

RUNNING HEAD: Moving Toward Action

Moving Toward Action – The MOD Position at Millbrook School

By Robb Arndt

Michigan State University – EAD 801

### **Final Interpretation and Framing**

I began this series of assignments by discussing the details of the MOD position, those who fulfill it, and the deficiencies of the system now in place. After several opportunities to reflect, converse with others, and evaluate my role in this challenge it has become apparent to me that there are clear technical components to this challenge and clear adaptive components. Originally, I naively tried to fit the entire challenge under the umbrella of an adaptive challenge, mistakenly believing that the technical components were less important than the adaptive pieces. After conversations with my colleagues, it has become clear to me that the technical components must be addressed in order to facilitate adaptive conversations. As such, I offer the following framing of the challenge of the MOD position at Millbrook School.

The technical components of this challenge are as follows: the school needs a better technological platform to handle student movement on and off campus. As I have stated previously, we are in the process of introducing a new program to streamline the data of student movement and provide easy access for the MOD and dorm faculty. This new program should lessen the burden on the MOD by enabling most faculty to sign a student in or out of campus. As a result, the MOD will turn into a primarily supervisory role, tracking student movement over the course of the day.

The adaptive challenge of the culture around the MOD's responsibilities still remains. By addressing the technical components mentioned above, I believe that the school has taken the first step in this process. The introduction of this new software will address some of the complaints that I heard during my research. With this, I believe that current MODs will be more

willing to engage in discussion around the culture of the position as they now have some additional clarity around the expectations of them while occupying the MOD role. The adaptive challenge facing us now is to create a culture of positivity, enthusiasm, and continuity throughout the MODs.

**Action Steps**

<b>Goal:</b> To create a culture of positivity, enthusiasm, and continuity amongst the MODs				
<b>Actions, Tasks Required</b>	<b>Time Horizon</b>	<b>Key Persons Responsible</b>	<b>Indicators of Success</b>	<b>Lookouts, Concerns (about readiness, conflicts, capacity, etc.)</b>
<b>Step 1</b> Embrace role as the leader of adaptive change around MOD culture	Week 1	Self	Enthusiasm for Step 2	Completely centered around myself. The work in this course has prepared me to embrace this role.
<b>Step 2</b> Meet with Dean of Students and Weekend Activities Coordinator to discuss my intent, purpose, and field questions	Week 2	Self, Dean of Students, Weekend Activities Coordinator	Clarified leadership ladder and backing of DOS and Weekend Activities Coordinator	There is potential for conflict between the DOS and Weekend Activities Coordinator in creating a decisive organizational chart with leadership over the MODs.
<b>Step 3</b> Meet with all MODs	Week 3	All MODs	Thoughtful conversation around the culture surrounding the MOD position and acknowledgment of adaptive challenge, rather than technical problem	Hesitancy to acknowledge that MOD challenge is more than technical problem. Tendency to project blame outward
<b>Step 4</b> Meet individually with each MOD to discuss past experiences and personal stances toward MOD responsibilities	Week 4	All MODs	Personal reflection with each MOD (possibly shared, possibly not) around what they add/subtract to the MOD position.	Individual skepticism around benefits of this practice. Eagerness to embrace technical solution to adaptive challenge. Reluctance to accept or acknowledge role of self in challenge.

			Possibly guided by my reflections from Assignment #4d.	
<p><b>Step 5</b> Meet again with all MODs to briefly share findings and create joint purpose/mission of MOD position</p>	Week 5	All MODs	MOD mission statement that appropriately encompasses the position	Varying beliefs as to the role/mission of the MOD. Eagerness to pass responsibility up the leadership ladder
<p><b>Step 6</b> Create a weekly meeting (or online conversation) amongst MODs &amp; DOS to address and discuss progress of adaptive challenge</p>	Week 6	All MODs & DOS	Continued & centralized conversation around being an MOD and tips to overcome potential hurdles. NOT centralized complaints or place to vent. Ideally, this creates the sense of identification and belonging amongst the MODs that indicates the highest levels of ownership.	Avoiding the possible tendency to make this a group venting session. While concerns can be helpful, must include a recommendation or suggestion for ways to grow positively.

**Descriptive Overview**

The six steps I have outlined above are what I view as the essential steps toward achieving a more positive culture around the MOD position at Millbrook School, with a greater degree of communication and clarity around the responsibilities of the position. After preparing myself to embark on this challenge, I think that the first step is to meet with the Dean of Students and Weekend Activities Coordinator, the two people in charge of the MOD system, to share with them a) my belief that this position presents an adaptive challenge that cannot be

solved with technical solutions, b) my desire to embrace this adaptive challenge with the steps I've outlined above, and c) my hopes for the path this approach will take. By addressing this with these two individuals at the beginning of this process, I hope to earn their support and establish a transparency that I think is essential to the success of this challenge. Additionally, this step insures that I am not acting alone and have support behind me (Heifetz et. al. 2009, p. 42)

I will next meet with all of the MODs to share my conversation with the Dean of Students and Weekend Activities Coordinator and, formally, express my desire to embrace this challenge with this group. As I have already had informal conversations with many of these individuals, I think that this step will be relatively straightforward, much more so than if this were the first they were hearing of it. Additionally, as the school is currently addressing technical components of the MOD position, the timing feels right to introduce and address the adaptive components as well. By bringing all the MODs together, I hope to form a collective identification and acceptance of the challenge.

Following our group meeting, I will meet individually with each MOD to encourage reflection on their personal experiences as MOD. This is the step that I anticipate the most pushback as it will be most successful if individuals acknowledge and accept responsibility for some of the adaptive challenge. To ease this, I plan to share my writing from Assignment #4d in the hopes that it will enable us to connect, establish an honest relationship and potentially offer common language for our discussion ("Credibility" p.27). I *do not* want to appear as if I am assigning them blame or placing myself outside the challenge. Another potential for conflict

arises here in that an individual may refuse to participate in this exercise or accept any degree of responsibility. These individual conversations will enable me to a) “find allies” and also b) identify and stay connected to the opposition (Heifetz et. al 2009, p. 136-142). Bringing all the MODs together after these conversations will enable us to “name the elephants in the room”. This will be the first step in establishing this naming as a consistent practice amongst the MODs (Heifetz et. al 2009, p. 166).

Finally, I hope to establish consistent discussion amongst the MODs. As I note in the table, this should not become a regular opportunity to vent but rather a time to raise concerns about the position, how one handles the responsibilities, and share tips. If successful, this meeting or discussion board will be a resource to current and future MODs as we navigate the best ways to embrace the responsibilities of this position and the identity as a Millbrook MOD (Avolio 2011 p. 8-9).

#### Ripeness/Readiness

As I’ve referenced above, I believe that the technical changes that the MOD position is undergoing this year make it an ideal time to address the adaptive elements of the position as well. This does not mean that all the faculty involved are equally ready. In past assignments, I have written about faculty members with varying degrees of experience at Millbrook and as the MOD. To generalize, my conversations this winter with other MODs indicates that those who have less experience as MODs are more open to conversations around the position and those

who fill the responsibilities. By taking steps 3-5 that I have outlined above, I hope to make each MOD feel validated in their opinion and a central part of the process. While some of the elder MODs are more resistant to change, I believe this is because they feel a high level of ownership with the position and are wary of how any possible changes or conversations about change will affect their role. With these individuals, my goal is to maintain this level of ownership while engaging them in the conversations about adaptive change.

Other key components of this process are the Dean of Students and the Weekend Activities Coordinator. The Dean of Students is nearing the end of his first year at my school and next year we will be appointing a new Weekend Activities Coordinator. The Dean of Students has spent his first year observing and declaring a hesitancy to implement immediate changes. As the year is almost over, I believe he will be open to addressing the adaptive elements I've mentioned above. Additionally, he has led the charge in the technical solutions to the MOD issues so my challenge is to show both of these people that the technical solution does not address the entire challenge.

#### Authority, Allies, and Quick Wins

I believe that the informal conversations I have had already have laid the foundation for much of the informal authority that will help me lead this process. Meeting with many of the MODs over the winter has enabled me to gain some credibility in the role of informal leader. By beginning the process with the Dean of Students and Weekend Activities Coordinator, and

agreeing upon an initial leadership chart and acknowledging the adaptive challenge, I hope to gain two important allies to start the process.

### Orchestrating Conflict & Providing a Holding Environment

The individual meetings with the MODs should provide insight into potential conflict areas with each individual. This will enable me to identify these conflicts and then introduce them to the larger group. We could also address a conflict area in our meeting/discussion posting each week which would maintain the productive disequilibrium.

The combination of these steps demonstrates that this is a *process* and one that is not easily solved. In fact, I think that this concept may be one of the larger hurdles that the group will face. Despite our profession, my experience is that teachers frequently desire a clear-cut, technical solution to challenges, perhaps because they are so focused on the learning process in their classroom. One of my goals is to bring this process focus to this adaptive challenge by keeping the group's focus on ways to improve as individuals and a collective MOD team.

### Uses of Data and Strategic Redundancy

While not data per se, the feedback from the individual conversations with the MODs will provide qualitative feedback ("data") as to areas that we will need to address or potential conflict areas. By addressing these as a group (team), we will avoid redundancy as there should be continuity in our communication.



This also makes me think that a discussion board would be most effective to document individual's perspectives, challenges, and tips ("data"). By centralizing the feedback in an online discussion board, we can make it accessible in real time which could enable MODs to reference past tips or discussion as conflicts arise.

### Turning the Work Over & Generating Ownership

As with many adaptive challenge ventures, the goal to this process is to enable the team of MODs to lead themselves. By bringing the group together for conversation around the conflicts, challenges, and best practices of the position, I hope to create a sense of belonging and identification amongst the Millbrook MODs (Avolio 2009,p. 8-9).

If our work is successful, then the discussion board or consistent communication amongst the MODs will enable the group to lead themselves. Ideally, this group will succeed as a team, with occasional oversight from the Dean of Students. As the group becomes more comfortable engaging in reflective and vulnerable conversations, the need for my leadership will, hopefully, dissipate. In an effort to maintain an ideal of equality, it may be effective to ask a different MOD to lead the discussion each week.

### Unknowns

The greatest unknown in this process is the level of engagement with which the MODs will receive it. Prior conversations indicate that they are open, and eager, to participate in these discussions but it will require time from all if the process is successful. It will also require a

willingness to experiment, be challenged, and be wrong on occasion. My hope is that by addressing these expectations in the beginning, we can confront these initial likely challenges head on.

Another unknown is how the new technical solution will work within the school. While it appears to solve many technical complaints, it is, as of now, untested. As such, working with the new system will likely present an aspect of the challenge that is difficult to anticipate right now.

Reference List

Avolio, B. J. (2011). *Full range leadership development*. Thousand Oaks (Calif.): SAGE.

Credibility is the Foundation of Leadership. (n.d.). In *The Leadership Challenge* (pp. 23-38).

Heifetz, R. A., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston: Harvard Business Press.