From mission statements to mission critical: a conceptual model for getting serious about student leader development

David Michael Rosch

*Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications Program,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois, USA, and*

Scott J. Allen

Boler College of Business, John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio, USA

Abstract

Purpose – Postsecondary institutions that purport to build leaders are ubiquitous. Yet, given such ubiquity, the curriculum and co-curriculum dedicated to student leadership development is diffuse as an overall field of practice and lacks firm grounding in matching consensus outcomes for leader development to specific principles of teaching and learning. We propose a conceptual model for leader development of undergraduates that describes what leadership education should strive to accomplish.

Design/methodology/approach – Recent scholars (Leroy *et al.*, 2022) suggest such lack of consensus and weak structure stems from a lack of commitment to defining the ultimate goals for leader development programs, matching curriculum and pedagogy to meet these goals, and then rigorously evaluating programs. Our proposed model illustrates a structure of leadership skill mastery founded in adult constructive development theory, applies a range of adult learning principles, and includes several suggestions for specific curricular and pedagogical applications. We describe each aspect of this conceptual model and explain how it might be enacted and assessed across diverse postsecondary contexts.

Findings – We have no findings to report.

Originality/value – Numerous scholars have advanced models that seek to define and provide a structure for "leadership." The novelty of our work is to combine the work of other scholars to provide an explicit framework for the work of leadership education in higher education – how to conceptualize "leader development," how to combine such development with adult learning principles, and what specific curricular and pedagogical elements should be included to achieve intended ends.

Keywords Leader development, Leadership education, Student development, Curriculum and pedagogy, Program assessment

Paper type Conceptual paper

"We prepare the leaders of tomorrow" is frequently seen in postsecondary institution mission statements. According to an international database, more than 2,000 postsecondary institutions offer formal curricula dedicated to student leader development – in the form of co-curricular initiatives, academic courses, disciplinary majors and minors, and undergraduate and graduate degrees (Guthrie, Teig, & Hu, 2018; Perruci & Hall, 2018). Numerous scholars have sought to advance theories and models for leader development in higher education, including, for example, Seemiller's Student Leadership Competencies (2013)

and Komives's Leader Identity Development theory (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Given such focus on student leader development, one may think that rigorous evidence exists that indicates how and why engaged students are better prepared to lead modern organizations and communities than their predecessors or less-engaged peers. Or that an organized body of scholarship has been dedicated to investigating leadership education initiatives that efficiently support student leader development and suggest best practices. Such is, unfortunately, not the case.

Our goal is to advance a comprehensive conceptual model for student leadership education. Our model describes outcomes founded in integrating leadership skill mastery with adult constructive development, integrates a popular model of adult learning orientations to help advance those outcomes, and exemplifies specific curricular aspects and pedagogical principles that should be applied to achieve our ultimate outcomes. While we suggest this conceptual model is likely not the only helpful roadmap for describing the overall work of leadership education, we firmly believe that dialogue regarding what the roadmap should look like will benefit the field and its founding scholarship.

Criticism of student leader development has been consistent for decades (e.g. Allen, Rosch, & Riggio, 2022; Dugan, 2011; Leroy *et al.*, 2022; Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt, 1999). These contemporary criticisms include two overarching themes: (1) No sufficient consensus exists regarding the end goals for postsecondary leadership development education (Black & Earnest, 2009; Leroy *et al.*, 2022; Riggio, 2013); and (2) The study of what comprises effective teaching techniques in leadership development is underdeveloped and rarely aligns with the scholarship of teaching and learning (DeRue, Sitkin, & Podolny, 2011). Even worse, each critique magnifies the other. To be clear, several scholars and practitioners have sought to describe and build consensus in leadership education regarding learning outcomes (such as Seemiller's list of competences (2013) or how to better focus on student learning (such as in Guthrie and Jenkin's text, "The Role of Leadership Educators (2018)). These scholars have made admirable advances in our field. However, Leroy *et al.* (2022) provide rigorous evidence to support claims that leader development efforts in higher education lack structural focus, consensus outcomes, and rigorous evaluation of success. Leroy and colleagues argue that the underlying causes of these issues stem, not from scholars, but from institutions that possess overly broad definitions of leadership and its development and apply an underdeveloped knowledge base regarding such development. In response, we seek to advance not another new theory for leader development, but rather an argument for *what leader development should be and why* and *how it should be taught* in postsecondary education.

Our model, pictured in Figure 1, is designed to specify the overarching goals and structure for initiatives designed to help build the capacity to lead while providing flexibility to adapt it across diverse and unique contexts. Its overall outcomes are based on leadership skill mastery (which we define as "horizontal development") and increasing maturity in meaning-making capacity (which we define as "vertical development"), which is necessary for managing the complexity embedded in modern society (Kegan, 1994). We advance an argument for more intentionally integrating adult learning orientations with leader development efforts to achieve these goals, and, in doing so, suggest specific curricular and pedagogical principles that should be broadly applied in leader development efforts, loosely employing a framework initially advanced by Jenkins and Allen (2017). This conceptual model is designed to help integrate a disparate set of outcomes and educational principles into a coherent whole to help build consensus for the practice of student leader development in postsecondary education.

Horizontal and vertical leader development
We suggest that two overlapping goals for programs should be to support students in (1) mastering specific concepts related to leader capacity, which we refer to as "horizontal"
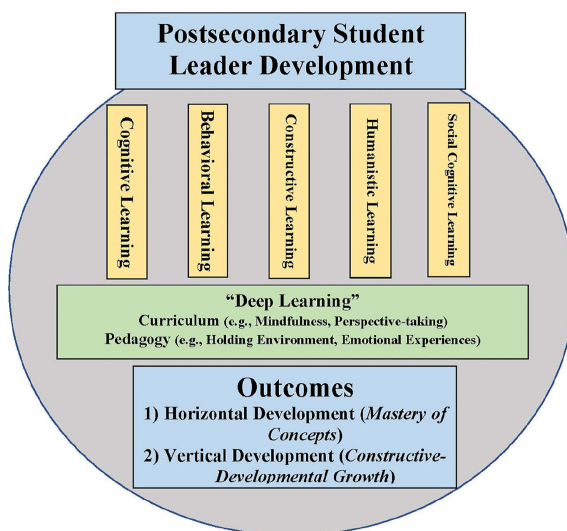
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development, and (2) developing more mature processes for making meaning within their environments that they can employ in decision-making, which we refer to as "vertical" development. Within Figure 1, we place these two concepts as the ultimate outcomes for student leader development.

Horizontal development—mastery of leadership concepts
Many learning initiatives focus almost exclusively on what we describe here as "*horizontal development*." Eigel and Kuhnert (2016) described such development as "lateral," or increasing one's knowledge, skills, and abilities (2016). We prefer the word "horizontal," initially employed by Torbert (2017), to provide better contrast against what we describe as "vertical" development in subsequent paragraphs. The goal of horizontal development is mastery of a specific subject matter. Within postsecondary leader development, horizontal mastery might include communication and listening skills, fundamental decision-making techniques, conflict, negotiation, influence strategies, and building and managing diverse and culturally competent work teams. Essentially, when we refer to "horizontal mastery," we refer to mastery of the conceptual content covered in essential leadership theory texts such as those authored by Yukl and Gardner (2020), Northouse (2021), and others.

However, while mastering these concepts is necessary, they may not be sufficient to lead in complex contemporary situations. Consider students who have studied the tenets of conflict management through their formal leadership-related coursework. Their coursework may have covered, for example, the Thomas-Kilmann principles of conflict management (Thomas, 2008), which places cognitive and behavioral reactions to interpersonal conflict into five distinct types: collaboration, compromise, competition, accommodation, and avoidance. Each type highlights a different approach to the conflict and goal for engaging in each type of thinking and behaving. Still, consider a conflict management scenario typical in many team environments—the tension that might arise over the variance of overt commitment to the team displayed by various members. Mastery of conflict management concepts provides little benefit in this scenario if the manager chooses myopic or selfish priorities (such as "rocking

the boat" as little as possible) over more significant ones (such as engaging in an authentic discussion). Team managers can only demonstrate mastery of conflict management concepts when they pair their knowledge with the ability to construct meaning out of their environment maturely, which we refer to as "vertical development."

Vertical development – constructive developmental growth
The conflict scenario above, for example, is relatively small in scope and significance yet suggests the need for leaders to develop capacities beyond understanding and applying leadership-related concepts. Leading within larger-scope issues require many of the same capacities. What is also required for success is what we describe as "*vertical development.*" Our use of this term is adopted from how Eigel and Kuhnert (2016) defined it, as broadly referring to a sense of wisdom and maturity in making meaning of one's situation based on advancements in the context of constructive-developmental theory. Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) were the first to align constructive developmental theory with requirements for effective leadership. Since then, a host of scholars have worked at the intersection of constructive developmental (CD) theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and leadership (e.g. Avolio and Gibbons, 1989; Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2008; Eigel, 1998; Harris & Kuhnert, 2008). Given the scope of our work here and the relative overlap of concepts within both models, we focus specifically on Kegan's model.

According to Kegan's model, adults typically fall somewhere on a continuum across four distinct levels of constructive meaning-making complexity after leaving childhood (where childhood is generally described as level 1 thinking). Level 2 (which Kegan labels an "Individualistic Mind") comprises fewer than 10% of adults (Eigel, 1998; Kegan, 1994). According to Harris and Kuhnert (2008), leaders at this level "do not integrate differing opinions because they have not developed the ability to weigh the importance of others' opinions against their own" (p. 49). While individuals at this level of development understand the opinions and needs of others, these perspectives are considered only through the lens of "How will this impact me?"

According to research, Kegan labeled level 3 as the "Socialized Mind," which describes approximately 46% of the adult population (Kegan, 1994). The "socialized mind" can take on perspectives from the outer world. One hallmark is the tendency to fully embrace espoused beliefs: political movements, membership organizations, corporate ideology, and so on. While individuals at level 3 possess the potential for coming together in integrated organizations, they may struggle to see the limitations of the belief systems within them. They can become myopic in their perspectives or abilities to apply critical thinking to collective beliefs. Likewise, they may over-rely on the thoughts, opinions, and perspectives in the group(s) with whom they identify—possessing an intense desire to please or conform to the dominant paradigm. Leaders at level 3 look to their groups for wisdom and clarity and can find it difficult to act independently from the group. Therefore, they rely primarily on permission from supervisors, organizational policies, approval from others, and established group precedents in their decision-making.

Kegan (1994) labeled individuals who make meaning at level 4 "Self-authoring" and suggested that about half of the adults in the population do *not* achieve this state of mental complexity. Hallmarks of this stage include the ability to see and analyze the potential limitations of wholesale acceptance of their valued group's perspectives and ideologies. According to Berger and Fitzgerald (2002), those who make meaning primarily using level 4 thinking "have an internal set of rules and regulations—a self-governing system—that they use to make decisions and mediate conflicts" (p. 38). The individual more clearly understands *their* beliefs, values, and perspectives at this stage, as opposed to the beliefs dominant in the groups in which they are a part. Level 4 meaning-makers can see nuance and describe how

and why they disagree with dominant perspectives. They, therefore, work to create meaning of their environments that can take into consideration and even value group perspectives but ultimately rest on their individual beliefs, values, and perspectives. Initial scholarship (e.g. Eigel & Kuhnert, 2016; Torbert, 2017) suggests that level 4 leaders can more easily perceive and analyze information that may make others uncomfortable while possessing the courage to make decisions that other group members may find unpleasant if it requires changing belief systems. However, what makes level 4 leaders more successful can also contribute to their shortcomings—they may become too comfortable relying on their leadership acumen and fail to critically analyze their self-authored beliefs, values, and perspectives in environments that consistently change.

Meaning-making for individuals at Level 5, which Kegan labeled as "Self-transforming," consists of the ability to hold particular beliefs, values, and perspectives as a piece of a more extensive system of potential perspectives. They recognize the limitations of any individual process of meaning-making. Therefore, they can describe how and why they believe what they do while recognizing that their meaning-making system may be limited as contexts shift and are open to multiple interpretations of reality. Those who consistently employ meaning-making processes indicative of Level 5 comprise a tiny percentage of the population (5–8%) (Eigel, 1998; Kegan, 1994), yet seem most able to lead in complex contemporary environments.

We argue that the goal of postsecondary leader education should be to support students in horizontal development (i.e., understanding and applying leadership concepts) *and* vertical development (i.e., growing in one's constructive development). Providing opportunities for horizontal development but not for vertical development might result in students who possess the tools to lead but do not have the mental complexity to recognize how and when to employ those tools. By contrast, providing opportunities for vertical development while neglecting horizontal development might relegate otherwise mature and capable leaders to experiment with techniques on their own while ignoring decades of organizational research and leadership scholarship. We argue that both aspects of learning and development should be integrated, and describe how to achieve such integration through applying a model of orientation to learning first conceptualized by Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner *et al.* (2007).

Five orientations to learning for leader development

To scaffold vertical and horizontal development, we adopt a model for adult learning first described by Merriam *et al.* (2007). The model delineates five distinct orientations to learning – that is, for growing in capacity related to a specific topic. These orientations are depicted in the vertical columns in Figure 1. Similar to the "leadership learning framework" advanced by Guthrie *et al.* (2018), this model was designed to help educators more comprehensively integrate diverse types of educational experiences within their work to help advance student development. The explicit goal suggested within *Learning in Adulthood* (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) was to build a schema for understanding exactly how adults needed to grow in capacity to achieve their goals in a contemporary professional environment, regardless of the specific discipline or field. The five orientations are labeled: (1) Cognitive learning, (2) Behavioral learning, (3) Constructive learning, (4) Humanistic learning, and (5) Social cognitive learning. The most basic explanation of the model might be that the five orientations ensure that a learner develops the knowledge, behaviors, self-awareness, personal goals, and professional role model network to succeed across various circumstances. We propose that aligning learning goals broadly across these orientations provides the support for students necessary for both horizontal and vertical leader development. The following sections provide brief

descriptions of each of the five orientations and highlight how each addresses a different orientation of learning for developing a well-rounded professional (in this case, a leader). It is important to note that we are not suggesting a *clean* distinction between these orientations. There is overlap and, in some cases, creative tension around specific definitions and core concepts.

Cognitivist learning

The cognitivist orientation is focused on knowledge acquisition and is rooted in the scholarship of Lewin (1951) and Piaget (1972), among others. Leadership scholars such as Avolio (2011) and Lord and Hall (2005) have highlighted this orientation in their work. The cognitive learning orientation is focused on information processing and developing the internal cognitive structure of an individual. A curriculum focused on this orientation might emphasize mastering knowledge of leadership theory. A learner who experiences *only* this orientation to leadership might develop a cognitive understanding of how to lead but may lack the skills, experience, and role models required to be successful.

Behaviorist learning

The behaviorist orientation emphasizes skill development and is rooted in the work of psychologists such as Skinner (1974) and Hull (1952). Several leadership scholars have addressed the need to attend more consistently to the domain of skill development (e.g. Conger, 1992; London, 2002). Essentially, the locus of learning within a behaviorist orientation is to elicit a behavior change in the learner. Instructors focus their energy on developing learners' desired (often kinesthetic) behavior at ever-increasing ability levels. Training programs designed to augment a specific capacity in specific circumstances are often designed using a behavioral learning approach. A learner who experienced *only* this orientation to leadership might develop behavioral skills but will lack a theoretical foundation for *why* they are completing a task in a particular manner or how they might do so differently under different circumstances.

Constructivist learning

Constructivism is rooted in the work of theorists such as Dewey (1938), Piaget (1954), and Kolb (1984), and its importance is highlighted by scholars such as Avolio (2005) in the field of leadership scholarship. The constructivist orientation is focused on personal meaning-making, where the educator provides opportunities for individuals to construct meaning from their experiences through critical reflection. One way of thinking about this orientation is through Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, where learners pause and make meaning of what has occurred after they address a learning opportunity. Thus, critical reflection is core to the success of this approach to learning. A learner who experienced *only* this orientation to the topic of leadership would have experience engaging in the work but may lack the theoretical foundation and behavioral skills to be successful, as well as the ability to translate learning to new environments through engaging with mentors and role models.

We note that the constructivist orientation to learning overlaps somewhat with our overarching goal within our model for creating, in part, constructive developmental growth within Kegan's theory. Indeed, both the orientation to learning and the goal involves students making meaning of their experiences. Within the learning orientation, the focus is on meaning-making dedicated to new experiences and intentional learning opportunities provided by educators. Within our model, the focus of is increasing the complexity and maturity with which students can make meaning of their broader circumstances and therefore respond to leadership scenarios more effectively.

Humanist learning
The humanist orientation focuses on self-actualization and developing healthy personal goals; psychologists like Maslow (1943) and Rogers (1969) pioneered this orientation to adult learning. Scholars such as Conger (1992) and Avolio (2005) have written extensively about the domain of leadership learning. Humanist learning is designed to support the development of the whole person while prioritizing developmental needs. According to humanists, the purpose of learning is to "become self-actualized, mature, and autonomous" (Merriam *et al.*, 2007, p. 295). A learner who experienced *only* this orientation to the topic of leadership would likely have an elevated level of self-knowledge for how leading fits into their personal goals but would lack the theoretical understanding, skills, experience, and mentors to be successful in many circumstances.

Social cognitive learning
The social cognitive orientation stems from scholars such as Bandura (1986) and Rotter (1954). In leadership literature, scholars such as McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988) and London (2002) underscore how our environment and the people in that culture shape learning. The goal of the social cognitive orientation is to facilitate interaction with people with more experience than the learner or who have mastered a skillset the learner is still developing. To facilitate social cognitive learning, an educator creates the conditions for developing relationships between more experienced practitioners and learners. A learner who experienced *only* this orientation to the topic of leadership would likely have exposure to one individual or organizational context and develop helpful relations for potential long-term growth. However, they would likely lack exposure to the theoretical understanding, skills, and meaning-making experience necessary for broad-based effectiveness.

Integrating orientations
Achieving horizontal and vertical development can accomplished together through interweaving educational experiences where students focus on all five orientations to learning – increasing their knowledge, behaving in more effective ways, understanding themselves and the larger world in more complexity, recognizing how their experiences relate to their goals, and seeing how other, more experienced, leaders act themselves. However, the effective application of these orientations to learning in student leader development initiatives should not, by any means, advance through building five independent silos where educators attend to each orientation separately. Resources are finite, and such independence is not efficient. Here, we provide a quick example of integrating ethical principles. Students might focus on theoretical concepts and then are assessed through a multiple-choice exam (cognitive learning); engage in an activity where students pair up to role-play managers confronting their direct reports to discuss unethical practices (behavioral learning); write a short essay assignment that invites reflection on the role ethical leadership practices will play in achieving their career goals (humanist learning) and reflect on a time they struggled to act ethically and why (constructivist learning); and listen to an experienced manager to visit the class to discuss ethical dilemmas they have faced (social cognitive learning). These forms of integration are common within many academic programs across disciplines. Still, we call for the architects of these programs to be *more intentional* in building opportunities for learning across all five orientations to ensure that each is substantially represented within the student experience. Later, we describe several curricular and pedagogical concepts that provide opportunities for such integration and are designed to support students in horizontal and vertical development.

"Deep learning" for horizontal and vertical development

This section integrates several curricular considerations and pedagogical applications for facilitating both horizontal and vertical leader development. In his book *Deep Learning in a Disorienting World,* Wergin (2020) outlined several components of "deep learning," which he defined as learning that supports individuals advancing along the path for both types. We have divided our suggestions into two parts: (1) Curricula that should be formally embedded as concepts for students to master, and (2) Aspects of pedagogy that should be applied to learning experiences. We propose that the curricular suggestions we advance be considered part of the foundational concepts covered in leadership education programs, and suggest leadership educators apply the pedagogical principles we list. Like other concepts within the model, none of these in isolation directly result in the ultimate outcomes we aim to achieve, but when skillfully integrated can result in both horizontal AND vertical leader development.

Curriculum

What follows are curricular concepts that educators in student leader development programs might consider including within their programs. Each of these concepts can be embedded independently from the others, but optimally each might enforce the others for deep learning. We should acknowledge that these concepts are not exhaustive for supporting the integration of vertical development and horizontal development. We include them here as a starting point to begin a discussion and empirical research agenda focusing on curricular concepts that help support vertical and horizontal leader development. Still, those we list have been supported by research as contributing to broad-based development and learning in various settings.

Cognitive bias awareness. How humans construct their reality is saturated in cognitive biases, which skew their subjective assessments of reality, severely limiting their capacity to make effective decisions—both individual and in organizations (Kahneman, Lovallo, & Sibony, 2011). For instance, confirmation bias (the tendency for a person to pay closer attention to information supporting their worldview) may limit a leader's ability to objectively examine data indicating that their pet initiative is failing. Attending to a few of the most prevalent and well-studied cognitive biases (e.g. fundamental attribution error, confirmation bias, anchoring bias, hindsight bias, halo effect, and framing effect) can help leadership students understand how quick judgments limits success. Mastering mindfulness is another curricular concept that might aid learners in being conscious of their cognitive biases.

Mindfulness. Mindfulness refers to the capacity for intentionally bringing awareness to one's thoughts and emotions within the moment. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are characterized by "control of attention, awareness, acceptance, non-reactivity, and non-judgmental thoughts that are gained through the practice of meditation" (Bamber & Morpeth, 2019, p. 203). Teaching students mindfulness techniques will help them better navigate interpersonal differences within a group setting, observe their own reactions to experiences, and examine the source of their thoughts and emotions more deeply. Mindfulness may be particularly significant for mastering aspects of vertical development; given how much of that development is based on making meaning in the moment.

Active listening. Active listening is a foundation for effective dialogue, teaming, and leadership. Active listening consists of an empathetic response (enacted through one's words and actions) resulting from "seeing the expressed idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, sensing how it feels to the person, achieving his or her frame of reference about the subject being discussed" (Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991). Four skills embedded in active listening include preparing to listen (e.g. setting aside distractions), asking open-ended questions (e.g. "Can you tell me more about...?"), paraphrasing (e.g. restating content to check for understanding), and reflecting feelings (e.g. naming and empathizing with the

feelings of the others) (Nemec, Spagnolo, & Soydan, 2017). We believe that for student leader development programs to help achieve horizontal and vertical growth, they should include formal training in active listening techniques within their curricula.

Perspective-taking capacity. The ability for a person to put themself in "another's shoes" and imagine the world from another's perspective is the heart of perspective-taking capacity. While empathy is about "feeling" with others' feelings, perspective-taking capacity is about a cognitive understanding of others' experiences. As Stietz, Jauk, Krach, and Kanske (2019) suggested, perspective-taking is "the capacity to make inferences about and represent others' intentions, goals, and motives (other terms include mentalizing and cognitive empathy)." For example, a leader who intentionally seeks to understand the viewpoints of everyone within their team will more fully understand the experience of others. Perspective-taking also supports another critical leadership capacity—mastering dialectical thinking.

Dialectical thinking. Dialectical thinking is the "cognitive tendency to tolerate contradictions, ambiguities, and inconsistencies" (Chen, Benet-Martínez, Wu, Lam, & Bond, 2013). Leaders face multiple competing commitments (Kegan & Lahey, 2016); the dialectic thinker is often more concerned with asking the right questions than having all the answers; they often live in the space of questions and see the complexity embedded in the environment. Dialectical thinking involves engaging in the process of leading through complexities by avoiding absolutist solutions and deeply examining the source of tensions.

Reflection, critical reflection, and reflexivity. Reflection is a state of mind that gives attention to events that have already occurred and might involve asking questions such as, "What just happened? What worked and what did not? Would I approach the situation again in the future in the same manner?" In a way, reflection signifies an initial form of meaning-making. Critical reflection, on the other hand, "involves us recognizing and researching the assumptions that undergird our thoughts and actions within relationships, at work, in community involvements, in vocational pursuits, and as citizens" (Brookfield, 1986, pp. 294–5). The ability to critically examine assumptions and how they are embedded in existing power and hierarchical relationships can contribute to helping organizations and communities grow stronger (Collinson & Tourish, 2015).

Reflexivity is designed to prompt a person to explicitly reflect on *their own* meaning-making structures. As Bolton suggested (1999), reflexivity involves "strategies to question our attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand our complex roles concerning others. An example of a fundamentally reflexive question in leadership education is, "What is driving my desire to be liked as a leader?" Embedding reflective, critically reflective, and reflexive meaning-making as learning goals within formal and informal student leader development initiatives would support students in more effectively understanding themselves, their environment, and the appropriate enactment of leader behaviors within it.

Pedagogy
In addition to embedding curricular concepts that are not consistently popular into the curriculum of student leader development programs, we suggest that educators introduce certain pedagogical elements to their teaching. These elements are not necessary to teach, per se, but rather methods for achieving the outcomes we list above.

Build a community holding environment. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) defined a holding environment as "the cohesive properties of a relationship or social system that serve to keep people engaged with one another despite the divisive forces generated by adaptive work" (p. 305). Such an environment builds trust and creates a space for people to be vulnerable and bring their whole selves to the experience. For Kegan and Lahey (2016), the holding environment must "receive and welcome the person exactly how she is, with no

requirement, at the moment, that she be anything different from who she is" (p. 152), therefore supporting everyone's growth and development. We believe that leadership educators should explicitly focus on the notion of a holding environment in the way they create an environment for learning within their initiatives, which we view as necessary for creating the creative tension for constructive development.

Encourage explicit norms and member expectations within a diverse learning community. Ideological and intellectual diversity among group members can promote development and growth among learners but might also reduce trust if not managed well (Wergin, 2020). Tense experiences can sometimes cause people to become defensive and rigid in retaining their initial beliefs and perspectives. Within the learning community context, well-established and emerging norms of behavior frame how individuals will learn and work with one another— group norms frame "how" we will be with one another. With common expectations for engagement, learners may engage in more productive discourse across diversity. Building norms in diverse groups, for example requires active listening, minimizing interruptions, and using person-first language.

Ensure appropriate levels of challenge and support. An effective curriculum keeps learners at their edge—they exist in a learning environment that is simultaneously challenging and supportive. Many scholars have discussed the need for "constructive disorientation" (Wergin, 2020) as a fundamental ingredient of deep learning (Ericsson & Pool, 2016; Heifetz *et al.*, 2009; Kegan & Lahey, 2016). Educators should build enough "heat" within the learning community to garner learners' attention while also providing a level of support so they do not shut down because the task is overwhelming or immense.

Support for Student Emotions. Pekrun (2014) suggested that "emotions profoundly influence learning and achievement" and urged educators to pay attention to emotions in the learning process. According to Wergin (2020), emotions are an essential catalyst for deep learning, and learners (and educators) who are in tune with their reactions, triggers, and embodied experiences can better use them as catalysts for self-exploration. Effective educators interested in helping students achieve mastery of leadership skills while also helping support students' constructive development should expect emotional reactions within their learning communities and support students through these reactions.

Conclusion

The conceptual model we propose (Figure 1) contains important elements for improving the purpose, techniques, and outcomes for higher education student leadership development. Resting at its foundation are the two ultimate outcomes for programs: (1) mastery of leadership concepts, which we describe as "horizontal development," and (2) advancement in constructive development growth which we have called "vertical development." These outcomes could be optimally achieved by providing a curriculum that introduces leadership concepts and founding students' engagement in these concepts in contemporary contexts. The curricula within these programs could be introduced to students in a way that invites them to learn across the five orientations we have described: cognitive, behavioral, constructive, humanist, and social cognitive. Additionally, we suggest specific curricular concepts and pedagogical aspects that should surround how students engage with leadership-specific theories and concepts.

Numerous academic programs employ several of these factors in educating students related to their leader development. To be clear, our goal is not to provide a detailed blueprint for educators to replicate within their programs nor to suggest that each aspect is new and unique. Instead, our focus has been to clarify a "big picture" of the shape and underpinnings of student leader development and begin a conversation among educators, a process called for in past and recent scholarship (Leroy *et al.*, 2022). A significant contribution of our model

may be providing program architects clarity on integrating the concepts we have described. In the future, we recognize the need to illustrate further how the model might be comprehensively applied in a postsecondary education academic program – and to begin assessing the model's effectiveness.

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Corresponding author
David Michael Rosch can be contacted at: dmrosch@illinois.edu