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Integrating Principle-Centered Leadership into the Business Curriculum: Lessons from the LMU Experience

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This article focuses on the challenge of designing and administering executive education programs that both educate students to be competitive in the job market and that also encourage personal growth and personal responsibility. We believe that graduate business education should not be limited to providing content knowledge, but should also include helping students mature and use better judgment. This article represents a “progress report” on our efforts at LMU in Los Angeles to integrate principle-centered leadership into our Executive MBA (EMBA) curricula. This effort emphasizes self-awareness and self-reflection as well as skills and competencies. This article discusses the challenges inherent to the design, conduct, and assessment of this unique approach to executive education. In essence, our EMBA program focuses on changing core attitudes and values. We want our graduates to become more ethical and decent in the choices they make when they re-enter the workforce.

“That which is worth doing is worth doing well.” – Nicolas Poussin

Introduction

Relax. This is not another article on leadership theory, or what leaders do, or what leaders should do, or what makes leaders, or how to become a great leader. Our premise is a simple one—leadership is critical and business schools have an important role in developing future and current leaders through executive education programs.

We at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles believe that our mission is to provide not only content knowledge in the business curricula, but

also to help students mature and use better judgment. This article reports on our efforts at LMU to address these issues. This will be illustrated using experiences from our Executive MBA (EMBA) program.

We have come to believe that a different kind of learning model—one that addresses not only acquiring knowledge in traditional business disciplines and developing skills and competencies, but also what we are referring to as *Leadership Intelligence* that is centered in self-awareness and self-reflection—is needed in the graduate business curricula. We are in the early stages of making innovative changes to the leadership portion of our EMBA program to address these issues. These changes, inspired by the work of Chris Lowney in his recent book *Heroic Leadership*, include emphasizing that (1) we are all leaders and we are leading all the time; (2) leadership springs from within; (3) leadership is a way of living; and (4) becoming a leader is an ongoing process of self-development (Lowney, 2003).

This article discusses the many challenges inherent to the design, conduct, and assessment of this unique approach to graduate business education. In short, our EMBA program focuses on changing core attitudes and values. We want our graduates to become more ethical and decent in the choices they make when they re-enter the workforce.

Principle-Centered Leadership is Needed More Than Ever

First, let us look at the need for principle-centered leadership and how it is being viewed. One big reason for revisiting the nature of leadership, of course, is the blazing scandals at Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and too many other companies. In the wake of these scandals, we don't need more standards-based guidelines or accounting-based rules to cover every possible situation. Instead, we need leaders of character and integrity. We need leaders who don't put their own egos and greed ahead of the welfare of the company and its employees. We need principled leaders who make ethically-based decisions while considering how both other people and the environment will be affected by their actions.

The second, less obvious reason may be of even greater concern: the "perfect storm" brewing. Sebastian Junger's (1999) remarkable book (and subsequent movie) *The Perfect Storm* recounts the story of the men who lost their lives aboard the sword-fishing boat *Andrea Gail* when a confluence of weather conditions combined to form a killer storm in the North Atlantic. Today, a similar storm threatens the talent required to lead twenty-first century companies. First, there is a decline in the number of people available for leadership positions over the next decade, due to simple demographics—there aren't as many post baby boomers. Second, globalization, hyper-competition, and outsourcing require exceptionally talented, strategic-thinking leaders. Thus, the job of leading is much more complex. Third, reorganizations and downsizing have removed mid-level talent from the corporate gene pool. Adding to this, companies are reducing expenditures on leadership development. Companies caught in the storm's vortex are unlikely to survive.

Lastly, we in academe also have our own “perfect storm” to contend with—the growing distance between industry and academe in the efficacy of using education in leadership development and our ability to actually “teach” leadership. Take, for example, the recent Bennis and O’Toole *Harvard Business Review* article, “How Business Schools Lost Their Way,” that decries business schools as “ill equipped to wrangle with complex, unquantifiable issues...the stuff of management” (2005, 96). And, Henry Mintzberg, a respected professor of management at McGill University, has also long held a contrary view to business education. In his latest book, *Managers not MBAs*, Mintzberg (2004) claims that MBA programs choose the “wrong people” and the “wrong ways”; wrong people because they are mostly young and inexperienced managers; “wrong ways” because the purely academic or case-based pedagogical approaches are inadequate.

In summary, the case is compelling. Values-based ethical leadership is required for a fair and just society, the world is getting more complex (making the leader’s job more demanding), and there is a lack of consensus on who to develop as leaders and how best to develop them.

The Ethical Advantage

LMU in Los Angeles organically positions leadership development on a rich centuries-old Jesuit tradition of ethical self-awareness amidst academic freedom. Leaders make decisions that affect performance, employees, customers, and impact local communities. As glaringly evident in the Enron, WorldCom, and Tyco debacles, when greed and self interest lead, performance and people suffer. By contrast, principle-centered leaders who act according to strong, ethical values don’t end up in jail, and their companies perform better in the long run. Ethical actions and decisions are on the high road, which appears to be the harder road for some leaders to take.

Preparation is the key to weathering the “perfect storm,” specifically through leadership development. There is no shortage of opportunities for executives to learn about leadership. Many large companies have their own leadership development programs, management consultants offer both training and executive coaching, and business schools approach leadership from a variety of perspectives.

Opinion is split about the effectiveness of leadership programs along “practice” and “theory” lines between those who “do” and those who “teach.” Corporations and management consultants contend that leadership is best learned through practice and experience. But business schools contend that corporate and management consultant leadership programs are usually geared to specific company or industry issues and not to the corporate environment at large. Business schools argue that leaders need a broad base that combines business knowledge, experience, an understanding of leadership theory, and skill development. Preparing leaders is a long-term commitment, one less suited for industry, which typically focuses on short-term performance. Business schools can more easily commit to this longer time horizon.

The ideal environment for leadership development is one that commits equally to teaching students hard skills and encouraging them to understand, question, and develop their values. Any business school, especially at the EMBA level, that emphasizes self-awareness, teaches corporate decision-making incorporating a long-term perspective, and gives students hands-on practical experience through case histories and real-life examples should do an outstanding job of teaching leadership.

In the LMU EMBA program, we believe not only that leadership can be taught, but also that it is most effectively taught to students who already have experience in the corporate world and have faced leadership challenges. Education provides contextual meaning to their experience, and the classroom becomes a leadership laboratory. By repeatedly evaluating leadership performance in real-life situations and their individual responses to the sensitive issues discussed in class, students become increasingly aware of and able to identify the actions, activities, and corporate issues that together create better leaders. Moreover, by continually viewing this in relation to their own individual perspective, they develop a leadership consciousness. Just as Bennis and Goldsmith (2003) maintain, the students learn for themselves what it means to be a principled leader.

Ethics is indisputably a core element of leadership development. While many business schools have rushed to insert that element into their programs, this approach often leaves ethics as an add-on rather than an integral component. The hard skills—finance, statistics, operations management, and information technology—tend to dominate the business curriculum, overshadowing the balance of values, self-awareness, and ethics.

For at least the past 450 years, Jesuits have taken a strong stand in favor of high moral and ethical principle. As Lowney notes, “Jesuits did not become successful leaders simply by adhering to particular religious beliefs but by the way they lived and worked. And their way of living holds value for everyone, whatever his or her creed” (2003, 6).

Some external challenges, such as attracting qualified students and faculty, affect all colleges and universities. Other external challenges, such as ensuring that members of the faculty hold a healthy respect for the institution and its values, are perhaps more of a challenge for Jesuit colleges and universities. Both of these dimensions affect curriculum design decisions.

Leadership Challenges—What to Include in the Curriculum

Perhaps the most compelling question we have heard raised from several fronts in recent months is, “Can leadership be taught?” The truth is that leadership classes *have* been taught in the corporate world and included in the curriculum of America’s leading business schools for well over 50 years (e.g., Conger & Benjamin, 1999).

However, leadership education has gone through various cycles over those years. Initially, following what is now known as the *Trait Approach* from the

1920s and 1930s, most experts and educators believed that leadership was an innate characteristic that people were born with. As a result, our nation's colleges and universities made no effort or attempt to teach leadership (cf. Pate & Filley, 2002). A major study of leadership by renowned social psychologist Kurt Lewin and two of his doctoral students at the University of Iowa (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939) led to the second major approach to leadership, now known as the *Behavioral Style Approach* or sometimes simply the *Behavioral Approach*. This approach was based upon the belief that leadership was learned and, further, that there was a "best way" to lead. Research and theorizing on the *Behavioral Style Approach*, conducted primarily after World War II, was focused on finding the best way to lead. The Lewin et al. (1939) study suggested that the best way was a *Democratic* style of leadership, characterized by involving subordinates in decision making. In retrospect, it is perhaps not at all surprising that in a 1939 world an esteemed behavioral scientist in the US would conclude that democracy was a better method of leadership than autocracy.

After the war, leadership researchers at The Ohio State University identified two dominant styles, which they called *Consideration* and *Initiating Structure* (Stogdill & Coons, 1957), while similar researchers at the University of Michigan identified *Employee Centered* and *Production Centered* styles (Likert, 1961). An outcome of this research, funded entirely by the US military, was that cadets at West Point and the other military academies were taught that leadership involved primarily two activities: (1) accomplishing the mission, and (2) looking out for the welfare of the men. In the 1960s, leadership researcher Fred Fiedler, then at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was primarily responsible for putting the focus on leadership style into a broader perspective that eventually led to the *Contingency Approach*. Fiedler reasoned that the effectiveness of one style (e.g., Task-oriented style) or another (Relationship-oriented, considerate style) depended on situational contingencies. His book, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness* (Fiedler, 1967), posited that *leader behavior* (LB) was a *function* (f) of the *leader's personality* (LP), *group characteristics* (GC) and the *situation* (S), such that $LB = f(LP, GC, S)$. Later contingency approaches included Path-Goal Theory (Evans, 1970; House, 1971), and the Vertical Dyad Linkage (VDL) approach (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975).

In summary, business schools initially avoided teaching leadership, since the prevailing belief was that people were either born with leadership skills or they were not. Shortly after World War II, students were taught that leadership was a style of behavior that could be learned, that involving subordinates in decisions was a good thing, and that there was a single best way to lead. Finally, leadership classes in business schools taught that the effectiveness of one style or another depended upon situational contingencies, and that a style that might be highly effective in one situation (e.g., oriented toward building relationships with subordinates) could be highly ineffective in other situations.

LMU Leadership Development Model

Four essential and interrelated components support leadership development in the LMU EMBA program. First, leaders must understand business; we call this *Business Knowledge*. Leaders need a working knowledge of finance, accounting, marketing, human resource practices, statistics, economics, and strategic management. These core business courses are taught primarily during the first year of our two-year graduate program.

Second, leaders have to do something. We call this *Execution*. Leaders set direction and manage change, which requires aligning the organization's human and other resources. Leaders motivate others to accomplish results and then monitor progress and make mid-course corrections. We prepare students to execute by giving them complex case studies, experiential activities, and other assignments to hone their analytic and communication skills.

Third, leaders must be able to apply knowledge. We call this *Managerial Competencies*. Application requires leaders to transfer what they have learned in the classroom to real, dynamic situations. Leaders make decisions, communicate, and work with people under unpredictable and ever-changing circumstances. Our focus is to help students develop and build transferable core competencies over the 21 months they are in the program.

So far, one could argue that all EMBA programs do this; for the most part, this is true. We strongly believe that our fourth element, *Leadership Intelligence*, is the model's most critical component. Leadership Intelligence means understanding that each person has a unique combination of strengths, weaknesses, passions, and values. The more that leaders recognize how these internal qualities shape their thoughts and behaviors, the more effective they will be. The balance of this article will address LMU's experience in incorporating Leadership Intelligence into the EMBA curriculum.

The model relationship is illustrated with the following notional equation:

$$\textit{Business Knowledge} \times \textit{Execution} \times \textit{Managerial Competencies} \times \textit{Leadership Intelligence} = \textit{Leadership Performance}$$

If any of the four values in the equation is zero, then *Performance* is necessarily zero. However, the likelihood of any one of the values actually being zero is low, since even the most ineffective manager has some knowledge, can execute some tasks, and uses some managerial competencies and possess some *Leadership Intelligence*. Even so, the equation shows that leadership performance is multiplicative—the more each area is developed, the higher performance will be. We believe that a leadership development program that focuses on all four components will result in better, more ethical leaders.

Leadership Intelligence

Elements of Leadership Intelligence have been in the LMU EMBA since its launch in 2000. The program has strongly emphasized self-awareness, includes components of emotional intelligence, and pushes innovation and creativity in assignments and major projects. Originally, these elements were not neatly bundled or well integrated. Then we discovered Lowney's (2003) work, in which he emphasizes that (1) we are all leaders, and we're leading all the time, well or poorly; (2) leadership springs from within; it's about who I am as much as what I do; (3) leadership is not an act; it is my life, a way of living; and (4) becoming a leader is an ongoing process of self-development. Suddenly, the pieces fell into place—our Jesuit heritage, our DNA, provides the backbone for Leadership Intelligence in our EMBA.

Perhaps Lowney's surprising background—he spent seven years as a Jesuit seminarian, then the next 17 years working for J. P. Morgan—had something to do with his keen insights. In *Heroic Leadership*, Lowney (2003) reveals the principles that have guided Jesuit leaders in their diverse pursuits for more than 450 years. He finds that the Jesuits' enduring success rests upon four core leadership principles:

Self-awareness – understand your strengths, weaknesses, values, and worldview

Ingenuity – confidently innovate and adapt to a changing world

Love – engage others with a positive attitude that unlocks their potential

Heroism – energize yourself and others with heroic ambitions and a passion for excellence

According to Lowney (2003), by incorporating these principles into their daily lives, the Jesuits built an organization that has operated a highly efficient international network of trade, education, missionary work, and scholarship for almost five centuries.

Heroic Leadership spawned two important insights for us. First the leadership principles provide a definition of what we include in Leadership Intelligence. This gives us the “what and why” components of Leadership Intelligence. In the EMBA, we renamed three of the four principles to be more descriptive of our program. Self Awareness remains the same, Ingenuity is called Innovation, Love is called Engaging Others, and Heroism is called Courage.

Second, we now have a roadmap that links learning outcomes, course components, and learning activities into Leadership Intelligence. It is this second part that gives rise to curriculum improvement and helps better target leadership. In effect, we are addressing the “how” in our curriculum. Of course, much of the

“how” is thoroughly covered in the management literature. For example, there is wide-spread acceptance and use of emotional intelligence (the major component of “Love”) in business (cf. Bar-On & Parker, 2000). Our curriculum thoroughly covers self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and innovation. What we have now is a defined process that links the various Leadership Intelligence parts in the curriculum into the leadership development model. Another way of saying this is that we now have a roadmap that links the four major components of leadership development (i.e., Business Knowledge, Execution, Managerial Competencies and Leadership Intelligence).

Leadership Intelligence in the Curriculum

The LMU EMBA program is comprised of four modules, each containing eight two-day instructional periods (all day Friday and Saturday, alternating weeks). Three residential programs enhance module learning. The first of these residential programs, *Introduction to Executive Leadership*, referred to as *Boot Camp*, starts the program. *Boot Camp* represents the transition into the program. Activities and orientation sessions provide the means for students to get to know one another and to be placed in study teams that they will later work with throughout the program. The other two residential programs are trips, first to Washington, D.C., where students see firsthand how business and government interact—or should interact—and next an international trip that exposes students to doing business in the global environment.

The four Leadership Intelligence principles are integrated into the four modules and residential programs in the course curriculum and in experiential assignments and project exercises. Assessment provides another measure of how well Leadership Intelligence principles are learned.

Curriculum Related

The primary vehicle used for linking leadership components into the curriculum is a set of specific learning outcomes that are included and assessed in the course syllabi. The four principles are integrated into actual courses where appropriate; students also experience them in action by participating in class and team assignments, and sometimes students just internalize them organically. In other words, we can force the principles into the curriculum through learning outcomes in the syllabi. We cannot, however, force or predict or control how or where the four principles might take root as a student progresses through the program. What we do know, however, is that learning occurs when the student takes learning seriously. As Charles Handy keenly observed:

Those who are always learning are those who can ride the waves of change and who see a changing world as full of opportunities rather than of damages. They are the ones most likely to be the survivors in a time of discontinuity. They are also the enthusiasts and the architects of new ways

and forms and ideas. If you want to change, try learning one might say, or more precisely, if you want to be in control of your change, take learning more seriously (1989, p. 56).

We will use “Self Awareness” to illustrate how we integrate all four principles into the EMBA program. Several components of self-awareness are introduced in Boot Camp. Here, students are introduced to journaling, a reflective process they are required to engage in throughout the program. Their journal is a confidential source of personal reflection. From time to time the instructor will require a short reflective paper on some aspect of their experience with emphasis on the epiphanies. These are non-graded and non-judgmental. To encourage participation, instructors assign a credit/no-credit mark.

As students progress, they encounter many opportunities to become more self-aware. For example, becoming an active and productive member of their study team gives them direct feedback on how they interact and work with others. Students stay in the same study team for the duration of the program and a faculty member works with each team to help them build high performance levels. The faculty member requires them to deal with and solve conflicts that arise. Several assignments in the teaming component require reflection on what worked and didn’t work and why, with an emphasis on one’s own contributions. Experiential assignments and projects (e.g., using a team readiness assessment, evaluating a company’s teaming performance) enhance what students learn from class discussions and team interactions.

The second module devotes approximately 40 contact hours to leadership principles, including a large block on emotional intelligence. Students engage in a two-day capstone *Emotional Intelligence Experience* meant to help them integrate leadership principles into their personal lives. They also receive 360-degree feedback data gathered from co-workers and EMBA team members.

Two courses specifically focus on enhancing self-awareness: *Ethics and Spirituality in the Workplace* and *Professional Growth Planning*.

The *Ethics and Spirituality in the Workplace* course is threaded across all four modules. Students meet with the instructor for approximately six hours per module (for a total of 24 hours). The course is heavily based on values. Subject matter includes understanding one’s values and their sources (e.g., family, religious training, schooling, and culture), recognizing how values influence action, and using values in decision making. The course introduces a values-based ethical decision making model and principles of social responsibility. Students are also exposed to reflection techniques and meditation (adapted from Ignatian Spiritual Exercises). Self-reflection is enhanced through the journaling process and through interactive class discussions between the instructor and students. Although the course is not religious in content or in delivery, the instructor, in effect, acts as a spiritual advisor.

Students take the *Professional Growth Planning* course in their second year. The course’s four main components, in order, are: self-awareness, personal and professional goal setting, opportunity assessment, and growth plan. Self-awareness

builds on and incorporates what students learned about themselves in *Ethics and Spirituality in the Workplace*, specifically the values component. Exercises help students gain a fuller understanding of their values, beliefs, strengths, weaknesses, and passions. Students develop professional and personal goals based on their self-awareness. Next, students learn techniques to determine where and how they can leverage their passion and strengths in their jobs and their personal lives. Toward the end of the course, each student develops a personal action plan.

A distinguishing feature of this course is the individual guidance each student receives from a seasoned executive career coach. The coach provides unbiased, objective feedback on the student's professional growth plan as it is being developed. As coaches model mentoring skills one-on-one, students hone their own mentoring skill, which ultimately makes them more effective leaders.

Both courses are required, but not graded (students receive a credit/noncredit mark). The assignments—journals, reflective papers, personal and professional goals, and action plan—are confidential. Discussions between students and the instructor and executive coaches also remain confidential. The design of the courses and assignments encourages students to, at a minimum, engage in the process. What they get out of that process is, of course, up to them and how seriously they take their own learning.

Assessment

Assessment enhances our ability to measure outcome achievement. The main challenge in assessing student learning in Leadership Intelligence principles is that we can't accurately measure what students have learned about themselves, how they have become more innovative, how they have improved in "engaging others," or how much more courageous (i.e., heroic) they have become. Despite these limitations, we use two assessment methods to help us measure how students are developing Leadership Intelligence: direct observation and learning process.

First, direct observation allows us to measure whether a particular learning outcome was covered in a course or assignment. In other words, we can determine that a learning outcome was listed in the syllabus, and then that it was included in an assignment, and finally that the assignment allowed students to demonstrate specific knowledge or skills. Serendipity is also a means of assessing learning through direct observation. For example, in grading an assignment or evaluating a major team presentation, faculty can pinpoint "innovation" used in addressing a problem or in working as a team.

Second, we can assess through the learning process itself. For example, we maintain a learning portfolio for each student. The portfolio contains samples of the student's work, such as videos of presentations, writing assignments, and results from self-awareness instruments (EI quotient, Myers Briggs, Skill Deployment Inventory, learning style scores). Periodically, a faculty member will review a student's progress using the learning portfolio data. In this way, the student sees progress and thus becomes more self-aware.

Lastly, we use post-module and post-program surveys to assess learning. Open-ended questions identify individual outcomes. Comments like, “I learned a lot about myself in the Emotional Intelligence retreat,” and, “I gained tremendous self confidence through the program” provide anecdotal evidence that students have experienced some change. While we don’t necessarily know how much or what specific kind of change it was, we at least have some confidence that students are growing and developing their Leadership Intelligence.

Summary and Lessons Learned

Leadership development is a collaborative effort. Academe alone cannot shoulder the task; in fact, our contribution at times is minimal. A 2002 Conference Board study, *Developing Business Leaders for 2010*, addressed the efforts of leading-edge companies to develop sufficient leadership strength in order to ensure competitive success in the coming years. The study identified that the most effective leadership development programs often include a combination of: individual leadership potential assessment, succession planning, creation of personal development plans, planned movement of high potentials through job rotation, and development assignments, experiential learning activities such as involvement in cross-functional projects, management and leadership training, and providing special development support like coaching and mentoring.

Nevertheless, business schools have an important role. We offer breadth and depth that companies cannot offer due to resources and limited knowledge and perspective. We can stimulate and help managers and leaders develop Leadership Intelligence, and specifically self-awareness. LMU’s EMBA program employs several teaching methods to help students build Leadership Intelligence. Self-awareness develops from understanding one’s values, decision-making styles, interpersonal interactions and personality. Students at LMU are challenged in assignments, case studies, projects, and through their own real-life examples where situations call for leadership. Courses such as *Ethics and Spirituality in the Workplace* and *Professional Growth Planning* allow students to explore critical issues in developing self-awareness. These courses examine the relationship between personal values and leadership performance and also provide templates for assessing one’s strengths, weaknesses, and passions.

Executive coaches guide students through a reflective process leading to an individual action plan. Lastly, leadership assessments and reflective assignments facilitate professional and personal development.

No one can truly determine whether a person can or will become a great leader. So much of leadership depends upon the context within which the leader lives and the opportunities their times present (Mayo & Nohria, 2005). We can, however, create an environment where students learn requisite business knowledge, where they can learn how to use tools and techniques to improve organizational performance, where they can address ethical issues and build character, and where they can improve their managerial competencies. By

building on our Jesuit DNA, we can help aspiring leaders develop and hone their Leadership Intelligence.

As leadership scholar Robert Quinn says, “Leaders are at the top of their game when they act from their deepest values and instincts” (2005, 75). We want our EMBA graduates at LMU to be at the top of their game as principle-centered leaders, and we are both confident and optimistic that the innovations described here will give them the Leadership Intelligence and other skills they need to get there.

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