

CHLNet COVID Corner Blog

By Bill Tholl, CHLNet Senior Policy Advisor, May 20, 2020

On May 7, 2020, CHLNet held its first ever virtual Network Partner Roundtable. Thirty-five individuals zoomed in representing over 25 of our partners. In the middle of a pandemic, it showed the importance of leaders to have a forum for honest dialogue and engagement on their leadership challenges. Partners were asked to respond in a roundtable fashion to two key questions:

- a. COVID-19 presents many leadership challenges at the team, organization and system level. Share your organizational response to COVID generally or to a specific challenge that was most impactful, and other leadership might learn from; and
- b. Has your individual leadership style and leadership practices changed since the onslaught of the pandemic?

Chatham house rule prevailed however key takeaways were noted. Overall, the level of candor in terms of vulnerabilities suggested a high level of trust in CHLNet. The main theme centred around “We are all in the same COVID storm but in different boats. Its ok to be in a different boat as we are stronger together in the same storm.” And to accompany this while you are in the boat, “Be calm. Be kind. Be safe.” Here are my top ten insights from these conversations:

Top Ten Insights:

1. Top-down, command and control leadership is not the leadership style to conquer COVID and instead followership becomes important. Need to rely much more on distributive or collaborative leadership styles. Empowerment is key! Letting go of control is easier said than done.
2. “Less is more”; “add value, not noise”. Network Partners are all working flat out. They have little time or tolerance for distractions. Continue to keep CHLNet communications clear, concise, and respectful of partner’s time.
3. Need to plan ahead for a restart of the system without restarting COVID. Intentional and purposeful mapping of the “new normal’ building on new ways of doing business is required (e.g. working remotely; virtual care; importance of maintain psychological health).
4. Importance of communicating clearly, honestly, and frequently through any crisis, but especially important given all the misinformation being circulated during this COVID pandemic. Given the pervasiveness of social media, important to clarify and set the record straight immediately especially on misinformation.
5. We must learn to deal better with ambiguity and with “COVID time”, where things that used to take a year or more to get done at a cost now are done in days at no cost.
6. There are silver linings to COVID. For example, virtual care has helped avoid overwhelming the healthcare system and is here to stay. Indeed, COVID can be thanked for accelerating a process of necessary system changes that would have otherwise taken many years. Licensing

agility of health professionals is another. It has “moved the leadership dial in a way that would have otherwise taken years”. But still much more needs to be done in long term care.

7. Leaders’ resilience is being increasingly tested as more and more are being asked to be accountable for decisions taken; for who knew what and when; and then deal with recriminations and retrospectives.
8. Moving to the “new normal” may be harder to do then shifting to crisis mode to deal with COVID (e.g. there were pandemic plans in place). A lack of common understanding of what this means remains and can be stressful as a result.
9. LEADS as a common leadership language can act as a bit of “rock” for us; keeping us grounded in the evidence; helping remind ourselves of the importance of sticking to our values; assisting us to “hold back” a bit to make better decisions (i.e. when under crisis, need to slow things down a bit).
10. This was a “Master class” in lessons learned from leading through a crisis. It has brought out the best in all of us.