

## **Getting Down to Business: A Look at Leadership Education in Business Schools**

### **Matthew Sowcik, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor of Leadership Studies  
Department of Entrepreneurship, Leadership Studies & Marketing  
Sidhu School of Business and Leadership  
Wilkes University  
Wilkes Barre, PA  
Matthew.sowcik@wilkes.edu

### **Scott J. Allen, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor of Management  
Department of Management, Marketing and Logistics  
John Carroll University  
University Heights, OH  
sallen@jcu.edu

### **Abstract**

In the context of business schools, the word “leadership” is widely used in missions, visions, and marketing materials. However, underlying support and the infrastructure to truly develop leaders may be lacking. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the challenges and issues facing leadership education in the context of business education. More specifically, we highlight some of the structural challenges, foundational issues, and research related problems and identify several opportunities to address some of the areas for development. Throughout this paper, we discuss how the National Leadership Education Research Agenda can spark research that will legitimize our work not only in business, but across disciplines.

In the past twenty-five years, leadership training, education, and development has become a priority for public, private, and governmental organizations (Fulmer, Gibbs & Goldsmith, 2000). Leadership education is often communicated as a strategic advantage that will result in a better-prepared workforce that is ready to meet the ever-increasing demands of a global economy. Research supports these assertions and as DeRue, Sitkin and Podolny (2011) report, “leadership development and succession are the top priorities for organization across the globe” (p. 371). Today, organizations in the United States spend approximately 12.5 billion dollars on leadership development training each year (Avolio & Hannah, 2008; O’Leonard, 2010; DeRue et al., 2011). These programs focus on senior executives, middle managers and emerging leaders alike. From a delivery standpoint, they run the gamut and may be highly individualized (executive coaching)

or designed for the masses (online learning platforms). However, despite growing insight into the importance of leadership education and the abundance of resources allocated to the development of leaders within organizations, there continues to exist below average confidence in business leaders (Rosenthal, 2012).

This growing emphasis on leadership development in organizations has also significantly impacted business school curricula over the past ten years. In 2003, Doh suggested that “more than three fifths of the top 50 U.S. business schools, as defined by the 2002 *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, publicized that they offer some course work in leadership” (p. 55). In line with these rankings, our own review of the top 50 business schools indicated a significant increase in the number of schools offering “some” coursework in leadership. In 45 of the top 50 schools (as defined by the 2014 *U.S. News and World Report* rankings), at least one leadership course was offered in the business school curriculum. In 40 of the top 50 schools, the leadership course(s) were part of the core curriculum. Furthermore, in more than half of the programs, two or more leadership classes were offered throughout the program’s curriculum. For instance, Harvard Business School has two required courses and four elective courses that focus on the topic of leadership ([www.hbs.edu](http://www.hbs.edu)).

In addition to courses, many business schools now strategically address the importance of leadership in their mission statements. For example, the mission statements from the top 5 U.S. business schools (as defined by the 2014 *U.S. News and World Report* rankings) all include the education of leaders as a central tenet:

- **Harvard Business School:** We educate leaders who make a difference in the world.
- **Stanford University:** Our mission is to create ideas that deepen and advance our understanding of management and with those ideas to develop innovative, principled, and insightful leaders who change the world.
- **University of Pennsylvania:** Prepare business leaders to fuel the growth of industries and economics on a global scale.
- **Northwestern University:** Our purpose is to educate, equip and inspire leaders who build strong organizations and wisely leverage the power of markets to create lasting value.
- **Massachusetts Institute of Technology:** The mission of the MIT Sloan School of Management is to develop principled, innovative leaders who improve the world and to generate ideas that advance management practice.

In line with these mission statements, many of the top 50 business schools are building infrastructure to support their mission within and outside the classroom. Business schools across the United States are building programs, centers, and executive education offerings to achieve their objectives of developing leaders. No longer do educators and managers debate the merits of leadership as a core function of business – but rather, the more relevant challenge today is in developing models that truly *develop leaders*. Riggio (2008) suggests, “There is every reason to believe that leadership development in organizations, particularly in the United States and Europe, must get better” (p. 390).

To sum, leadership education and development is widely discussed as a core tenant of business schools and while courses have been added and centers are being built, there are still some significant challenges ahead. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the challenges and issues facing leadership education in the context of business education. First, we explore some structural challenges. Second, we highlight three foundational issues related to leadership. Third, we investigate two research-related issues. In addition, we identify several opportunities to address these challenges and discuss how the National Leadership Education Research Agenda (NLERA) can spark research that will legitimize our work not only in business, but across disciplines (Andenoro, Allen, Haber-Curran, Jenkins, Sowcik, Dugan, & Osteen, 2013). As Perruci and McManus (2013) suggest, “It is time for leadership to inform other disciplines, as opposed to only the other way around” (p. 51).

### Structural Challenges in the Context of Business Education

#### Acceptance by AACSB & AOM

The two most influential bodies in management education, The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and The Academy of Management (AOM) view leadership and perhaps the priority of leadership development as a “sub-topic” despite the expressed mission of so many institutions. For instance, AACSB (2005) suggests “The management education experience creates leaders capable of inspiring greater benefit from the work of individuals of developing organizations that are more effective at fulfilling their purpose” (p. 11). However, the organization also suggests, “In addition to mastering technical skills, students must acquire knowledge of ethics, social responsibility, law, and public policy, along with skill development in communication, leadership, and critical thinking” (p. 6). So although “developing leaders” is a priority, leadership as a topic may be on the same level as communication skills and critical thinking – not accounting, finance, organizational behavior, marketing, and so forth. In fact, in the AACSB’s (2013) *Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation* it is suggested that:

Traditional business subjects include accounting, business law, decision sciences, economics, entrepreneurship, finance (including insurance, real estate, and banking), human resources, international business, management, management information systems, management science, marketing, operations management, organizational behavior, organizational development, strategic management, supply chain management (including transportation and logistics), and technology management. (p. 9)

While the organization does not claim the list to be exhaustive, it’s clear that many in management education feel that leadership is a topic under the banner of management, organizational behavior, or “soft skills.” While AACSB has hinted at the importance of topics such as leadership, without the expressed and systemic support of AACSB, “leadership” will likely stay in its current position within business education. As one author suggests,

if the AACSB’s rhetoric and standards are ever going to turn into reality, it is critical that this institution undergo some internal reflection to determine just exactly why it has failed to effect the appropriate changes. One possible answer is that it has become more

of a group of foxes guarding the MBA henhouses than a beacon of leadership and force for catalytic change. (Navarro, 2008, p. 120)

Another organization with great influence over management education is The Academy of Management. The Academy of Management's expressed mission is "To build a vibrant and supportive community of scholars by markedly expanding opportunities to connect and explore ideas" (Vision, Mission, Objectives & Values, 2013). The Academy is divided into 25 management disciplines (called divisions) such as organizational behavior, operations management, management history, human resources, healthcare management, careers, and conflict management. Leadership is not included as a distinct management discipline or division. There is a "Network of Leadership Scholars," but again, our assumption is that many would see leadership as a sub-topic of many of the above-mentioned divisions.

Given the relative youth of leadership as an area of inquiry, it may not yet be elevated to what would be widely considered as a discipline. Although programs in leadership studies have become popular in recent years, they do not often find homes in schools of business. Likewise, "leadership" would not be considered a "profession" as would accounting, human resources, or marketing. To elevate our status, we may in fact need a codified base of knowledge, recognized set of behaviors, appropriate methods for inquiry, and so forth. Of course in an applied field such as leadership, this will take time.

While it is not our purpose to suggest that leadership *should be* housed in a school of business, it's interesting to note the topic's lack of legitimacy in the larger system of business education. Perhaps this occurs in other domains such as education, agriculture, and psychology as well. Thus, one ultimate objective of our work is a sense of legitimacy within the larger Academy. This will be the byproduct of relevance and rigor. As the NLERA (Andenoro et al., 2013) introduction states:

This charge was approached with consideration for the fundamental problems and issues within the broad context of leadership education that should be addressed at the higher education level through research in the next five years and under the auspice of achieving the two overarching goals of the agenda: 1) Provide research priorities that can guide applied scholarship contributing to the development of future leaders and managers through higher education, and 2) Provide key elements that further define Leadership Education as a discipline. (p. 2)

We believe that the NLERA provides direction for our research which is needed. One opportunity is that although the NLERA has received support from several organizations, it may be interesting to explore other partnerships with influential organizations outside of leadership and student affairs, such as Network of Leadership Scholars (Academy of Management) or the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP).

### *The Issue of Silos*

A second structural challenge has to do with silos on college campuses, which occur on multiple levels. For the purpose of this paper, we will explore three that specifically impact leadership education. The first level is programmatic. On most college campuses, there are a number of individuals and departments conducting leadership development. These can include academic departments that offer major and minors, programming in business schools, student affairs

efforts, and training in Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). More often than not, there is little coordination and communication across the institution to align these programs, initiatives and learning opportunities. Within each of these areas, the knowledgeable program architect needs to be skilled in a number of disciplines such as training and development (instructional design, learning theory, and program evaluation), psychology (identity development, information processing, decision making, expertise, learning and cognition) leadership (theory), and other topics such as critical thinking, interpersonal communication and so forth. As a result, many instructors have to make sense of the literature on their own and they naturally search within their own disciplines (agriculture, education, military science, business, psychology, student affairs). Many find that there is no clear template or starting point like in other areas of practice such as accounting, medicine or law (Riggio, 2008). Ask 10 theorists or program developers the starting point for curriculum and you will likely get 10 different answers. This becomes problematic because a template for appropriately scaffolding a curriculum does not exist. So even the most basic question, such as “what skills does one need to learn prior to higher order or more complex *adaptive competencies*” (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009) is answered largely based upon the silo in which the program architect exists. If the program architect is in student affairs, they turn to the work of Susan Komives and if they are in Army ROTC they turn to AR-350-1.

The second level of silos occurs within the various schools within each institution. For instance, even within business schools, there are silos that often create barriers between the economists, organizational behaviorists, and accountants. There have been calls for integration to remove the silos that exist within business schools, but according to some, little has been done to do so (Navarro, 2008; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). In reality, a business executive does not focus on accounting or marketing in a silo and is often charged with managing interdisciplinary teams working on the same problem or innovation. However, a challenge within business schools is that all too often, students and professors alike do not view a marketing class as an opportunity to practice leadership or hone their skills. As a result, we miss several opportunities to more intentionally develop the leadership skills of our students.

Silos also occur at the institutional level. Interestingly, the Carnegie Foundation recently released a report calling for an increased level of collaboration between the liberal arts and business (Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011). While this may seem far-fetched to some, it’s worthy to note that management education has its roots in the liberal arts. As AACSB (2005), suggests:

Management education is an extraordinary model of a liberal education. It is steeped in intellectual traditions drawn from theories and concepts representing a wide range of social sciences including economics, sociology, psychology, mathematics and statistics. The disciplines of organizational behavior, business strategy and finance, for example each trace their intellectual roots to these social sciences. (p. 6)

For an interdisciplinary topic such as leadership this is true as well. However, this reality can be problematic because there is no clear “home” as there would be for physics, chemical engineering, operations management, and the like. Unlike other topics, leadership logically fits in a number of departments on campus. The topic of leadership lends itself to *true* interdisciplinary work because it has been informed by education, student affairs, anthropology,

psychology, sociology, biology, neuroscience, history, political science, philosophy, communication, English, organizational behavior, ethics, and religion, among others. The disciplines we have highlighted both inform and can be informed by the topic of leadership.

The NLERA (Andenoro et al., 2013) directly addresses the issues of silos and calls for an intentional focus on aligning the best research and scholarship from multiple domains. While building our own streams of scholarship, priority must be placed on the scholarship of integration (Boyer, 1990). The intentional development of interdisciplinary connections is essential for the advancement of Leadership Studies. Connections to topics such as instructional and curricular design, program assessment, information processing, student development, competency-based learning, training & development, and identity development have the potential to inform our work and can have powerful implications for leadership education.

### Foundational Issues Related to the Context Business Education

#### *Leadership [Training, Education, Development, Studies, Learning...]*

Like other domains, there continues to be a lack of clarity around even the most basic definitions of our work as leadership educators. This is perhaps even more prevalent in the management literature where management development and leadership development are consistently *and at times intentionally* used interchangeably (Mintzberg, 2005). Terms such as: leadership development (Allen & Roberts, 2012; Brungardt, 1996; Day, 2001; Roberts, 1981), leader development (Day, 2001), leadership training (Allen & Roberts, 2012; Brungardt, 1996; Roberts, 1981), leadership education (Allen & Roberts, 2012; Brungardt, 1996; Roberts, 1981), leadership learning (Allen & Roberts, 2012; Hirst, Mann, Baine, Pirola-Merlot, Richver, 2004), leadership studies (Sowcik, 2013), competency development (Boyatzis, Leonard, Rhee & Wheeler, 1996), management education (Albanese, 1990), management development (Mabey & Lees, 2007), managerial leadership development (Collins & Holton, 2004), managerial skill building/training (Bigelow, 1995; Pagalis, 2013), strategic management development (Brown, 2003), and leadership self-development (Reichard & Johnson, 2011; Orvis & Ratwani, 2010) lack widely accepted definitions.

This reality is problematic for a few reasons. First, one of the first tasks anyone engaged in the process of theory building, is defining the “what.” According to Whetten (1989), the “what” represents, “Which factors (variables, constructs, concepts) logically should be considered as part of the explanation of the social or individual phenomena of interest” (p. 490). Although Whetten is describing a different level, it would seem that a good theory of leadership or management development would also contain a definition of what is, and is not, under consideration. Of course these clear and coherent definitions help to promote research that follows consistent streams of inquiry. How does our field develop, mature and grow without a clear and coherent understanding of basic terminology? Likewise, consistent definitions serve as a foundation for leadership & management educators as they work to develop knowledge, skills and abilities.

The NLERA (Andenoro et al., 2013) specifically calls for clarity on definitions and suggests that this is:

essential to advance a cohesive body of scholarship that can be effectively translated to practice across fields and disciplines. It is particularly important to clarify the term

Leadership Education to aid in the functionality of the research priorities outlined in this agenda. (p. 3)

Clarifying the above will help individuals more intentionally build learning opportunities that achieve their objectives. As Baldwin, Pierce, Joines, and Farouk (2011) suggest, “it is unreasonable to expect a consistent level of understanding and behavioral responses related to a body of knowledge that has not yet been codified, trained, and reinforced in the first place” (p. 586).

### **What Should We Develop and How Do We Know Development Has Occurred?**

One consequence of a lack of clear definitions is the inherent disagreement as to “what” is being developed. Depending on who is asked, the output of our efforts to develop leaders and managers will be vastly different. For instance, in the management realm, the authors of the widely used (Brown, Charlier, Rynes, Hosmanek, 2013) text, *Management Skills Development*, suggest that the necessary topics include: developing self-awareness, managing personal stress, solving problems analytically and creatively, building relationships by communicating supportively, motivating others, managing conflict, empowering and delegating, building effective teams and teamwork, and leading positive change (Whetten & Cameron, 2010). Lord & Hall (2005) suggest that skills connected to leadership development include: task skills, emotional skills, social skills, meta-monitoring skills, and values. Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) suggest a different set of foci which include: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and business skills. If we turn to specific theorists such as Bruce Avolio, he suggests introducing the Full Range Model of Leadership Development (transformational leadership) (Avolio, 1999). However, it is likely that proponents of emotional intelligence would suggest beginning there...

Even after we have determined what we want to develop, a challenge that has puzzled scholars in the managerial skills domain is what expertise looks like and how this is graded or judged (Bigelow, Seltzer, van Buskirk, Hall, Schor, Garcia, & Keleman, 1999) in the context of an academic environment. Lord & Hall (2005) have identified “knowledge content emphasis of different leadership skill levels” (p. 605) which serve as potential markers as individual moves from novice to intermediate to expert. However, this process occurs over a period of years versus one or two semester-long courses. A semester-long course is not enough time to develop expertise (Lord & Hall, 2005; Mumford, Friedrich, Caughron, Antes, 2009). Ericsson (1996) suggests that effective learning “requires a well-defined task with an appropriate difficulty level for the particular individual, informative feedback, and opportunities for repetition and correction of errors” (pp. 20-21). It is apparent that on campus and in industry, leader development lacks a number of Ericsson’s requirements for developing expertise.

Area Two of the NLERA is dedicated to exploring the “what” of our efforts and suggests that “it is absolutely critical to consider the content and the learner with respect to the transfer of leadership learning within the leadership education context” (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 12). Likewise, the NLERA (Andenoro et al., 2013) document emphasizes the importance of measurement in Priority One and calls for:

A common set of questions is a necessary step for furthering research in leadership education, but that is not enough. We also need to learn more about assessment of our efforts (Riggio, 2008); more specifically, the appropriate research methods, paradigms, and data collection procedures. (p. 7)

We will know the NLERA has had an impact on the field of leadership if in five years, we have greater clarity on definitions, content and measures of development.

### *Assessment & Evaluation*

A lack of clearly defined constructs and topics for development lends itself to challenges with assessment and evaluation. Increased attention has been paid to programmatic assessment and evaluation over the past ten years in both leadership education and business schools. In 2003, AACSB adopted a new set of standards for accreditation and reaccreditation (Pringle & Michel, 2007). Although AACSB had required assessment prior to 2003, a small percentage of the criteria for assessment were attributed to assessment. After the adoption of the new standards, one-third of the accreditation criteria are directly related to assessment (Pringle & Michel, 2007).

At the same time, a dialogue concerning formalized program review was occurring in leadership education, which drove the creation of evaluation resources like the International Leadership Association's (2009) *Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs* and the *Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership – Institutional Survey* (Dugan & Komives, 2007). More recently, the interest in discussing leadership program evaluation options like formalized program review, certification, and accreditation prompted the creation of the *Formalized Program Review Task Force*, appointed by the chair of the International Leadership Association. The task force explores and recommends options related to formalized program review including key points that address many of the challenges involved in moving towards a formalized evaluation process (Sowcik, Lindsey, & Rosch, 2013).

The growing interest in programmatic assessment and evaluation can be attributed to a number of factors. In business schools, an increased emphasis on assessment is credited to greater need for accountability to state legislators, parents, students, taxpayers, donors, and organizations (Pringle & Michel, 2007). In Leadership Studies, a much newer field of study, assessment is a growing concern. As Riggio (2008) suggests,

Those of us involved in efforts to develop leadership need to be very concerned about evaluation of our programs. We need to demonstrate the effectiveness of what we are doing and, in short, justify our existence. Organizations should be assured that their investment in leadership development does indeed pay off. (p. 389)

Due to the growing need to justify institutional resources, it is discouraging that there is not more emphasis placed on evaluation in leadership education research and practice (Riggio, 2008). The need to address deficiencies in both the research and evaluation resources is outlined in the National Leadership Education Research Agenda (Andenoro et al., 2013). Over the next five years, it will be critical for leadership education, both within and outside of business schools, to better address these shortcomings to justify institutional resources and increase the perception of credibility throughout higher education.

The National Research Agenda (2013) also asserts that “it would be wise of us within the field to reach out to other established academic disciplines to better understand assessment practices” (p. 11). To begin this process, we will address some of the major challenges of assessment in



leadership education as highlighted by the NLERA (Andenoro et al., 2013) and benchmark this with evaluation in business education. As suggested above, the AACSB has created one model of accreditation, which has addressed many of the issues that are outlined in the NLERA.

The first challenge addresses the question, *how do we begin to provide and apply common programmatic assessment across the field, especially with skepticism that such a diverse field could be evaluated by a common program evaluation practice?* This is increasingly difficult with the numerous types of leadership programs within higher education. Leadership education includes leadership studies programs (e.g., certificate, minors, majors), graduate programs (e.g., certificates, masters, doctoral work), and co-curricular efforts (e.g., student affairs, ROTC). In addition, when evaluating similar types of programs, such as two undergraduate minors in leadership, the programs may vary based on their mission, vision, values, conceptual framework, structure, and context. These differences make programmatic assessment practices difficult across the field.

This is not a unique concern that leadership educators alone face. As Romero (2008) suggests, “AACSB accredited schools offer 1,700 different kinds of undergraduate programs and 740 specialized master’s programs (e.g., luxury brand management, pharmaeconomics)” (p. 248). To address this diversity in program evaluation, the AACSB model acknowledges the difference and turns to a school’s mission statement to determine evaluation expectations and appropriate learning goals (Romero, 2008). The association’s report, *Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation*, adopted April 8, 2013, suggests:

AACSB remains deeply committed to diversity in collegiate management education, recognizing that a wide variety of missions and strategies can lead to quality. One of the guiding principles of AACSB accreditation is the acceptance, and even encouragement, of diverse paths to achieving high quality in management education. Accreditation decisions are derived through a process that relies on the professional judgment of peers who conduct reviews that are guided by the business school mission. (p. 2)

This model, supported by AACSB, and the recommendation to focus evaluation of a program’s learning goals on the business school’s mission, is similar to the recommendations presented by the 2012 ILA *Formalized Program Review Task Force*. The task force suggested that each leadership education program should establish a unique conceptual framework, which is consistent with the context of the institution. A formalized program review would then be based on the degree to which the program’s content, teaching, student learning, and assessment (including evaluation and outcomes) relate to the program’s unique mission (Sowcik et al., 2013). The suggestion from the task force places responsibility on program architects to identify the conceptual framework and deliberately build a leadership curriculum that takes both mission and context into account. As stated by the task force, “this approach avoids excessive standardization and reduces the danger of driving out program creativity and autonomy” (Sowcik et al., 2013, p. 70).

A second challenge is more administrative in nature—*how do we develop a process that does not end up leading to largely unnecessary bureaucratic constraints on the leadership education programs going through the review process?* This concern applies directly to leadership education programs, which are new and/or limited in terms of resources. This is also a major

criticism of the AACSB accreditation process (Pringle & Michel, 2007). At times the requests from AACSB can seem so burdensome that those working in business schools wish they had more time to figure out better ways to educate students and spend less time on matters which relate to accreditation. Likewise, more and more business schools are being asked to engage in two or more assessment programs (collect different sets of measures and write up different reports annually) that result from discipline-specific accreditation and institutional accreditation efforts. As Pringle and Michel (2007) report, “Our survey showed that 26% of the U.S. - based responding (business) schools must operate two assessment programs and write two different reports annually as a result of these (both school/major and institutional) dual requirements” (p. 207). This is certainly not a burden that individuals supporting a more formalized program review process in leadership studies want to put on anyone within or outside business schools that offer leadership education.

However, this criticism may not fall completely on AACSB. As Romero (2008) points out, Evidence of performance is consistent with the strategy implementation process used in industry. It is hard to imagine any organization that would reward the accomplishment of major performance goals without verifiable evidence. The reporting required for AACSB accreditation is conceptually analogous to corporate reporting to shareholders. (p. 250)

Also, in a survey that was conducted by Pringle & Michel (2007), respondents indicated that without AACSB, regional accrediting agencies, and university pressures, considerably less assessment activity would take place. In fact, Pringle & Michel (2007) found that only 17% of respondents would engage in assessment at the same level if the assessment was not required by an entity outside their school. These findings in the field of business may provide some insight into the lack of assessment in the field of leadership education.

Finally, the field of leadership education relies heavily on both indirect and direct measures of assessment including comprehensive exit exams, class projects, portfolios, surveys of students, alumni, and employers, pre-test and post-tests, and scores on locally developed assessments. However, AACSB shows a strong preference for direct measures of student learning (Shaftel & Shaftel, 2007; Pringle & Michel, 2007). This difference in perception concerning what is an appropriate assessment measure may also contribute to the scarcity of leadership evaluation in business schools. It is clear that research over the next five years should focus both on ways to influence business school assessment as it relates to leadership education and learn from business school accreditation to positively impact evaluation in the field of leadership education.

### Research Issues in the Context of Business Education

#### **Actionability of our Research: The Theory & Practice Gap**

A current internal debate among business scholars has to do with the actionability of our research. As Pearce & Huang (2012) suggest, “It cannot be good for any field to move further and further away from generating new knowledge that those outside ivory towers might use—particularly so for an applied field like management” (p. 260). And while some strongly disagree with the opinion of Pearce & Huang, it’s an interesting question to wrestle with. If one steps back and tries to determine or locate a leadership theory with widespread corporate acceptance *and* academic rigor (at the highest levels), one may be hard pressed to find a model that fit the bill. In academia, transformational leadership was heralded as “the model” for a couple of decades but did not achieve the widespread appeal of situational leadership in the corporate

domain. Situational Leadership, on the other hand, was reportedly used by 400 of fortune 500 over the years, but received mixed support in the academic realm (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Graeff, 1983). This has been the case for other trade publications such as *Primal Leadership* (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2004), *Good To Great* (Collins, 2001) and *Strengths Based Leadership* (Rath & Conchie, 2009).

The trade publications mentioned above are often born out of management consulting firms. These firms (e.g., Gallup, Inc., Korn/Ferry International, Center for Creative Leadership, Development Dimensions International) have experienced great success developing resources and programming designed to assist practitioners for at least two reasons. First, these organizations conduct research and develop resources with the consumer in mind. Of course many academics would challenge the rigor of their work because it can be difficult to replicate or confirm their findings. Regardless of rigor, is their research more actionable in the mind of the consumer? A second reason may be rooted in marketing. Busy practitioners desire models, systems and programming that is delivered in a user-friendly manner. Terms like *leader member exchange*, *idealized influence*, *management by exception*, *motivation to lead*, *leader self-efficacy*, *identity development*, *metacognitive ability*, *psychological mindedness*, *self-concept*, and *reflective judgment* have little use to the middle manager in corporate America, whether she is at work or sitting in her MBA course. Jim Collins spoke the language of the busy executive. So did Ken Blanchard.

We are not suggesting that all research must be actionable. Nor are we diminishing the role of rigor. However, we are promoting relevance *and* rigor (AACSB, 2002). As leadership educators, we have an opportunity to focus our work on research that is actionable. That is, someone (academic or practitioner) can take the method, model or process and readily adopt it in their own organizations. Better yet, scholars and practitioners could *partner* to better witness the impact we are having on individuals. These field studies are needed as we further explore how to conduct research that truly can impact the masses.

According to AACSB (2008), “Scholars focusing on contributions to practice and/or pedagogy often suffer from a lack of respect, integration, and advancement opportunities in academic environments” (p. 27). The NLERA has a clear emphasis on pedagogical priorities or the applied nature of leadership education (Andenoro et al., 2013). Each of these are highly relevant to practitioners. However, for the NLERA (2013) to truly advance the field in the next five years, we need to increase our level of rigor so we truly understand the process of development and in turn, increase our legitimacy. Three aspects of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 5) will help our research become more actionable:

1. Explore the Capacity & Competency Development Process for the Leadership Education Learner
2. Explore the Role of the Individual Learner in Leadership Education
3. Explore Curriculum Development Frameworks to Enhance the Leadership Education Transfer of Learning

### *The Long Haul*

In addition to research that is actionable, there is a need for longitudinal research. In 2002, Ployhart, Holtz and Bliese, discussed the lack of longitudinal research in the field of leadership.

The authors suggested, “While leadership theory clearly incorporates time as a dimension, it is difficult to find leadership research that is truly of a longitudinal nature” (p. 456). Almost a decade later, Riggio and Mumford (2011) echoed this sentiment in *The Leadership Quarterly’s* special issue – “Longitudinal Studies of Leadership Development.” The National Leadership Education Research Agenda, once again addresses the need for longitudinal research; however, in the area of leadership education. The NLERA (2013) asserts, “to understand the long term effects of leadership education upon student behavior and learning outcomes, research is needed that follows students participating in leadership programs” (p. 7).

The expressed need of longitudinal research is not unique to the field of leadership education. Other fields of study in business have similar objectives. For instance, Avey, Luthans, and Mhatre (2008) called for increased longitudinal research in positive organizational behavior. Likewise, researchers discussed the need for a significant increase in the longitudinal research to inform the field of entrepreneurship (Davidsson, Low, & Wright, 2001; Low & MacMillan, 1988). Similar to leadership education, the first call for increased longitudinal research in the field of entrepreneurship came in 1988 (Low & MacMillan, 1988). However, a little over a decade later, Davidsson, Low, and Wright (2001) reported “that only 7% of studies were true longitudinal studies with data collected at two or more points in time, frequent interviewing or multi-year analysis of data” (p. 13).

The National Leadership Education Research Agenda’s call for increased focus on longitudinal research prompts the question, “what are the challenges in conducting leadership education longitudinal research in business schools?” From 50,000 feet, “perceived difficulty in collecting and analyzing longitudinal data are probably among the most important factors prohibiting longitudinal leadership research” (Ployhart, Holtz, & Bliese, 2002, p. 708). On the ground, this translates into a lack of longitudinal studies due to “demands of tenure dissuade researchers from investing considerable effort in long-term projects that may bear little fruit” (Davidsson, Low, & Wright, 2001, p. 12). Likewise, resources in the form of time, money, and lack of access to longitudinal data are also seen as challenges to increasing the number of longitudinal studies in leadership education over the next five years.

However, with increased attention being paid to longitudinal research by the National Leadership Education Research Agenda (Andenoro et al., 2013), now might be the perfect time to address many of these concerns. Organizations, like the Association of Leadership Educators (ALE) and the International Leadership Association (ILA), could look to establish presentation opportunities/tracks at their annual conferences for those proposals which address the NLERA and, more specifically, longitudinal research. Journals that feature leadership education research, like *The Journal of Leadership Education* (JOLE), can give priority to those articles that address research utilizing longitudinal data. In both of these cases, researchers who invest time and resources into this method of conducting research will be rewarded for their efforts. Additionally, faculty now have a resource in the NLERA (2013) that helps make the case to stakeholders for the time and resources, which will provide avenues to conduct this particular type of research.

### Conclusion

Clearly, leadership development is important to business schools. Likewise, leadership development is important to alumni of business schools. For instance, in one study, alumni rated

“interpersonal, leadership, and communication skills as highly important in the business world, yet they often rate these skills as among the least effective components of business school curricula” (AACSB International, 2002, p. 19). This would suggest that like other domains, business schools struggle with many of the same issues as others interested in developing leaders and there is a clear need for business schools to think more intentionally about how they are defining and living their visions of developing leaders (DeRue, Sitkin, Podolny, 2011).

Our purpose has been to highlight some of the structural challenges, foundational issues and research related problems in the context of business education. The good news is that we feel the NLERA can truly address some of these challenges in business education and the other domains discussed in this special issue. Addressing issues of legitimacy, clarifying definitions, making intentional interdisciplinary connections, and actionable research that is longitudinal will surely play a role in shaping the field of leadership education over the next five years. Although in many fields of study, the five year span covered in the NLERA seems insignificant, a great deal of progress can be made in a short amount of time and we look forward to contributing to this important work.

## References

- AACSB International – The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. (2008). Final report of the AACSB International Task Force on Impact Research. Tampa: Author.
- AACSB International - The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (2002). *Management Education at Risk*. St. Louis: Author.
- AACSB International - The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (2005). *Why Management Education Matters*. Tampa: Author.
- AACSB International - The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (2013). *Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation*. Tampa: Author.
- Academy of Management. Vision, Mission, Objectives & Values. Retrieved on August 21, 2013 from <http://aom.org/About-AOM/Vision,-Mission,-Objectives---Values.aspx>
- Albanese, R. (1990). Competency-based management education: Three operative and normative issues. *Journal of Management Education*, 14, 16-28.
- Allen, S. J., & Roberts, D. (2011). Leadership learning: Crucial conversations, next steps & thoughts for consideration. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 52, 65-70.
- Andenoro, A. C., Allen, S. J., Haber-Curran, P., Jenkins, D. M., Sowcik, M., Dugan, J. P., & Osteen, L. (2013). *National leadership education research agenda 2013-2018: Providing strategic direction for the field of leadership education*. Retrieved from Association of Leadership Educators website: <http://leadershipeducators.org/ResearchAgenda>
- Avey, J. B., Luthans, F., & Mhatre, K. H. (2008). A call for longitudinal research in positive organizational behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(5), 705-711.
- Avolio, B. (1999). *Full leadership development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Avolio, B. J., & Hannah, S. T. (2008). Developmental readiness: Accelerating leader development. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 60, 331–347.
- Baldwin, T. T., Pierce, J. R., Joines, C. J., & Farouk, S. (2011). The elusiveness of applied management knowledge: A critical challenge for management educators. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 10(4), 583–605.

- Bigelow, J. D. (1995). Teaching managerial skills: A critique and future directions. *Journal of Management Education, 19*, 305-325.
- Bigelow, J., Seltzer, J., van Buskirk, W., Hall, J. C., Schor, S., Garcia, J., & Keleman, K. (1999). Management skills in action: Four teaching models. *Journal of Management Education, 23*(4), 355-376.
- Boyer, E. (1990). Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate. Retrieved May 5, 2009 from [http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=ED326149&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=ED326149](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED326149&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED326149)
- Brungardt, C. (1997). The making of leaders: A review of the research in leadership development and education. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 3*(3), 81–95.
- Brown, K., Charlier, S. D., Rynes, S. L., & Hosmanek, A. (2013). What do we teach in organizational behavior? An analysis of MBA syllabi. *Journal of Management Education, 37*(4), 447-471.
- Brown, P. (2003). Seeking success through strategic management development. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 27*(6), 292-303.
- Colby, A., Ehrlich, T., Sullivan, B., & Dolle, J. (2011). *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education: Liberal Learning for the Profession*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't*. New York: Harper Business.
- Collins, D. B., & Holton, E. F. (2004). The effectiveness of managerial leadership development programs: A meta-analysis of studies from 1982 to 2001. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 15*(2), 217-248.
- Day, D. (2001). Leadership development: A review in context. *Leadership Quarterly, 11*(4), 581-613.
- Day, D. V., Harrison, M. M., Halpin, S. M. (2009). *An integrative approach to leader development: Connecting adult development, identity, and expertise*. New York: Routledge.
- Davidsson, P., Low, M., & Wright, M. (2001). Editors' introduction: Low and MacMillan ten years on—achievements and future directions for entrepreneurship research. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 25*(4), 5-16.

- DeRue, D. S., Sitkin, S. B., Podolny, J. M. (2011). From the guest editors: Teaching leadership—issues and insights. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 369-372.
- Doh, J. P. (2003). Can leadership be taught? Perspectives from management educators. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 2(1), 54-67.
- Dugan, J. P., & Komives, S. R. (2007). *Developing leadership capacity in college students: Findings from a national study*. College Park, MD: National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs. Retrieved from <http://leadershipstudymsl.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/mslreport-final.pdf>
- Ericsson, K. A. (1996). The acquisition of expert performance: An introduction to some of the issues. In K. A. Ericsson (Ed.), *The road to excellence: The acquisition of expert performance in the arts and sciences, sports, and games* (pp. 1-50). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Fernandez, C. F., & Vecchio, R. P. (1997). Situational leadership theory revisited: A test of an across-jobs perspective. *Leadership Quarterly*, 8(1), 67-84.
- Fulmer, R.M., Gibbs, P.A., & Goldsmith, M. (2000). Developing Leaders: How Winning Companies Keep on Winning. *Sloan Management Review*, 49-59.
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal Leadership: Learning to lead with emotional intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Graeff, C. L. (1983). The situational leadership theory: A critical view. *The Academy of Management Review*, 8(2), 285-291.
- Hirst, G., Mann, L., Bain, P., Pirola-Merlo, A., & Richver, A. (2004). Learning to lead: The development and testing of a model of leadership learning. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(3), 311-327.
- Hogan, R., & Warrenfeltz, R. (2003). Educating the modern manager. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 2(1), 74-84.
- International Leadership Association (ILA). (2009). *Guiding questions: Guidelines for leadership education programs*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ila-net.org/communities/LC/GuidingQuestionsFinal.pdf>
- Lord, R. G., & Hall, R. J. (2005). Identity, deep structure and the development of leadership skill. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 591-615.
- Low, M. B., & MacMillan, I. C. (1988). Entrepreneurship: Past research and future challenges. *Journal of Management*, 14(2), 139-161.
- Mabey, C., & Lees, T. F. (2007). *Management and leadership development*. London: Sage.



- Mintzberg, H. (2005). *Managers not MBAs: A hard look at the soft practice of managing and management development*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Mumford, M. D., Friedrich, T. L., Caughron, J. J., Antes, A. L. (2009). Leadership development and assessment: Describing and rethinking the state of the art. In K. A. Ericsson (Ed.), *The development of professional expertise: Toward measurement of expert performance and design of optimal learning environments* (pp. 84-107). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Navarro, P. (2008). The MBA core curricula of top-ranked U.S. business schools: A study in failure? *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 7(1), 108–123.
- O'Leonard, K. (2010). *The corporate learning factbook: Statistics benchmarks, and analysis of U.S. corporate training market*. Bersin & Associates.
- Orvis, K. A., & Ratawani, K. L. (2010). Leader-self development: A contemporary context for leader development evaluation. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21, 657-674.
- Pagalís, L. L. (2013). A review of managerial skills training in the classroom. *Journal of Management Education*, 37(4), 472–498.
- Pearce, J. L., & Huang, L. (2012). The decreasing value of our research to management education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 11(2), 247–262.
- Perruci, G., & McManus, R. M. (2012). The State of Leadership Studies. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 6(3), 49-54.
- Pfeffer, & Fong, C. T. (2002). The end of business schools? Less success than meets the eye. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 1(1), 78-95.
- Ployhart, R. E., Holtz, B. C., & Bliese, P. D. (2002). Longitudinal data analysis: Applications of random coefficient modeling to leadership research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13(4), 455-486.
- Pringle, C. & Michel, M. (2007). Assessment practices in AACSB-accredited business schools. *Journal of Education for Business*, 82, 202–211
- Rath, T., & Conchie, B. (2008). *Strengths-based leadership: Great leaders, great teams, and why people follow*. Gallup Press: New York, NY.
- Reichard, R. J., & Johnson, S. K. (2011) Leader self-development as organizational strategy. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22, 33-42.
- Riggio, R. (2008). Leadership development: The current state and future expectations. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 60(4), 383–392.

- Riggio, R. E., & Mumford, M. D. (2011). Introduction to the special issue: Longitudinal studies of leadership development. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(3), 453-456.
- Roberts, D. (Ed.). (1981). *Student leadership programs in higher education*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University/American College Personnel Association.
- Romero, E. (2008). AACSB Accreditation: Addressing Faculty Concerns. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 7(2), 245-255.
- Rosenthal, S. A. (2012). National Leadership Index 2012: A National Study of Confidence in Leadership. Center for Public Leadership, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Shaftel, J. & Shaftel, T. L. (2007). Educational assessment and the AACSB. *Issues in Accounting Education*. 22(2), 215-232.
- Sowcik, M. (2012). A review and critique of guiding questions: Guidelines for leadership education programs. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 11(2), 192-213.
- Sowcik, M., Lindsey, J.L. & Rosch, D. M. (2013). A collective effort to understand formalized program review. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 6(3), 67-72.
- Whetten, D. A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 490-495.
- Whetten, D. A. & Cameron, K. S. (2010). *Developing Management Skills*, (8th Edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

### Author Biographies

Dr. Matthew Sowcik is an Assistant Professor in Leadership Studies and the Director of Leadership Education in the Department of Entrepreneurship and Leadership Studies at Wilkes University, where he has worked professionally for the past 9 years. Aside from his research and administrative duties, Dr. Sowcik also currently serves as a consultant to *The New York Times*, focusing on the newspaper's educational programming for leadership studies faculty and students. Matthew received a B.A. degree in Psychology from Wilkes University, a M.A. degree in Organizational Leadership from Columbia University, and his Ph.D. in Leadership Studies from Gonzaga University. Matthew teaches both on the undergraduate and graduate level in Leadership Theory, Advanced Leadership, The Entrepreneurial Leader, Innovation and Creativity, and Leadership in Context. Matthew's research specialization is in the emergence and sustainability of Leadership Studies programs.

Scott J. Allen, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Management at John Carroll University. His research interests include leadership development and emotionally intelligent leadership. Scott serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of Management Education* and is the co-author of

*The Little Book of Leadership Development and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for College Students.* In addition to teaching and writing, Scott conducts workshops, leads retreats and consults across industries. Scott is a member of The Association of Leadership Educators, The Academy of Management, OBTS Teaching Society for Management Educators and serves on the boards of the International Leadership Association and Beta Theta Pi Fraternity.