**Culminating Undergraduate HAT Paper**

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**Introduction**

Returning to complete my Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership and Learning at the University of Louisville in 2024 was an opportunity to accomplish a goal and develop my leadership skills. Though I began this journey in 2015, I returned with a renewed commitment to complete what I started. This was more than just coursework; it was about actively experiencing and applying learned skills.

The Organizational Leadership and Learning program at the University of Louisville offered an opportunity for bridging the gap between theory and practice. This paper highlights key moments in the program where I actively used theories in real situations. Through experiences such as developing actionable recommendations for a nonprofit, creating and facilitating a training session, strategizing organizational restructuring, and conducting a professional job analysis, the program provided invaluable opportunities for skill development and a deeper understanding of effective leadership.

**Concrete Experience**

To achieve my Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership and Learning from the University of Louisville, I actively **participated** in numerous in-person and online courses. For instance, in the Needs Assessment course, I collaborated with a team of three additional people to conduct a needs assessment to suggest ways to improve an organization's volunteer engagement. We **created** actionable recommendations for improving volunteer engagement, retention, and organizational sustainability for a real-world organization. We **produced** realistic solutions that could be implemented to meet the organization's program needs.

In the Instructional Strategy and Facilitations course, I **created** a training session for Kingdom Fellowship Christian Church's Congregational Care team, putting instructional design principles into practice to enhance membership growth. In this facilitation experience I **prepared** and explained a process designed for effective membership growth and equipped team members with the necessary knowledge to implement it successfully.

When I designed a strategy to reorganize a nonprofit's structure and increase volunteer engagement, I **applied** principles of organizational design and volunteer management to develop a plan aimed at enhancing the organization's capacity to provide compassionate care and support. I **implemented** solutions to alleviate volunteer shortages, optimize scheduling, and explore organizational restructuring.  I also **conducted** a thorough job analysis for the Kentucky Court of Justice's Family Court Judicial Assistant by applying my knowledge of job analysis techniques. This application included detailed descriptions of job duties, responsibilities, reporting relationships, required KSAs and qualifications, and identified training needs, all of which were designed to inform program design and improve job performance. These hands-on experiences, where I directly **applied** the theories and concepts learned in the classroom, were crucial in solidifying my leadership skills and directly contributing to my goal of moving into higher leadership roles.

**Observations and Reflections**

Reflecting on the needs assessment project, I **realized** the importance of clear communication within the team and with the client organization. I **noticed** that while our recommendations were practical, the organization's capacity for implementation was a significant factor we hadn't fully accounted for. In retrospect, I would have spent more time assessing the organization's resources and readiness for change. In the instructional facilitation, I **observed** the varying learning styles of the participants. Some responded well to visual aids, while others preferred hands-on activities. I **discovered** that flexibility and adaptability are crucial for effective training delivery. What worked well was the structured approach to the training content; however, I **noticed** that more time for Q&A would have enhanced participant understanding. When I designed the nonprofit restructuring strategy, I **realized** that even well-designed plans can face resistance from stakeholders. What didn't work as smoothly as anticipated was the scheduling aspect, highlighting the need for more detailed planning and contingency measures.

The Kentucky Court of Justice job analysis really highlighted the value of detailed documentation and data analysis for me. I **noticed** the significance of how job duties and KSAs needed to be captured. I **saw** the need to cross-reference data sources to ensure comprehensive and accurate results. I **discovered** how to apply what I learned in books to real life, which improved my leadership.

**Concepts and Generalizations**

When conducting needs assessments for an organization, I **learned** to make sure the leaders are on board and the organization has the resources to make changes. In order to address those organizational needs, I **developed** a needs assessment that included surveys, interviews with staff and volunteers, and an analysis of existing organizational data. From this information, I realized creating a resource allocation plan that prioritized funding for volunteer recruitment and training, technology upgrades to improve communication, and dedicated staff time for volunteer coordination would best help this organization.

I **learned** that creating interactive training modules with group activities and establishing ways to get feedback through post-training surveys and follow-up discussions, are crucial for engaging people and tailoring learning to their need. I also **found** that data collection matters a lot for getting correct results, and that requires good research.  I **learned** collecting data from different sources helped me get responses from a broad audience. I **realized** that a successful leader must be a continuous learner, constantly refining their approach by synthesizing theory and practice.

My experience with restructuring an organization, I **learned** the importance of stakeholder input such as board members, staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries. I **realized** that to change an organization effectively, you must focus on people's feelings and reactions, especially those who are affected and not just the procedural steps involved.

**Active Experimentation**

The knowledge, skills, and experiences obtained in my Organizational Leadership and Learning courses allowed me to actively look for ways to use my new skills. For example, I immediately **established** a shared online document for task tracking and communication that clearly defined individual responsibilities. I also **changed** how frequently I met with my team and set up regular weekly check in meetings to ensure everyone was on the same page and progressing.

I also **updated** my facilitation techniques. In future training sessions, I **used** more hands-on exercises, group discussions, and real-world case studies. I also used PowerPoint presentations with engaging visuals, short video clips, and interactive whiteboards to meet different learning styles. I also made sure to schedule more time specifically for questions and answers, knowing how important it is for people to get things clarified right away.

These experiences, reflections, and what I learned helped me understand organizational dynamics, instructional design, and leadership better in a real-world way. I **changed** my perspective of working with a team and I got better at seeing problems coming. My teamwork, ability to create interesting learning, and strategic thinking about organizational change all got much stronger. I **tried** new ways of doing things. These experiences fundamentally reshaped my approach to both learning and leadership which instilled in me a habit of deeper reflection, adaptability, and a drive to take initiative.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Organizational Leadership and Learning program at UofL was a game-changer, pushing me beyond just knowing theories to actually using them. Thinking back on those projects taught me crucial things about communication, being flexible, involving others, and why good data matters. I realized that being a good leader means always learning, changing, and really understanding the situation. In the end, actively trying new things showed a clear improvement in how I work with teams, lead training, and think strategically.The skills and insights I gained will definitely be a solid base for my future leadership roles and ongoing professional development.