

**RELATIONAL LEADING PRACTICES IN A PROJECT TEAM:
AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION**

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, I explored the influence of relational leading practices on a project team's organizational communication. The study took place within a global high-technology organization located in the United States. The project team was assembled in August 2015. Core project work was completed in March 2016. Post implementation stabilization monitoring of the software conversion functionality, and team member engagement, in a limited capacity, continued through July 2016 and November 2016 respectively. (A project timeline (Figure 1.1) is presented in Chapter One.) Team member interviews were held in July and August 2017. The 16 project team members in the study includes technical and non-technical personnel working to convert a major software application. My role in the project was that of program manager, peer, and researcher. Researching from a social constructionist worldview, an auto- and duo-ethnographic single case study design strategy was used. Thematic analysis with constant comparison was utilized as the primary data analysis tool for this study. Inductive analysis logic was used to identify themes and patterns. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews, a focus group, an interview with the independent third-party focus group facilitator, researcher notes/memos, observations, and project documentation. A concept map was created to demonstrate themes, relationships, experiences, and related documentation. The results of this study were compared to 12 relational leading practices known in the current literature review. Data from this thesis supported the 12 relational leading practices set forth by Gergen and Hersted. In addition, research from this thesis yielded four new relational leading practices. These findings were documented and categorized using thematic analysis guidelines and placed into three major categories: empowerment, open dialogue, and shared learning. All of the 16 practices in this study were discussed separately, then combined to create The Integrated Relational Leading Practices Framework. The practices found in this framework support the definition of relational leading generated from this study, *persons in connected relationships, moving forward to make meaning to create positive change through relational practices*. This research will assist at least the project team members, my division, and the organization. The project team members benefited through the experiences of working in a relational leading project team environment by improving their engagement and communication skills, and increasing their productivity and enjoyment levels. Team members have indicated that their experience was positive, and that they will bring the new relational leading and communication skills learned to the future projects they participate in. Through this experience team members developed a strong relationship network and continue to engage and share knowledge with each other. This organizational division will benefit because project team members have adopted the relational leading practices learned in this project, and through the examples they set, and with the new skills they acquired, others within the organization will learn and benefit from the project team member's positive experiences. The greater organization may also realize benefits as project team members move to new projects that cross organizational boundaries. Through the relational leading practices and organizational communication processes learned and developed during the software conversion project, team member's knowledge will be available to be shared with a greater audience. Positive project team engagement through a project environment that promotes generative dialogue and opportunities to develop a vision of how to go on together, are realized. The research findings can benefit also both academic researchers and business practitioners in the theory and practice areas of relational leading and organizational communication.

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