
Leadership Theory and Practice: Integrating the Leader-Exemplar, Theory, Assessment, and Reflection

* *Catherine Pratt*
Pacific Lutheran University

This paper explores a model for teaching leadership in the undergraduate business curriculum by integrating theory, the leader-exemplar, assessment, and reflection. Rather than a textbook oriented leadership course, or a leader-speaker series without theoretical foundation, this integrated model invites students to explore their own leadership futures and reinforces program objectives and mission. The leader-exemplars both in and out of the classroom tell stories, reflect on lessons learned, and give personal voice to leadership theory. Students (a) integrate learning through assessment and reflection, (b) identify themes across theory and practice, and (c) experience moments of self-discovery and develop leadership goals.

Key Words: Leadership theory, Exemplar, Assessment, Reflection

Introduction

As it has for decades, the leadership debate continues to rage among scholars. Expansive explorations and intriguing streams of leadership research abound on numerous contradictory fronts. There is vast leadership literature and theory development, but how valuable is this to the undergraduate business student? The purpose of this paper is to present a model on how to integrate leadership theory and practice in a manner that provides a foundation but also invites students to explore their own leadership futures. This model is suited for reinforcing mission and program objectives.

Communities and organizations have leaders at multiple levels and being a leader need not be related to formal position. Exactly how to develop leaders is as fraught with dispute as the concept of leadership in general. Conger cuts through the debate on leadership development by stating succinctly: "It is not a matter of whether leaders are born or made. They are born *and* made" (2004, p. 136).

Leadership and the Undergraduate Business Student

Barker (2001) views leadership as a continuous social process with indefinable beginnings and endings. Business students are somewhere on that continuum of leadership. Increasingly, curricula are specifically focused on leadership (Doh, 2003). What is the role of management educators when students come into the classroom with diverse abilities and interests? Doh notes: "As educators, we should be skeptical of our ability to mold leaders, and instead should view leadership as one of several characteristics and skill sets that may be further developed by education and practice...Leadership clearly requires personal commitments on the part of the learner" (2003, p. 66).

Instead of seeking to cram all possible leadership theory into the minds of undergraduate business students, an integrative model is recommended that encourages students to explore leadership in the life of the mind. This is a multifaceted approach of theory, interaction, assessment, the leader-exemplar, and stories embedded in the values and mission of the institution. The synergy coming out of this model leads students to personal self-discovery—"aha!" moments. Connections are made, values are

clarified, possibilities are imagined, and the desire to make a difference is energized.

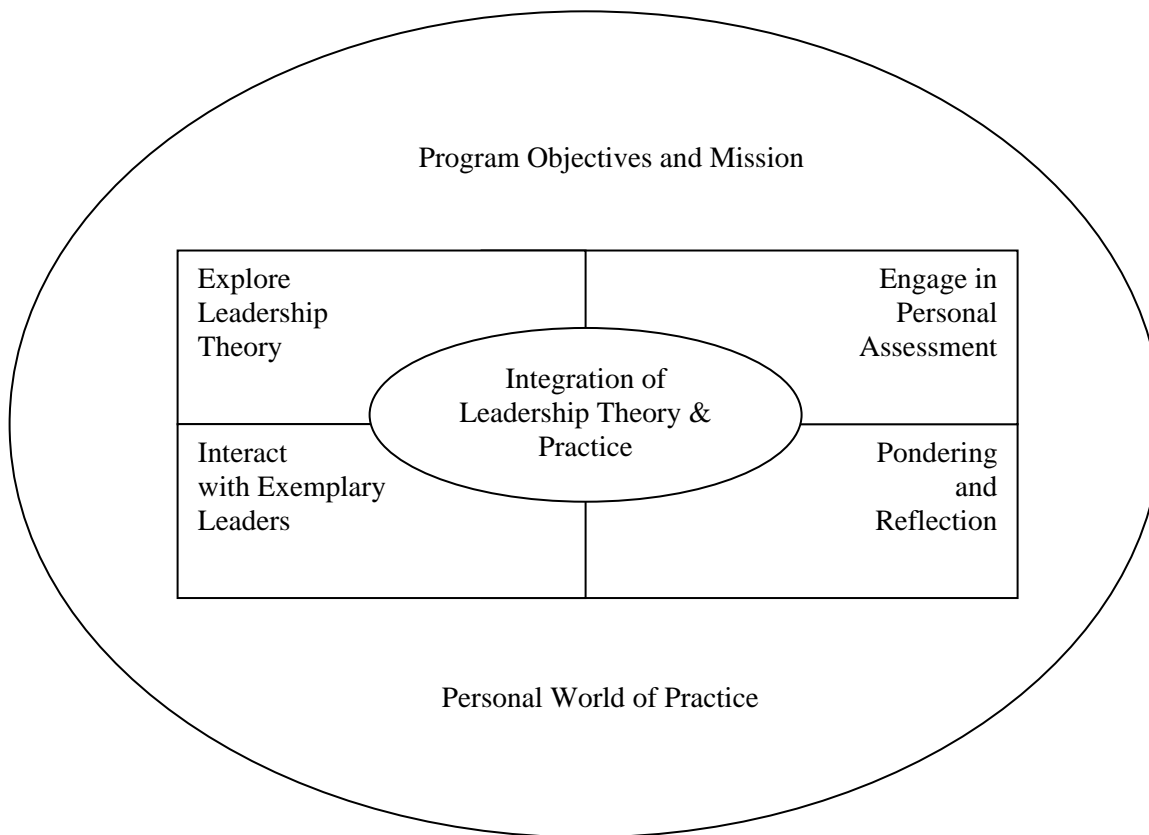
A Multifaceted Model for Leadership Education

Rather than a textbook oriented course on leadership or a leader-speaker series without theoretical foundation, this integrated model helps students to

learn leadership theory, engage in assessment, reflect on their own leadership choices and opportunities, and interact with business leaders. This model is limited to one course, although it does integrate with program objectives. An illustration of the model is found in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Integrative Leadership Theory and Practice Teaching Model



The ingredients in this integrative leadership theory and practice model are:

Explore Leadership Theory

A survey textbook, although a good introduction to theory, may not be enough to launch the integration of theory and practice. Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) note, “dominant models of leadership conceptualise leadership in ways that are generally unhelpful to attempts to teach leadership” (p. 154). Instead of trying to survey a broad leadership literature, an integrated approach aligns leadership readings with the goals and objectives of the program, school of

business, and the university. For example, if service is part of the mission, readings on the role of the leader in service to others promotes integration. It is also worth considering whether one of the more substantive popular leadership business books should be included in readings, because this is often what business leaders are reading and commenting on when they visit the classroom. The critical question when selecting readings and texts is to consider their relevance in leading students to self-exploration and reflection. One mistake frequently made is to so overwhelm the student with reading that they cannot effectively integrate theory with their own reflection.

Interact with Exemplary Leaders

Business leader-exemplars in the classroom and students in the business community create live case opportunities. As guest speakers who are business leaders tell stories, reflect on lessons learned, and give personal voice to challenges and opportunities, students begin to organize and integrate their own learning. The power of stories is especially strong in creating images that teach, inspire, and energize (Denning, 2004, 2005).

There are lessons to be learned from guest leaders, but this is only part of the continuum of leadership development. Leadership scholar Stumphf comments: "Students of leadership seem to gravitate toward real leaders. They want to hear from them, learn from them, because they have credibility. But they don't necessarily learn a great deal from them. What it takes for the learning to happen is experiences for them to practice what they have heard" (Doh, 2003, p. 63). Experiences can be part of the university experience. Although there is often a disconnect between management theory and practice (Buckley, Ferris, Bernardin, & Harvey, 1998; Hasan, 1993), bringing theory and practitioners into the same learning environment seeks to overcome this gap.

Listening to real leaders can inspire the learning that takes place when knowledge is put into action. One student who took the course organized around this model reflected on guest leaders who had the most impact on her: "[Name] will stay with me for a long time. He was a very down-to-earth multi-millionaire who happens to adore his role as a leader. Also, hearing [name] reassured me that my biggest downfall of trying to please everyone can be overcome." Another student said: "[Name]'s energy and passion for what he is doing inspired me to really find a job that I love to do. He also spoke of risk-taking and pursuing new opportunities, which is something I am going to challenge myself to do both now and in the future. His emphasis on serving the community impacted me because I realized it doesn't matter what career you are in, there are always ways to give back."

The instructor has an important responsibility in selecting and preparing leader-exemplars for the classroom. Ideally, the leaders represent diverse walks of life including gender and type of organization. A broad selection of leader-speakers

introduces variety from organizations such as entrepreneurial firms, family businesses, non-profits, large corporations, and divergent industries. Exemplar-leaders do not need to be from the top of the organization. The first places to look for leader-exemplars that align with the university's values and mission are executive advisory boards, alumni, and friends of the university who are likely interested in "giving back" and nurturing students. Preparing guest leaders includes sharing course objectives, readings list, program objectives, university mission, and a clear request to tell stories and discuss challenges and opportunities.

The leader's values and attitudes shine through in their conversation. Students pick up on whether there is alignment between what the business leaders espouse and what they do. Although unintended, sometimes students learn just as much from unexpected examples as clearly positive ones. One guest speaker spoke about a challenging point in the company's history where the solution involved hourly workers agreeing in advance to work for more hours in a period than there would be pay. Students were quick to point out labor law violations and this launched a broad ranging ethics discussion on goals and means. It could not have been scripted and illustrated the interplay of choices, challenges, and ethics.

A more personal way for students to interact with exemplars is to send them out to interview business leaders. This is an opportunity for students to interact with alumni or other leaders who are admired and in possible fields of interest. The framing of questions and one-on-one interaction lead to personal reflection on desired approaches and goals. The last time a course using this model was taught in 2006, an unintended outcome of the business exemplar-student interaction was that after the course ended, one fourth of the class individually pursued and accepted job opportunities with the organizations and leaders they admired. The students found an alignment of values and their personal goals.

Engage in Personal Assessment

Engaging in 360 assessment verifies strengths and identifies weaknesses. There are leadership assessment tools targeted at students that adapt questions while maintaining the integrity of the assessment (for example, see Kouzes & Posner,

2005). Possible respondents in a 360 assessment include co-workers, academic team members, fellow athletes, past or present work supervisors, student organization leaders, and coaches. There are ways to structure collection and analysis of leadership assessments to preserve anonymity.

The debriefing and reflection on assessment results is an important aspect of an integrative exploration of leadership theory and practice. Distributing assessment results without comment or integration may create more harm than value. Reflection includes discussion and writing about how assessment results fit into personal identity and expectations, perceived accuracy of the results, linkages with readings, similarities and differences from leader-exemplars, and personal dreams and desires.

Ponder and Integrate Through Reflection

Reflection is to step back, ponder, consider, make sense of, and integrate (see Atkins & Murphy, 1993; Daudelin, 1996; Vince, 2002). Reynolds (1998) views reflection in management education as primarily problem-solving and proposes that the term “critical reflection” is more accurate for “emancipatory approaches to education” (p. 183). For Reynolds, this means questioning assumptions and considering the social environment rather than just the individual. Although terms are often ambiguous, the concept of reflecting to make sense is of value to the business student engaging in leadership exploration. For example, it is appropriate to use written reflection assignments that ask students to ponder on reading, interviews, assessment, and guest speakers in order to consider personal leadership goals and expectations. Learning and growth occur through the interaction of theory and practice.

Link to Program Objectives and Mission

This model and the creation of an integrative course that links leadership theory, leader-exemplars, reflection, and assessment provides an excellent opportunity to align learning goals or course objectives with program goals and mission. The ability to link learning goals to courses and outcomes is an AACSB International accreditation requirement (AACSB International, 2006). The reinforcement-weaving of key program objectives and mission concepts using this model can be very powerful in a

leadership course, although it may be difficult to focus on all objectives in depth. The program objective of “preparing students for lives of service to the community” can be explored by requiring students to participate in a certain amount of service throughout the course. When this is followed by verbal and written reflection on the leadership aspects of their service, program objectives are integrated into the course. One student wrote: “My top personal leadership learning from this course is giving back to the community. I want service learning to become a large part of my life. I figure if I start doing more community service now, then it will carry over into balancing my future career and lifestyle. The service project that I did while in this course was so rewarding that it made me want to continue doing other service more often.” Not every student responds in the same way and course objectives can be reinforced to varying degrees.

Be Leaders in Our Teaching

If modeling of leaders is important to helping students learn as they explore the leadership road, the teacher has a responsibility to model leadership as well. Noted scholar Quinn encourages: “As teachers of the organization sciences, we should be able to create what we claim to understand. If we want to teach our students to become great leaders, we might consider embedding them in great organizations, meaning great courses...We can change our students by changing ourselves, by becoming transformational teachers. In the end it is a question of integrity” (Anding, 2005, p. 487). Teaching leadership with integrity means learning and reflecting ourselves. Are we engaged in personal assessment? Are we integrating our research and practice? Are we giving sufficient energies to our students and our own personal journey? The leader-teacher engages in reflection and action that makes each course different and exciting.

Summary

The goal of an integrative leadership course using this model is that everyone, including the instructor, walks away with deeply personal self-discovery moments that shape future learning and behavior. This blending of theory and practice is not about just earning credits or delivering a course, it is about facilitating students’ exploration of how they can change their world at whatever level they are ready to

engage. Tichy proposes that there is a virtuous teaching cycle in organizations where leaders teach, others learn, and the cycle continues in multiple and often mutual levels (see Allio, 2003). This organizational construct for leadership development can happen using the described model in an integrative leadership course where theory, leader-exemplars, assessment, and reflection occur. Leaders are developed through this continuum where discovery, learning, opportunity, and practice intersect. Leadership is more than theory and common motivation or influence constructs. An integrative teaching approach that combines leadership theory and leader-exemplars engages a deeper examination of social and ethical leadership dimensions that are embedded in the university's values and mission.

**Dr. Catherine Pratt is an assistant professor of management and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in organization behavior, organization design, and leadership. She holds a B.A. from Brigham Young University, an M.A. from Pacific Lutheran University, and an Ed.D. from Seattle University.*

Ongoing research interests include leadership development, learning leadership across generations in family firms, ethics practices, and governance in family firms. She has led the PLU Family Enterprise Institute since 1998 and is actively involved with family firms in the state of Washington.

References

- AACSB International. (2006, January). Eligibility procedures and accreditation standards for business accreditation. Tampa, FL: Author.
- Allio, R. J. (2003). Interview: Noel M. Tichy explains why the "virtuous teaching cycle" is integral to effective leadership. *Strategy & Leadership*, 31(5), 20-25.
- Anding, J. M. (2005). An interview with Robert E. Quinn, Entering the fundamental state of leadership: Reflections on the path to transformational teaching. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 4(4), 487-495.
- Atkins, S., & Murphy, K. (1993). Reflection: A review of the literature. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 18(8), 1188-1192.
- Barker, R. A. (2001). The nature of leadership. *Human Relations*, 54(4), 469-494.
- Buckley, M. R., Ferris, G. R., Bernardin, H. J., & Harvey, M. G. (1998). The disconnect between the science and practice of management. *Business Horizons*, 41(2), 31-38.
- Conger, J. A. (2004). Developing leadership capability: What's inside the black box? *Academy of Management Executive*, 18(3), 136-139.
- Daudelin, M. W. (1996). Learning from experience through reflection. *Organizational Dynamics*, 24(3), 36-48.
- Denning, S. (2004). Telling tales. *Harvard Business Review*, 82(5), 122-129.
- Denning, S. (2005). The leader's guide to storytelling. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Doh, J. P. (2003). Can leadership be taught? Perspectives from management educators. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 2(1), 54-67.
- Hasan, S. M. J. (1993). Business schools: Ostrich syndrome. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 6(1), 47-53.
- Hay, A., & Hodgkinson, M. (2006). Rethinking leadership: A way forward for teaching leadership? *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 27(2), 144-158.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2005). *The student leadership practices inventory (LPI): Student workbook, 2nd ed.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Reynolds, M. (1998). Reflection and critical reflection in management learning. *Management Learning*, 29(2), 183-200.
- Vince, R. (2002). Organizing reflection. *Management Learning*, 33(1), 63-78.