corporate leadership style contributes to promotion and/or hindrance of organizational learning. Furthermore, with corporations becoming more globalized, in terms of physical location, diversity of staff, and improvements in technology, the need for more flexible, adaptive, and collaborative leadership and learning models is becoming increasingly apparent (Chiva, Ghauri and Alegre 2014).

In order to foster organizational learning, a collaborative and collective organizational culture is necessary (Yukl 2009). Without collaboration, organizations remain fragmented, segregating responsibilities and interactions based upon prescribed hierarchal division. Senge (2006, 198), describes this type of collaborative shift as moving from personal vision to shared vision, “When more people come to share a common vision, the vision may not change fundamentally. But it becomes more alive...people

can truly imagine achieving. They now have partners, 'co-creators;' the vision no longer rest on their shoulders alone." Fostering this type of shared commitment requires shifting from a traditional leadership model, where values and objectives are imposed, to one where every individual is conceived as a co-creator of the company's success.

Beyond being insufficient, in terms of promoting organizational learning and collaboration, top-down leadership models fail to create opportunities for employee leadership development. Beer and Eisenstat (2000, 34), cite "Senior managers who exercise top-down management fail to provide the opportunity for leadership development...They operate in separate fiefdoms, unwilling to give up their best people to meet needs of other business units." Daniel Goleman, a distinguished researcher on leadership and emotional intelligence, argues that leadership is distributive, rather than concentrated in a single individual, "There are many leaders, not just one. Leadership is distributed. It resides not solely in the individual at the top, but in every person at every level" (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2013, xviii). The idea that leadership is distributive and not restricted to one's position or job title, leads to the question: how can corporations nurture a culture where every individual is perceived and developed as a potential leader?

While American corporations tends to seek the newest, most cutting-edge, evidence-based solutions. U.S. corporations may be better served by

reflecting upon the knowledge and practices of the past. Native American leadership values offer corporate America an alternative model for addressing organizational and leadership challenges. Through integration of Native American leadership principles, U.S. corporations will foster greater employee leadership, promote collaboration, and enhance organizational learning. Additionally, this report seeks to demonstrate the practical application of Native American leadership, by highlighting correlations to modern leadership and organizational theories, such as emotional intelligence and systems thinking. The ultimate goal of this project is to inspire scholars and those within the world of academia, to consider the application and value of Native American principles within the context of U.S. corporate culture.

Approach

This report draws on a diverse body of literature from the fields of leadership, organizational development, and management science. Being that leadership is not a science in the empirical sense, the majority of evidence presented in the report is qualitative, rather than quantitative in nature. Sources used to support claims, reasoning and warrants consist primarily of articles from peer-reviewed academic journals. Sources selected will critically examine top-down leadership, questioning its effectiveness as leadership and management model.

While peer-reviewed sources represent the majority of supporting literature, the report includes evidence from academic textbooks and other literature related to Native American leadership. The report will consist of two parts, the first will make an argument against three perceived shortcomings of top-down leadership. The second part will focus on the proposed solution, examining the application of Native American leadership principles in corporate America. Since there is relatively limited scholarly literature on Native American leadership, in both academia and corporate America, this report will attempt to draw correlations between existing leadership models and Native American leadership principles. By highlighting these connections, this report seeks to demonstrate the practical implications of Native American leadership values within corporate

management and leadership practices. Based upon the research conducted, it appears that the proposed solution is novel in terms of a leadership paradigm for corporate America. As a result of the unique nature of the topic, some of the supporting evidence will be obtained through Native American academic journals and books, rather than “mainstream,” peer-reviewed management and leadership journals.

Project Analysis

Claim One:

Corporations that utilize a top-down leadership approach fail to create opportunities for employee leadership development.

Evidence:

In an article published in the Journal of Management Development, Afroditi Dalakoura argues that:

The hierarchies of the past are no longer applicable; they hamper an organization's actions. For organizations to survive and succeed through such demanding conditions, exceptional leadership is needed at all levels. The fierce competition and the instantaneous distribution and availability of knowledge due to the advent of computer technology force organizations to flatten their hierarchies and decentralize decision making in order to gain flexibility and be able to respond with speed... successful implementation of leadership development programs depends largely on the effort, support, commitment and active involvement of the firm's line managers, the top management team and CEO...if a leader is to be successful, he or she must develop others to be leaders...if he or she doesn't personally see to the development of new leaders, the organization won't be sustainable, and the person is not a true leader (Dalakoura 2010, 434-35).

Furthermore, Dalakoura (2010, 435) continues, stating that "If an organization has developed leadership at all levels, then its people would act more like owners and entrepreneurs than just hired employees." Peter Senge emphasizes the value of commitment in his book *The Fifth Discipline*, pointing out that "Real commitment is still rare in today's organizations. It is

our experience that, 90 percent of the time, what passes for commitment is compliance” (Senge 2006, 202).

If this is the case, it would behoove corporations to create opportunities for employees at all levels to engage in leadership. Benefits of increased levels of engagement include: lower employee attrition, increased levels of employee initiative and accountability and greater willingness to experiment and take risks (Dalakoura 2010, 435).

More recently, an article published in Strategic Direction echoes a similar sentiment, stating that “centralized, top-down leadership can put the future of the organization at risk” (Strategic Direction 2013, 28). The article describes the perceived “dangers” that many modern industrialized organizations face by embracing a centralized model of leadership.

Top management sets the tone for the entire business. The falling dominoes effect means that followers tend to copy the management behavior they experience from above...Relying on command and control may mean using fear and intimidation to get results. Offensive or abusive leadership behavior can become a justification for employees engaging in anti-sustainable activities, such as sabotage, theft, retaliation, litigation and even subversive humor (Strategic Direction 2013, 28-29).

Instead, it advocates that organizations that hope to be sustainable in the future, should encourage the development of a decentralized, shared leadership culture. “Decentralized shared leadership was better than centralized, vertical leadership at predicting firm growth rates—both for a random sample of entrepreneurial US firms and for a sample of the fastest

growing privately held US firms” (Strategic Direction 2013, 29). Pearce, Manz and Akanno (2013, 252), make the argument that top-down, centralized leadership models limit leadership development to those already in positions of leadership.

Further, the society found an overwhelming majority of leadership development training is delivered to those individuals who are currently in formal leadership positions or those that have already been identified as leadership candidates, as opposed to providing leadership skills learning opportunities to the wider work force, which typically represents an important source of leadership for the future (Pearce, Manz, and Akanno 2013, 252). Reasoning:

As the evidence demonstrates, corporations that embrace a top-down, centralized approach to leadership hinder the sustainability of their organizations by concentrating leadership responsibilities in the hands of a limited few. While top-down leadership is still prevalent within many corporations, a growing body of research in the field of leadership development, supports movement towards a more inclusive and collaborative leadership model (Kramer and Crespy 2011, 1025).

As more corporations begin focusing on sustainability and remaining competitive in this increasingly globalized economy, leadership development will be required at all levels of the organization (Pearce, Manz and Akanno 2013, 252). If U.S. corporations hope to foster a culture of commitment, shared vision and collectivism, leadership must become distributive, rather than something that is communicated and bestowed upon subordinates by those in upper management.

Counter Argument:

Clearly defined hierarchies are necessary, as there should be clear delineation between leaders and followers within organizations. In an article titled Leadership and Inequality, Nathan Harter argues this point, stating "Analytical hierarchicalism claims that inequality in groups and organizations is inevitable, useful, and even necessary. Properly accounted for, inequality is also just. This is also our position" (Harter et al. 2006, 277). In contrast to the viewpoint that organizations should seek to develop leadership at all levels, Harter (et al. 2006, 277) argues, "In the modern bureaucracy, organizations are simply too large for amateurs. In most instances, the leader would have to possess a minimum level of technical expertise in order to exercise proper judgement." According to this viewpoint, there are distinct and justifiable difference between leaders and followers. These differences justify the unequal treatment between them, making some individuals "qualified" to lead, while others suitable to follow. Following this line of thinking, it would be unnecessary to develop leaders throughout the organization, as there would be only a limited number of individuals possessing the technical aptitude that would make them qualified to lead.

Warrant:

If inherent inequity exists within traditional corporate leadership hierarchies, it creates conditions where some individuals are developed as leaders, based upon their position or role, while others are overlooked for leadership development due to their lower position within the organizational hierarchy. In this type of environment, leadership will remain concentrated among a few and will be limited to certain positions within an organization. Adopting the philosophy that leaders must possess a certain level of technical expertise or must be "experts" and not "amateurs," will continue to justify the concentration of leadership power in the hands of a select few. This will create corporations that are increasingly vulnerable, due to the inequity of leadership and the lack of employee commitment.

Claim Two:

Top-down leadership is inadequate, in terms of fostering collaboration.

Evidence:

University of Southern California professor and author, Warren Bennis, makes a case for why top-down leadership is an ineffective model, in terms of addressing modern societal challenges.

In a society as sophisticated as ours, the most urgent projects require the coordinated contributions of many talented people working together. Whether the task is building a global business or discovering

the mysteries of the human brain, it doesn't happen at the top; TOP down leadership can't hope to accomplish it, however gifted the person at the TOP is (Bennis 1999, 73).

Kramer and Crespy (2011, 1025) offer a compelling case for the benefits of collaborative leadership, describing leaders as "curators of talent who motivate group members to action rather than givers of directives and orders." In order to foster this type of collaborative culture, Kramer and Crespy (2011, 1025) argue that leaders "must work in relationship with group members through dialogue that minimizes power differences. For collaboration to occur, leaders must empower groups with the authority and responsibility to make decisions."

Whereas top-down leadership models are rooted in hierarchy with very clear chains of command, Rok (2009, 465) describes effective leadership as depending upon, "a process of influence, whereby people are inspired towards group goals, not through coercion, but through individual motivation." In contrast, the article goes on to describe classical or top-down leadership as:

This paradigm refers to dominance by a special person or group of people, while regular followers do not openly question their directives, out of respect for the leader or out of fear of the consequences of not doing so. Because the leader is accountable for the outcomes, followers make relatively little contribution to the whole organization. Leaders are responsible for decision making, so there is no real internal dialogue. The main instruments used by such a leader are based on command-and-control, hierarchical top-down approach and pretty often on manipulation (Rok 2009, 466).

Rather than forcing collaboration through authoritarian coercion, U.S. corporations would be better served by embracing what Rok (2009, 466) describes as organic leadership, "Organic leadership is based on the teamwork, without the formal distinction between leaders and followers. Members of the team are working together in whatever roles of authority and power they may have, not based on position power." In his chapter on Shared Vision, Peter Senge describes the process of shifting from compliance to commitment as enrollment, stating "The hardest lesson for many managers to face is that, ultimately, there is really nothing you can do to get another person to enroll or commit. Enrollment and commitment require freedom of choice" (Senge 2006, 207).

Reasoning:

By minimizing the perceived psychological and physical environmental differences, managers and others within corporate leadership roles may naturally enhance employee collaboration across artificial division and departmental lines—not through coercion or control, but by fostering a culture rooted in inspiration where employees choose to be committed and collaboration occurs as an organic consequence.

Counter Argument:

A top-down, commanding leadership style, may be necessary for a leader responding to a crisis, such as a corporate takeover or eliminating

ingrained unproductive business procedures (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee 2013, 78). While Goleman suggests that this approach to leadership should be used sparingly, he does admit that "In spite of its many negative effects...coercive leaders thrive the world over in surprisingly large numbers" (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee 2013, 77).

Although situations of crisis may be the exception, leaders that foster collaboration through coercion or top-down command will not reap changes that are sustainable or long lasting. Employee collaboration may increase temporarily, however, once the crisis has been averted, collaboration is likely to decline as employees resume familiar patterns of behavior. Rok (2009, 470) describes this command and control approach to leadership within the context of a totalitarian system:

Totalitarian systems enable a command and control focus over the collective that may create short-term balance through autocracy but not long-term sustainable balance. Responsible business in the contemporary world primarily means undertaking long-term strategic actions...and understanding of the mutual expectations of all stakeholders.

Warrant:

Similar to organizational learning, collaboration cannot be imposed upon individuals through top-down commanding approaches. In order to foster collaboration that is sustaining, corporations must promote a culture where employee input, ideas, and values are appreciated and encouraged. "When employees participate, they see the whole system as more fair...As a

result of this empowerment, employees are part of more open ways of interacting with their peers and other stakeholders” (Rok 2009, 468). Anything less than this will only produce short-term, temporary changes in employee behavior. Managers and corporate leadership cannot impose collaboration on employees, any more than teachers can impose education upon their students.

Claim Three:

Top-down leadership models hinder organizational learning.

Evidence:

Beer and Eisenstat (2000, 33), argue that a top-down management style is often the main barrier to honest upward communication and organizational learning:

In many of the organizations we examined, strategic-planning documents went into great detail on long-term technology trends, customer buying behavior and the competitive environment, but they failed to communicate downward a coherent story showing why the changing world outside the organization demanded new ways of working together. Employees never heard how the strategy affected priorities nor received any guidelines showing the relative priorities of projects (Beer and Eisenstat 2000, 33).

Yukl (2009, 51-52), describes how top-down leadership can be an obstacle to collective learning:

One obstacle is the common belief that top management should have most of the responsibility for leading change and innovation. This belief encourages a top-down approach to innovation, rather than a collaborative approach that includes emergent processes.

Yukl goes on to argue that, "Leaders at all levels in an organization can help to build and sustain a culture with strong values for learning, innovation, experimentation, flexibility, and continuous improvement (Yukl 2009, 51-52). In a Leadership Quarterly article written by Sean T. Hannah and Paul B. Lester, they recommend a multilevel approach for leadership and organizational learning.

The leadership literature has largely viewed organizational learning and adaptation through reduction, suggesting that top-down and particularly linear learning processes can be initiated and controlled by senior leaders...We argue for a multi-level approach to learning where top-down leadership serves to set the conditions to maximize the emergence of knowledge creation and diffusion, while limiting leader intrusion into the actual creative process (Hannah and Lester 2009, 35).

Reasoning:

As one of the most well respected scholars in the field of organizational learning and systems thinking, Peter Senge (2006, 4), points out that, "The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization." If U.S. corporations hope to maintain a competitive advantage in the global economy, they must make organizational learning a top priority and foster a culture that encourages it. Top-down leadership models can hinder this type of learning fluidity, by compartmentalizing and restricting learning based upon position and departmental function. Limiting employee learning based upon their position

within the organization can result in what Senge (2006, 19), describes as the "I am my position" learning disability: "When people in organizations focus only on their position, they have little sense of responsibility for the results produced when all positions interact."

An article published in *Industrial and Commercial Training*, it argues that top-down leadership impacts learning by stifling the experimentation with new approaches. "A dangerous feature of "top-down" leadership is the assumption that a central unit knows best. In some areas this has led to reluctance to experiment with alternative approaches and different ways of operating" (Thomas 2013, 95).

Counter Argument:

Top-down leadership can promote organizational learning by providing clearly defined goals and learning objectives for each department. Additionally, by having a defined hierarchy, organizations can designate key personnel to assume responsibility for department specific learning.

Warrant:

Although learning needs of specific business units may vary, current research in the field of organizational development makes a strong case for the benefits of collective learning. When learning is concentrated within the hands of a few individual, companies miss opportunities to gain insight and knowledge from diverse perspectives within the organization (Yukl 2009,

52). Additionally, while having a defined hierarchy may be conducive to department specific learning, its intrinsic design limits learning to the scope of a particular business unit or department. If learning goals and objectives are being developed and communicated from the top-down, employees tend to have minimal input, resulting in learning programs which may not be applicable to the employee's learning needs. Senge (2006, 9) articulates this concept simply, yet eloquently stating: "People excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to."

Solution

In contrast to the top-down model of management and leadership adopted by the majority of U.S. corporations, Native American leadership principles are based upon the premises of interconnection, shared leadership and reflective learning. This section aims to demonstrate, how implementing Native American leadership values can help U.S. corporations address the shortcomings of top-down leadership.

In an article entitled: "Keeping the Circle Strong: Learning about Native American Leadership," the author, Martha McLeod describes the Bay Mills Indian philosophy towards leadership, "Leadership moves around the circle. Everyone in the circle should be treated with equal respect because everyone in the circle is a leader, past present, or future" (McLeod 2002). In contrast to the myth of the triumphant individual associated with top-down leadership (Bennis 1999, 72), Native Americans tend to view leaders in the role of servants. "The Indian views the leader as a servant of the people, and in tribal organizations, all people are expected to act as leaders when their specialized knowledge or abilities are needed at a particular time" (McLeod 2002). In this way, leadership from an Indigenous American perspective is not rooted in title or status, but rotated depending upon the skills needed for a particular situation. A benefit of this fluid organizational approach toward leadership is decreased burnout and greater accountability

towards those the leader is serving. "Leadership is rotated, allowing team members to avoid the burnout associated with constant responsibility or redundant work. This rotation also empowers future leaders as each person confronts the challenge of simultaneously leading and following" (McLeod 2002). Additionally, since leadership is not attached to one's title or role within the organization, leaders can only lead as long as people are willing to follow them. This approach differs fundamentally from the traditional U.S. corporate model, where leadership is correlated to one's position within the company and employees are expected to follow the leader, regardless of whether they agree with or respect their decisions. Whereas, American Indians tend to lead by example rather than by authority or holding power over others. "In this way, American Indian leadership was neither coercive nor hierarchical" (Becker 1997, 4). By embracing a more fluid organizational structure, where leadership does not reside in one's title or status, but is expected and encouraged at all levels within the organization, corporate America could expand opportunities for employee leadership development.

In addition to embracing a philosophy of rotating leadership, which encourages all individuals to serve as leaders, Native American leadership is rooted in the belief of interconnectedness of all things. This fosters a greater tendency to engage in decision making that is participatory and collaborative in nature. Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy (2011, 11-12), describe the Native American value of interconnectedness as being represented by a

“virtuous circle,” and discuss how this philosophy could be applied to create more humane business practices.

Native American spirituality holds that all creatures and natural phenomena are animate, connected, and worthy of respect...These systems of knowledge may hold crucial insights towards more sustainable and humane global business practices countering myopic tendencies in management toward values neglect.

While “traditional” U.S. business schools promote values of self-interest, financial gain and maximizing human behavior (Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy 2011, 15), Native American businesses tend to be less concerned about maximizing profits and more with providing employment opportunities and contributing to the community (Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy 2011, 17). This concern for the welfare of one’s community and the broader global world, tends to promote a more participative decision making style, where the perspectives of various individuals are considered, rather than a top-down, authoritarian approach, where directives are given with the expectations that those lower in the hierarchy will execute them. By recognizing the value and seeking out the opinions of all employees, not just those in management or leadership positions, U.S. corporations may foster greater collaboration, resulting in companies that are more connected to their local and global communities and that conceive a purpose beyond maximizing profits and increasing market share. In this way, Native American leadership is not only collaborative in terms of involving multiple individuals in the decision making process, but collaborative in the sense

that they consider the impact of business decisions on the natural environment and lives and livelihood of several generations beyond those making the decision (Marchand, Vogt and Suntana 2013, 169).

Thus far, the report has examined how Native American leadership values offer corporate America an alternative paradigm for fostering employee leadership and promoting collaboration. This section will discuss the non-linear process of Native American learning and its potential application for promoting organizational learning in corporate America.

In contrast to traditional corporate learning models, which tend to focus on linear, evidence-based and time driven processes, Native Americans have traditionally used storytelling as a mechanism for transmitting culture and passing along important teachings from one generation to the next. In the quest to remain competitive, U.S. corporations often discount and devalue information from the past, perceiving it as outdated and irrelevant in solving modern day problems. Conversely, Native American storytelling, tends to be non-linear, timeless and promotes critical thinking, integration, reflective learning and service learning (Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy 2011, 53), rather than providing a definitive, concrete solution.

This timeless aspect that characterizes Native American storytelling and knowledge transfer, may hold potential applications corporate learning.

“An overemphasis on work time and high efficiency per hour may be detrimental to quality of life...Thus, a myopic instrumental focus on time-determined beginnings and ends may lead to efficiency in lieu of effectiveness” (Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy 2011, 55). The same argument could be made against corporate learning initiatives that focus exclusively on efficiency and timeliness, rather than providing opportunities for deeper reflection. Instead of compartmentalizing learning into various training categories, such as sales, marketing and management, U.S. corporations may be better served by embracing more reflective learning models, which “facilitate higher intellectual learning levels” (Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy 2011, 57). This could take the form of developing a period of daily reflection time, where individuals would come together to reflect upon the purpose and meaning of their work today. While this might seem odd and even uncomfortable at first, providing opportunities to introspectively reflect upon the meaning of one’s work, beyond their day to day task can result in creative insights and renewed sense of purpose.

Discussion

This section of the report will provide an in-depth analysis of the project, the approach and the proposed solution. With respect to the overall project, it was successful in the sense that it pushed boundaries, in terms of bringing attention to the leadership practices of a population that has historically been excluded from academic literature. Initially, the intention of the project was to examine indigenous leadership practices from a broader perspective. However, due to time constraints and the limited scope of the project, it was decided that the project would focus specifically on Native American leadership values, rather than analyzing the subject from a more global context. Additionally, due to the novelty of the project's focus and the shortage of "peer-reviewed" research related to the topic, the project approach achieved its objective of attempting to draw correlation between existing management and leadership theories and Native American leadership values. By demonstrating these connections between Native American leadership practices and mainstream leadership theories, it is the hope that academic scholars will begin to consider the value and application of Native American knowledge within corporate America and the world of higher education.

In terms of the project solution, if viewed from the perspective of providing concrete, tangible and definitive results, the project solution

certainly falls short. However, that was not the ultimate goal of this project, nor should it be for any academic project. The fact is, nobody definitively knows if their proposed solution will actually succeed when applied to problems in the real world. The solution of this project was not designed to give corporations a “how to” guide for implementing Native American leadership principles, but rather, aims to stimulate dialogue and encourage further exploration into their potential application.

While the project was successful in terms of providing an inquiry into what is largely, an unexplored subject in the world of academia, it does fall short with respect to answering the question: why should U.S. corporations adopt Native American leadership principles over other existing leadership models? Albeit, the project provides various examples of how Native American leadership fundamentally differs from classical, top-down leadership, it fails to provide empirical evidence demonstrating that it can successfully alleviate the perceived shortcomings of the top-down model. Part of this is due to the fact that “America’s indigenous people are virtually invisible in U.S. management education and literature. Native Americans are the smallest and most under-represented minority group in business schools” (Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy 2011, 12). When considering that U.S. business schools represent the training facilities for the majority of U.S. corporate executives, it makes sense that there would be a lack of scholarly research regarding the application of Native American leadership practices in

corporate America. However, just because a topic has not been extensively researched, does not mean that it lacks validity, credibility or value.

In terms of evidence, as noted in the approach section, the majority of the research for the project was qualitative, rather than quantitative in nature. Since Native Americans in many cases are still absent from academic literature on management and leadership, some of the data obtained was gathered through tribal academic journals, books and governmental advisory reports. While some sources were relatively current, for example, being published in the last two to five years, others were more dated going back as far as fifteen or twenty years. This presented a substantial challenge, in terms of credibility of evidence presented in the project. The recommended guidelines requested that evidence to be no older than five years; however, since scholarly research published about Native American leadership is few and far in between, it was difficult to comply with this requirement. An interesting insight gained over the course of this project was the value that Native Americans place upon the past and the lessons that can be learned from it. While U.S. corporations tend to look towards the future for what is relevant for success in the modern world, Native Americans seem to reflect upon the past, as is evident by the importance placed upon storytelling as a mechanism for transmitting cultural knowledge to the next generation. This reflective approach to learning may be something that U.S. corporations could utilize, in terms of developing regular reflective practices with staff.

In addition to the aforementioned successes and challenges, another limitation of the project is that it lumps Native Americans and their leadership philosophies into a generic subgroup. It is recognized that Native American culture, in terms of spirituality, beliefs and approaches towards leadership vary widely across tribes. However, it would have been extremely difficult to obtain the required amount of evidence on the leadership practices of any one particular tribe. Therefore, for the purpose of this project, Native American leadership is viewed collectively, as a common set of values, beliefs and practices that tend to be shared across Native American tribes.

Conversely, it is recognized that the term corporate America, encompasses businesses that are widely diverse, in terms of size, ownership structure and financial resources. While the majority of corporations tend to follow some type of hierarchical structure, where decision making control tends to reside at the top of the organization (i.e. top-down management/leadership), it is recognized that there may be exceptions to this within the U.S. corporate landscape. In terms of potential application, Native American leadership values may be better suited to smaller, privately held corporations, rather than multinational entities—at least initially. However, as long as Native Americans remain virtually invisible in U.S. business schools and absent from business education curricula and literature, it is unlikely that Native American leadership principles will be

acknowledged, let alone integrated into U.S. corporate culture. This project presented numerous and substantial challenges, in terms of gathering credible evidence and formulating a working thesis. Challenging the ingrained model of top-down leadership and selecting a non-traditional solution was risky. It would have been easier to choose a more thoroughly researched topic that offered an abundance of scholarly evidence in support of it. However, when faced with the dilemma of whether to abandon the topic or persist, deciding to persevere allowed the project to give a voice to a population that has historically been ignored in both academia and corporate America. This was the deciding criteria in determining to proceed with and see the project through to completion.

Executive Summary

In conclusion, this project was conceived as a result of the desire to push traditional perceptions regarding leadership and management within corporate America. While initially, the project aimed to explore indigenous leadership from a more global perspective. The project examined the application of Native American leadership principles as a solution to the shortcomings of top-down management and leadership models in corporate America. In analyzing top-down leadership, it was viewed as inadequate with respect to fostering employee leadership, encouraging a culture of collaboration and promoting organizational learning. The evidence gathered for the project highlighted examples of how top-down leadership was insufficient in addressing these areas. While there proved to be an abundance of evidence supporting the three claims within the thesis statement, it was challenging to obtain counter-evidence that touted the benefits of the top-down leadership model. A theory is that this was due to the fact that so many corporations are organized in a hierarchical, top-down structure that most scholars do not feel the need to justify the model.

Despite these challenges, the project served its purpose in terms of bringing attention to the leadership practices, values and approaches of a population that remains largely absent from "mainstream" leadership and management literature. While the solutions remain more theoretical than

practical, they do represent a beginning point into the exploration of indigenous American leadership practices and their application within the U.S. business world. Since literature regarding Native Americans in corporate America was extremely limited, the majority of evidence presented focused on the contrasts between Native and non-Native leadership approaches. A number of journal articles also examined how Native American values might be applied to management education programs, with the goal of increasing Native American enrollment and participation in U.S. business schools.

In addition to the Native specific journals, the project also cited literature from a variety of peer-reviewed journals in the areas of management, leadership and organizational studies. These sources provided academic credibility to the project by showcasing the correlation between current theories in leadership and management studies and Native American leadership values. While many U.S. corporations may perceive Native American leadership practices as foreign, impractical or not applicable to modern day challenges, "Indigenous people demonstrate a remarkable resilience in the face of generalized devastation and a determination to thrive with their unique identities intact" (Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy 2011, 11). This fact alone speaks to what might be learned from Native Americans, in terms of organizational preservation and continuity. In contrast, Peter Senge (2006, 17) cites, "Few large corporations live even

half as long as a person...the average lifetime of the largest industrial enterprise is less than forty years, roughly half the lifetime of a human being." Taking this into consideration, it would appear that there may be much that U.S. corporations could learn by studying Native American and integrating their values and leadership philosophies within their organizations.

This project represents a starting point—an entry into the inquiry regarding the application of Native American leadership in corporate America. While the solutions may not be concrete and the direction not yet clear, it is the hope that other scholars may read and be inspired to further this inquiry. However, one thing is becoming increasingly clear, the fields of leadership, management and organizational studies are gradually shifting away from theories that advocate authoritarian, command-control, hierarchical leadership, in favor of more collaborative, participatory models. In addition to the aforementioned benefits, "Native American values may open a door to different business ideas and practices by shifting underlying business assumptions about what is good and right vis-à-vis interconnected other, creatures, and ecological systems" (Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy 2011, 12). These factors are becoming even more important as our world becomes increasingly interconnected through the globalization of business. Despite the reasons that have been laid out, some may still ask: If the goal of corporate America is to obtain profit, then why would corporations seek to

implement the leadership values and practices of a population where the majority of the members have been or currently are economically disadvantaged? While the natural reaction of an academic writer would be to respond with compelling evidence and present a logical argument in support of the evidence. Native Americans, however, view the value of questions from a very different perspective and do not feel it necessary to prove their claim as absolute or even correct. Verbos, Gladstone and Kennedy (2011, 57) provide an insightful and reflective quote regarding the value of questions from a Native American perspective:

It is the question that you ponder that allows you to discover your answer...the questions we choose to ask are more important than any truth we might hope to discover in asking such questions, since how we act impacts the way the world is, the way in which a question will get answered. The way in which we ask questions...guides us, then, to the right answers, rather than the other way around wherein what is true directs the method of questions and the question itself.

In closing, it is easy to question the validity, credibility and applicability of a solution that is novel, under researched or untested. It is convenient to dismiss cultures that has been overlooked, misunderstood and devalued by modern society. It seems practical to say that if Native American leadership practices had application on corporate America, CEO's and managers would be utilizing them by now. However, just because something has been written off or ignored by "mainstream" society, does not make it invalid or irrelevant. Perhaps U.S. corporations would be better served by reflecting

upon the deeper meaning within their questions and actions, rather than seeking to quickly dismiss, object or turn to the seemingly logical solution.

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