



Ideas without Borders: The Art of Leadership – The Art of the Possible

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It's classic textbook "Management 101". We have a strategy. We have an implementation plan. We have performance metrics, resource allocation criteria, risk management contingencies, clear accountabilities, and a project management office. We have the sure recipe to succeed in advancing the state of e-health today in Canada. Or do we?

Today, rapid massive change is not only possible, it is inevitable. Much of this change is fuelled by technology; and if we're not driving, we're being driven. Emerging from the complexity and chaos of the world around us are three distinct certainties: discontinuous change, networked teams and simultaneity. Harnessing these certainties and marshalling their collective synergies speaks to the art of the possible.

Mastering the art of the possible is necessary but not sufficient for shaping the future. Leadership provides the penultimate ingredient essential to shaping the future. Leadership provides meaning. Meaning is what inspires people, and true leaders must inspire.

Unfortunately, leaders can be held hostage to 'Management 101': first we stake out our position, develop our strategy, implement our plan and finally measure our performance. That may be good management, but it's no recipe for leadership. Leaders understand that:

- We cannot establish our position; our position is a place, and someone else put us there. We don't start by positioning ourselves; we start by leveraging our position. Our position is all in people's minds, so we need to find out what's on their mind.
- Tactics drive strategy; we can't learn from our strategy – it's just sitting there pretending it knows what it's talking about while your tactics are out there getting battle-tested by the industry/market.
- We can't plan our future, but we can plan our people; outstanding people who fit our basic broad vision will tend to make the right decisions along the way, not by following the plan, but by using their skill.
- Performance is important when kept in perspective. We tend to become what we measure, so remember the quote hanging on the wall in Einstein's Princeton

office: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

As Dick Alvarez said when he took over the helm at Canada Health Infoway, building the Electronic Health Record is like the "search for the Holy Grail". We've certainly staked out our position, developed our strategy, implemented our plan and measured our performance. But is that sufficient to guide us in our search for the Holy Grail we call the Electronic Health Record?

Perhaps there are some lessons we can learn from Monty Python's Knights who say Ni (who by the way I don't recall being equipped with anything like the accoutrements of good management in their Grail quest):

Lesson 1: Improvise

Our goals are not achieved by planning alone. Improvisation occurs when planning intersects with real time challenges and opportunities. We can benefit if we capitalize on those opportunities that materialize. Know when to stick to the plan, and when and how to improvise.

Lesson 2: Be creative

Creativity is the only renewable, irreplaceable and sustainable competitive advantage. It helps us develop bold plans, and then carry them out with passion. Marginal tactics executed passionately almost always outperform brilliant tactics executed marginally.

Lesson 3: Dwell in possibility

Emily Dickinson once said, "I dwell in possibility." This lesson is the amalgam of the first two lessons, and ultimately leads to anticipatory creativity. That is, knowing in advance, that the traditional tools, techniques and approaches, alone, will not be sufficient in our search for the Electronic Health Record. Knowing that we will need to continually be improvising and be creative and anticipating possibilities as we move forward will help us "dwell in possibility."

Infoway and others across Canada have done this, to a certain extent by taking not only a Pan-Canadian

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approach, but also a global perspective. Canadians have thrived on international trade, not only in goods and services, but in ideas. We habitually, some argue, obsessively, look to others for ideas, inspiration and successes. Some contend this is a weakness; I say that there are two sides to every loonie, and that our fascination with ideas beyond our borders has made us better informed and equipped to tackle e-health (and other) challenges.

By its very nature, technology's lack of predictability lends itself exceedingly well to dwelling in possibility. As leaders we understand that our journey will be better informed and served by others. Hence, on the eve of the National E-Health Conference, we are

organizing a Global Executive Forum to tackle collective challenges and capitalize on prospective opportunities. The session will be provocative, interactive and will tap into the cumulative knowledge and experience of our international guests.

I challenge all those attending the session to mobilize the lessons learned, improvise wisely, think creatively, and remember that technology demands that we dwell in possibility. If, indeed, we are to be ultimately successful in finding the Holy Grail of the Electronic Health Record, it may be because we, as Canadians, truly understand, exude and embrace the concept of ideas without borders. ●

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