

Leadership and management education: An analysis of the executive education experiences of an Australian group of managers

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A significant issue appearing in the business education literature in the past decade and most recently in the media reporting on the spectacular failures of leadership and management in the financial sector, has been the question of whether leadership and management can in fact be taught. Doh (2003) presented an overview of the key arguments with regard to leadership development inclusive of the nature versus nurture argument in leadership. The debate on leadership and management development though has come to focus upon three major issues. Firstly, at a broad level there is the challenge to effectively develop leadership and management practice. Specifically the question arises as to what approaches in training and education can develop leadership and management practice? The second issue within the debate concerns the role of business education institutions in the education and development of aspiring leaders and managers. Finally, there is the third issue of the debate which concerns a theory to practice divide with the need for business education to develop at the pace and scope of business practice. In addressing the first and last of these issues there has been a considerable effort in leadership and management research to identify models of teachable practices that engender effective leader and manager practice (Heifetz, 1995; Tichy & Cohen, 1997b; Doh, 2003; Ready & Conger, 2004). This paper reviews the literature on leadership and management education and teaching and learning approaches for leadership and management development. The paper then considers the results of post program interviews from a group of Australian mid level managers 18 months after completion of a leadership and management development program. Themes and constructs from the post program interviews are considered against the critical issues raised in the literature. Conclusions developed highlight insights gained regarding leadership and management practice education in terms of context, content and process of learning and development.

Field of Research: Leadership, Management, Executive Education, Teaching and Learning.

1. Introduction – Leadership and management education

Three key interwoven issues have been a focus of discussion in the management and leadership education literature in the past decade. Firstly, the broad level issue of effective development of leadership and management practice (Connaughton, Lawrence & Ruben, 2003; Doh, 2003; Elmuti, Minnis & Abebe, 2005; Ready & Conger, 2003). Specifically the question arises as to what approaches in training and education; appear effective in developing leadership and management practice? The second issue concerns an apparent theory to practice divide with the need for business education to develop at the pace and scope of business practice (Conger & Xin, 2000; Ghoshal, 2005; Holian, 2004; Mintzberg, 2004b; Reynolds & Vince, 2004; Thomas, 2007). Finally, there is a third issue, namely the role of

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business education institutions in the education and development of aspiring leaders and managers.

This paper intends to address the first and second of the abovementioned issues having written an earlier paper considering a wider perspective of the state of leadership and management education. The paper is structured in the following manner. Firstly a literature review covering the issues involved in effective leadership and management practice development, as well as concerns relating to a theory to practice divide in contemporary leadership and management education. The literature review will also consider the issue of program design specifically the impact of adult learning theories on design of education initiatives. The Methodology section of the paper considers the research design aspects in particular the use of data reduction and analysis using coding and data display matrices (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to determine key attributes of learning and program characteristics for an effective model of a leadership and management program. A discussion section identifies the key theoretical links for the attributes of Learning and Program characteristics before concluding with an overview of the contribution of the model attributes to a Leadership and management development program.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Effective leadership and management development: Can leadership and management be taught?*

A key issue regarding leadership and management development has been the question of whether leadership and management can be taught. Doh (2003) presented an overview of the key arguments with regard to leadership development inclusive of the key nature versus nurture argument in leadership. This argument considered whether leaders are born with the aptitude and attitude for leadership or whether leaders can be made, that is requisite leadership skills and attitudes can be developed in the individual (Avolio, 2005; Bass, 1990; Doh, 2003; Yukl, 1994). The current position of many scholars on leadership and leadership education is that both nature and nurture matter. There has been recognition by contemporary researchers that effective leaders are a result of both inherent traits and carefully developed skills (Connaughton, Lawrence & Ruben, 2003). Similarly there has been a considerable effort in leadership and management research to identify models of teachable practices that engender effective leader and manager practice. Such research has resulted in a range of leadership development models in the past decade.

Several leadership development models that have continued to be valued by organizations include the following: Tichy and Cohen (1997a) identified a system of leadership practice based upon a *Leadership Engine* that builds teachable points of view on leadership practice from successful leaders to aspiring leaders at every organisational level. Based upon successful development and application of the model at the General Electric Corporation, (GE), the authors advocated developing organisational learning cultures to support leadership practice. Ulrich, Zenger and Smallwood (1999) articulated a *Results-based Leadership* model. Based upon a balanced score card of four result areas, employee results, organization results, customer results and investor results. The results-based model targets key

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performance metrics and standards for leadership performance. The resurgence of competency in respect to leadership is presented in the *Resonant Leadership* model of Boyatzis and McKee (2005) and Goleman et al. (2001, 2002). The Resonant Leadership model uses emotional intelligence to underpin a range of leadership styles suited to the complex world of leader and follower performance situations.

Scholarly exchanges in the literature on approaches to teaching business practice abound. Mole (2004) argued that leadership cannot be taught as the relationship between leaders and followers is dynamically changing through context. Further to this, Allio (2005) stated that leadership cannot be taught but has suggested it can be learned. He sees leadership programs as capable of building skills but not practice in leadership. Allio (2005) on the subject of leadership programs argued that they can provide a knowledge base of concepts and approaches but fail to develop leadership practice, "They may provide leadership literacy, but cannot develop leadership competence." (p. 1076).

Interestingly, many researchers and management educators have agreed that although there are some useful innate attributes that are easily identified in leaders, a significant part of leadership qualities can be successfully taught (Connaughton et al., 2003; Doh, 2003; Elmuti, Minnis & Abebe, 2005; Ready & Conger, 2003).

2.2 *Effective leadership and management development: The theory to practice divide*

Elmuti, Minnis and Abebe (2005) considered the role of education in developing leadership skills. They argued that business schools needed to reframe their leadership programs with a stronger connection to business and industry environments. In particular the authors stressed that leadership programs have a greater emphasis on ethical and global perspectives (Elmuti, et al., 2005). Elmuti (2004) had earlier suggested management education should adopt further soft skills development in intra-personal and interpersonal skills to complement traditional hard skills development in business analysis to better respond to rapid technological change and impacts from globalisation.

In the 1990s Conger (1993) identified the need for new approaches to developing leaders because as he saw it, much of what had been called leadership training was based on the requirements of past decades rather than future challenges. Conger has continued to be involved in the debate on management education over many years advocating a better balance between theory and practice in leadership and management development (Conger & Xin, 2000). The call for improved integration of theory and practice is a recurring theme of many writers discussing management education (Ghoshal, 2005; Holian, 2004; Mintzberg, 2004b; Reynolds & Vince, 2004; Thomas, 2007; Thorpe, 1990) and in particular the courses and programs provided by business schools (Friga, Bettis & Sullivan, 2003; Hawawini, 2005; Raelin, 1993).

Several writers have concluded that presently in business schools there is a distinct disconnect between theory and practice both in terms of theory informing practice and new practice discoveries assisting the development of new theory (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Hoffman, 2004; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2005). In line with the call to strengthen leadership and business theory and practice, Ready and Conger (2003)

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highlighted the need for leadership development interventions to focus on approaches related more strongly to the context of business. These approaches included accountability for learning, investing in well-designed processes for learning and not fad products, and linking investments in leadership development to building capabilities that serve the business well. Most recently Tushman, O'Reilly, Fenollosa, Kleinbaum and McGrath (2007) have argued that business schools should "aspire to couple research rigor with managerial relevance" (p. 1). Research by Tushman et al. (2007) indicated that action learning approaches within executive education provide sound platforms to enhance both individual and company based outcomes and also enhance teaching practice and research to bridge a "relevance – rigor gap" (p. 1).

2.3 *Effective leadership and management development: The emergence of context as an issue.*

For other writers on leadership the context in which leadership takes place is a central issue to leadership practice. The issue of context therefore created a challenge to developing generic leadership courses, programs, or interventions. Storey (2004) noted that current leadership research identifies context as an important factor in leadership. Mole (2004) considered context as being fundamental to the teaching and practice of leadership. He has argued, "Leadership cannot be taught as though it were a context-free subject. Context is not just important to the way leaders behave; it is axiomatic" (Mole, 2004, p. 129). Bennis and Thomas (2002) also considered context and have suggested that leadership is best understood as a mix of time, place, predisposition and potential. For Conger and Ready (2004) context in developing leadership was also a key consideration as "leadership requirements vary by level, culture and situation" (p.46)

Parks (2005) presented a case for teaching leadership by considering the theoretical constructs of Heifetz and his teaching practice. Heifetz (1995) suggested that leadership is best understood as an adaptive process (that is an evolving context with actors adapting within that context). By using a case in point approach to teaching student experiences are drawn into classroom dialogues and students are encouraged to experience activities and practice on the *dance floor* but also reflect and review from the perspective of the *balcony*. Overtones of *reflection in action* and *reflection on reflection in action* may have relevance here (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Schön, 1983, 1987). Reflection in action would occur in the immediacy of the leader's activities in the organizational setting of the dance floor whilst reflection on action would connect to the moments away from the activity of the dance floor at balcony level to achieve a measured and holistic perspective of a leader's own practice.

2.4 *Effective leadership and management development: Adult learning principles.*

A further issue is the debate over pedagogical and androgogical approaches to leadership and management development program design. Pedagogical learning involves teacher direction and control of processes. Androgogic learning by contrast involves adult learners in the decision making about the what, how, where, when and why of learning (Knowles, 1990; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005). Views differ on the approaches most suited to management development in terms

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development strategy, development initiative design and processes inclusive of levels of involvement of participants in the development design, learning processes and the nature of outcomes (Garavan, 1997; Garavan, Barnicle & O'Suilleabhain, 1999). In the 1990's the theory of transformative learning has gained support in adult learning practices (Gunnlaugson, 2007).

Transformative learning involves participants becoming more reflective and critical in their practices. They are more open to the perspectives of others and also less defensive and more accepting of new perspectives, concepts and practices (Mezirow, 1997). Under transformative learning critical reflection challenges an adult learner's frames or reference to consider new ways of acting and being (Mezirow, 2003, 2005). According to Moore (2005) the tension between pedagogical and androgogical curriculum design and learning processes under transformative learning theory remain continuing issues of debate within university education settings.

2.5 *Effective leadership and management development: Attributes of education program design.*

Issues regarding content delivered in leadership and management education, as well as processes of delivery have been an ongoing source of research and discussion in the literature. Research by Guetzkow, Forehand and James (1962) indicated that a management development course of one-year duration changed participant behaviour significantly more than shorter duration training courses. Conger (1993) discussed designing leadership courses where the learning sticks and reaffirmed the point about pacing development interventions over time rather than short concentrated courses. "A single, one-time course is insufficient to create and support lasting behavioural change" (Conger, 1993, p. 56). This research gave some credence to a theory that longer term learning interventions had merit over short course training.

Mintzberg (2004a; 2004b) has argued extensively for greater work integration in management education and that new models incorporating greater reflection on practice are needed as critical development processes (Gosling & Mintzberg 2004a; 2004b). Heifetz (1994) moving to a more andragogical adult learner approach to teaching and learning developed the *case in point method*. The case in point method aims to develop leadership and management practice by integrating more explicitly the insights from managers' workplace experience into discussions and activities (Parks, 2005).

In this decade key writers in have identified a number of areas in management education requiring renewed consideration. These areas include; a push for broader concepts of curricula in terms of course design and delivery (Mintzberg, 2004b; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002b; Moratis & van Baalen, 2002; Wankel & De Fillippi, 2002; Watson & Temkin, 2000); Suggestions for more innovative pedagogical and andragogical processes in teaching and learning (Hawawini, 2005; Mintzberg 2004a, 2004b; Thomas, 2007); a call to decipher the nature of what in fact is teachable and effective in leadership and management education (Monks & Walsh, 2001); finally an awareness of the need for improved structures, systems and processes in universities and business schools in order to face the challenges of management education in the 21st century (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005;

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Friga, Bettis & Sullivan, 2003; Leavitt, 2000, Marrington & Rowe, 2004; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Porter, 2004).

3. Methodology and Research Design

A sample of twenty Australian mid level managers twelve months after completing a leadership and management development program were interviewed using semi structured interview process that was audio taped (Dey, 1993). Transcripts of the interviews were prepared for content analysis and coding of key themes and categorisations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Following an initial processing of the transcripts for accuracy and completeness the data was ready for treatment and analysis. Critical treatments of qualitative data analysis and display as advised by Miles and Huberman (1994) were employed. In the basic method of qualitative data analysis as advised by Miles and Huberman (1994) there are three broad stages: data reduction involving coding, categorisation and thematic clustering; data display involving compressed text, matrices and informational graphics; and finally conclusion drawing and verification which involves noting meanings and testing for plausibility and validity.

A series of matrices were developed to support the attributes both Learning and Program . The decision rules for each matrix enabled classification of interviewee responses as Strong, Moderate or Weak in terms of relevance or fit of the related coded response to the attribute under investigation.

4. Discussion and Findings

Twenty Australian mid level managers undertook a twelve-month leadership and management development program. A series of post program interviews as well as program experience surveys with participants indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the program and also benefits of promotions, greater confidence and comfort in leading and managing.

Codes appearing out of the interview data supported the view that learning characteristics were prevalent in the interviewees assessments of attributes to develop leadership and management practice. Consistent with key concepts stemming from Knowles (1990), Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005) regarding adult learner involvement in decision making about content, processes and situations of learning participants reported very high levels of program satisfaction, a key aspect of high levels of participation and involvement and flexibility of processes and control on their part.

Participants also reported on the challenge of reflection on practice and confronting current behaviours and practices. The attributes resulting from the codes also connected strongly with Mezirow's (2003; 2005) concept of transformative learning for participants to consider new ways of acting and being in their personal lives and work lives. The attributes confirmed under the **Learning Orientation** cluster were:

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- *Involvement* with prevalent themes of sticking with the program and committing to learning processes as well as sharing learning insights and experiences were strongly represented in the transcripts. Pattern codes of *Commitment* and *Shared Learning* eventually surfaced from a series of descriptive and In Vivo codes supporting these overarching themes.
- *Opportunity Seeking in which* participants used terms and phrases that linked to the key themes of *Discovery*, through extending self and extending knowing. of *Applying Learning* and *Learning as a Journey*. These themes were strongly represented in the transcripts. The pattern codes of *Exploring* eventually surfaced from descriptive and In Vivo codes supporting these overarching themes
- *Readiness to Learn* where themes of fulfilling a need, looking for improvement, and commitment to the learning program were represented in the transcripts. A key pattern code of *Accepting Challenge* clearly surfaced from a series of descriptive and In Vivo codes supporting these overarching themes
- *Capacity to Change* in which major issue to emerge from extracts relating to the key category *Capacity to Change* is that change is personal and can be quite profound in terms of scale in one particular area, for example relationships in leadership practice, or profound in terms of scope such as both professional and personal practices. The extracts appear to confirm evidence of a positive shift in practice through development of self and other perception, various leadership and management concepts and tools that aided practice covered in the program.

A final group of codes appearing in the data related specifically to **Program Architecture**. The thematic cluster extracted from coding and categorization here included the concept of *Program Ethos* that distinguishes the program from other offerings, its values and philosophy of practice. The prevalent themes of engagement with the programs values and purpose and seeking congruence or fit of own values and program values were represented in the transcripts. Pattern codes of *Engaged with Program* and *Fit of Program*, eventually surfaced from a series of descriptive and In Vivo codes supporting these overarching themes. Also included were:

- *Program Content* in which participant responses all spoke of structure and flow of content, theory based insights, the readings in particular as highly beneficial = “engaging” and “well framed”. I coded these responses under various codes with the key pattern code emerging as *Form*.
- *Program Process* in which the prevalent themes of free flowing nature, interaction, respect for differences and flexibility, were represented in the transcripts. A key pattern code of *Flexibility* surfaced from a series of descriptive and In Vivo codes supporting these overarching themes.
- *Program Context* in which prevalent themes of, adult learning, transference of learning, group learning as well as passion and drive and encouragement as features of the program context stood out in the transcripts. Pattern codes of *Encouraged* and *Group*

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Dynamic as overarching concepts associated with the Context of the Program Architecture emerged from the descriptive and In Vivo codes supporting these overarching themes

All were key drivers of engagement in terms of androgogical practices. *Program Impact* was also a key attribute. The prevalent themes of positive experience, life changing and improvement in practice were strongly represented in the transcripts. Pattern codes of *Fulfilled* and *Developed* eventually surfaced from a series of descriptive and In Vivo codes supporting these overarching themes. *Program Impact* was an important category in support of the key category **Program Architecture**.

5. Conclusion

Figure 5.1 below outlines the key attributes for **Learning Orientation** and **Program Architecture** thematic clusters associated with effective learning and development for the leadership and management program undertaken by twenty Australian managers. These attributes support and underpin the program delivery and effectiveness of program design to transfer underpinning knowledge, practice based skills and perspectives and insights to challenge attitudes. Each attribute in the figure has an Explanatory Descriptor to further indicate the nature of the attribute as derived from the data categorisation process.

Figure 5.1

Attribute Cluster [Derived from Key Category]	Attribute [Derived from Key Code]	Explanatory Descriptor of Attribute
Learning Orientation	Involved	Discover, Explore, Querulousness.
	Opportunity Seeking	Risk comfortable. Values Learning Processes & Outcomes.
	Readiness to Learn	Willing to try new ways of doing, thinking & being.
	Capacity to Change	Open to new knowledge & experiences.
Program Architecture	Program Ethos	Purpose, Direction.
	Program Content	Variety, Stimulation – discussion, insight, support change.
	Program Processes	Flexible, Insightful, Learning oriented..
	Program Context	Adaptiveness, Style.
	Program Impact	Practice Development, Personal Development.

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Both **Learning Orientation** and **Program Architecture** attribute clusters as outlined above were key success features of the leadership and management program undertaken by the group of Australian managers. Critically care was taken to consider the nature of program design and delivery strategy. This was achieved through both **Program Architecture** and **Learning Orientation** before commencement of program (feed forward), during program (concurrent evaluation), and twelve months following program (feedback) to consider veracity of program impact on practice.

The findings relating to application of a **Learning Orientation** suited to the educational program and considerations of each attribute underpinning **Program Architecture** are recommended as consideration points for designers and facilitators of leadership and management programs. These attribute clusters are also recommended as areas for further research by fellow researchers in the arena of education and learning for adult learners in business programs.

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