

Leadership Development through Experiential Learning

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Introduction

The United States and the world are facing many challenges and changes. Some of those issues are in the areas of social, technical, demographic, environmental, and economic. Zimmerman said one thing is certain, “the nation’s ability to respond and prosper will depend on the quality of leadership demonstrated at all levels of society” (Zimmerman and Burkhardt, 2000, p. 2). One way to develop this leadership is through the use of experiential learning projects and internships. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) believe service learning plays a major role in the development of two things: the individual and the community. They found research that suggests that “service learning has a positive impact on personal, attitudinal, moral, social, and cognitive outcomes” (p. 223). They also believe that “emphasizing service has the potential to enrich learning and renew communities, but will also give ‘new dignity to the scholarship of service’” (p. 221). This study attempts to further connect the idea of leadership development through experiential learning.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to conduct a thorough review of literature related to leadership development and experiential learning. The objectives were as follows:

1. Define key terms
2. Establish a need for leader development
3. Describe examples of experiential learning
4. Connect the need for leader development with the outcomes of experiential learning

Methods

Data for this study was gathered through a library search at Texas A&M University. Searches were conducted through databases including Proquest, ERIC, and Academic Search Premier. Search terms included “experiential learning,” “service learning,” “internships,” “leadership development,” and “leader development.” The databases were accessed online, and articles were collected online. An Internet search was also conducted with the same search terms.

Findings

Leader/leadership development defined

Leadership development and leader development can be defined two different ways. There is much confusion as to which definition matches which term. Leader development is typically an emphasis on individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with an actual leadership position or a formal leadership role.

Day (2000) explains the purpose of leader development as the following:

The primary emphasis of the overarching development strategy is to build the intrapersonal competence needed to form an accurate model of oneself, to engage in healthy attitude and identity development, and to use that self-model to perform effectively in any number of organizational roles (p. 585).

Organizations, businesses, or schools who invest in training for their employees or students are trying to protect their “human capital.”

Leadership development, on the other hand, pertains to developing “social capital.” This is done by “building networked relationships among individuals that enhance cooperation and resource exchange in creating organizational value” (Day, 2000, p. 586). Day goes on to define social capital as being based on “relationships, which are created through interpersonal exchange” (p. 586).

McCauley defines leadership development as “expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes” (McCauley and Douglas, 1998, p. 161). Leader development is based on the individual’s knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership roles (Day, 2000).

Skills were one of the first areas of leadership studied. First there was the trait theory, and shortly after, people started to look at particular skills people needed in order to be a leader. Northouse (2004) says that the skills approach focuses on skills and abilities that can be developed. He says “skills imply what leaders can accomplish whereas traits imply who leaders are” (p. 36). He defines leadership skills as “the ability to use one’s knowledge and competencies to accomplish a set of goals or objectives” (p. 36). It is very fitting, then, that traditionally, leadership development was conceptualized as an individual-level skill. It was thought that one could develop someone’s leadership potential through training an individual. Day (2000) says they primarily trained that person in the areas of skills and abilities. This approach fails to show that there is more to leadership than just skills and abilities. It is a relationship between the “social and organizational environment” (Day, 2000). However, with more and more studies, researchers began to see that one could not study the leader without studying the followers and the situation. In his book, Northouse (2004) takes the reader through the history and timelines of leadership theories and models. What began with looking at only traits of leaders, the study of leadership has grown to encompass theories that deal with the situation and followers as well.

Today, leadership development encompasses more than just developing leaders who are believed to have certain desirable skills. Leadership is approached as a social process that engages everyone. In this way of thinking, everyone is considered a leader. Thus the goal of leadership development is to turn a group of individuals in a particular organization or work environment into a team. In order to truly make a difference in an organization or business, both the individual leader and collective leadership

development need to be taken into consideration when establishing training procedures (Day, 2000).

Experiential learning/internships defined

Experiential learning is not a new concept in today's educational world. John Dewey wrote about it early in the 20th century and David A. Kolb outlined an experiential learning model in 1984. Dewey launched the principles of experiential education as an established pedagogy. Kolb's model included four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and testing in new situations.

Kolb (1984) wrote:

The learning process often begins with a person carrying out an action and seeing the effects of the action; the second step is to understand the effects of the action. The third step is to understand the action, and the last step is to modify the action given a new situation.

Kolb defined experiential learning as "a process linking education, work, and personal development" (Stedman, Rutherford, and Roberts, 2006).

Keith Morton said service learning is important because it allows students to get involved with their communities at both the high school and collegiate levels. He said it gives students many opportunities to give back to their communities, while learning at the same time. He said service learning focuses on two issues: the civic engagement of young people and the nature and quality of campus-community partnerships (Morton and Enos, 2002). Morton (1996) described two different types of academic courses involving service learning. One guides students in the process of reflecting on and learning from a project or activity they are already involved in; called service-centered courses. The other type of course has discipline and content objectives. With the inclusion of service, they can be more effectively reached. This type is referred to as content-centered.

Service-learning, whether it is through internships or experiential learning projects is becoming more widely seen and accepted in colleges and universities. Tens of thousands of faculty are engaging millions of college students in some form of service-learning practice every year. Universities are also receiving major federal and private funding to sustain and expand the growing service-learning movement (Butin, 2006). Bringle and Hatcher (2000) said that in the past 10 years, only the World Wide Web has grown faster than the service learning movement.

Many believe the growth in service-learning over the last ten years is due to a need and desire to build a stronger relationship between university students and the community with which they are a part of. "Higher education has begun to embrace a scholarship of engagement be it manifested as experiential education, service-learning, undergraduate research, community-based research, the scholarship of teaching and learning movement, or stronger relationships with local communities" (Butin, 2006, p. 473).

Butin (2006) said the service-learning movement "appears ideally situated within higher education" (p. 475). One can see service-learning in many aspects of collegiate learning. An increasing number of faculties are teaching using service-learning in a diverse range of academic courses. It is also being used by administrative positions and

university presidents are making mention of it in their speeches, on institutional homepages, and in marketing brochures.

Butin (2006) goes on to define the service learning factors used by most higher education institutions:

(a) philosophy and mission (b) faculty support and involvement (c) student support and involvement (d) community participation and partnerships, and (e) institutional support. The objective of using service-learning practices and techniques is to “foster respect for and reciprocity with the communities that colleges and universities are all too often in but not of” (p. 476).

When defining service learning, Bringle and Hatcher (1996) say it is important to differentiate service learning from extracurricular voluntary service. They say service learning is a “course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations” (p. 222).

Need for leadership

The United States and the world are facing many challenges and changes. Some of those issues are in the areas of social, technical, demographic, environmental, and economic. Zimmerman said one thing is certain, “the nation’s ability to respond and prosper will depend on the quality of leadership demonstrated at all levels of society” (Zimmerman and Burkhardt, 2000, p. 2). Zimmerman believes America needs a new generation of leaders who can “bring about positive change in local, national, and international affairs” (Zimmerman and Burkhardt, 2000, p. 2).

Zimmerman and Burkhardt (2000) say that new methods of teaching leadership need to be developed and the definition of leadership needs to be broadened and thought of as a process for effective, positive social change. They say it is also important to look at leadership from different angles and broaden the scope of who exactly can be a leader. There is a great need for more leaders in more positions and there are people who are ready and capable to step up to those positions (Zimmerman and Burkhardt, 2000). Leadership development must become an integral part of a student’s college education in order for him or her to be ready and able to take on the leadership roles that will be available when he or she enters the workforce.

Many organizations are using leadership development to gain an advantage on their competition in their selected field. They consider leadership development to be an investment and they are investing large amounts of money to train their employees.

Leadership development is not only taking place in colleges and universities, but in the corporate world as well. Fulmer (1997) says that almost every organization is trying to create leaders who are capable of helping the corporation shape a more positive future. Because of this, management training and education has become a big business. Annual corporate expenditures on training stand at \$45 billion annually. Corporations are structuring these trainings to fit the weaknesses and needs of their employees. The highest cost of leadership development training comes from paying the staff who delivers the content. Many universities use their own staff to conduct the training.

Leadership development is changing. Along with having the right trainer, the organizations must be aware of their organizational needs. Organizations are looking for

new ideas and forms of leadership development in order to keep up with the competition in today's economy (Fulmer, 1997).

Gains from leadership development

Julian Barling and Tom Weber conducted a study called the *Effects of Transformational Leadership Training on Attitudinal and Financial Outcomes: A Field Experiment* (1996). In this study, they used a pretest-posttest control group to assess the effects of transformational leadership training.

They chose to use Bass's definition of transformational leadership which includes: charisma (providing a vision and a sense of mission, and raising followers' self-expectations), intellectual stimulation (helping employees emphasize rational solutions and challenge old assumptions), and individualized consideration (developing employees and coaching). Transformational leadership elevates leaders and helps followers achieve higher levels of organizational functioning (Bass, 1990).

They found that the subordinates of managers receiving the training perceived their managers as higher on intellectual stimulation, charisma, and individual consideration than subordinates of managers in the no-training control group. They also found that the training program exerted significant effects on subordinates' organizational commitments. Barling and Weber's research provides experimental evidence that "transformational leadership can result in changes in subordinates' perceptions of managers' leadership behaviors, subordinates' own commitment to the organization, and some aspects of financial performance" (Barling, Weber, and Kelloway, 1996, p. 831).

Mary Ryan says that some of the most valuable contributions to development in the undergraduate years are those contributions which foster personal and intellectual growth (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996). Undergraduates reach this growth through internships and service learning projects. Often times, they are put in real-world situations and are given much responsibility and freedom. As a result of internships, they leave school as well-rounded individuals, prepared to enter the workforce.

Internships and service learning have many purposes. The main purpose is to create what Ryan refers to as "lifelong learners" (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996, p. 1). Students learn in the classroom, no one is arguing against that. They acquire knowledge needed to perform tasks and come to conclusions when there is a problem. Service learning is focused on showing students how to continue learning once out of the classroom. These projects teach students that learning and knowledge is all around them. It also teaches them skills and abilities needed to be successful (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996).

Most people involved in service learning education say the overarching goal is to connect learning in the classroom through lectures and discussion with the real world experiences school is supposed to prepare them for. Service learning connects the two together and allows students the chance to gain more knowledge and experience than they would in the classroom (Steffes, 2004). Steffes (2004) says undergraduate research opportunities, internships and service learning projects give students "the knowledge and skills that will help them become effective workers and concerned, knowledgeable citizens after they graduate" (p. 43). Higher education critics claim that it is the role of universities and colleges to prepare students for the "real world." Service learning proponents claim service learning projects and internships provide the connection to the

real world and should be an integral part of education (Steffes, 2004). More and more colleges and universities are adopting experiential education programs as part of the curriculum. Higher education is beginning to see the importance of experiential education, and in fact, some are even making it a degree requirement (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996).

Goals of experiential education

The goal of experiential education is to bridge the gap between the classroom and the “real world.” It was designed to bridge the gap between classroom learning and knowledge that is needed in a “knowledge-based society.” It has often been thought that college students learn how to learn while in school. Ryan calls the learning a process, not an outcome. She says the internship/service-learning experience teaches students lifelong learning (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996).

More and more research is being conducted to prove that service-learning can positively impact student outcomes. Butin found the scholarly studies show “service-learning to be a statistically significant practice in impacting, among other things, students’ personal and interpersonal development, stereotype reduction, sense of citizenship, and academic learning” (Butin, 2006, p. 487). While much of the research is new, service-learning has been proven to positively impact students’ development. Proponents of service-learning have taken a qualitative research approach to show that service-learning has “legitimate, consequential, and measurable outcomes in higher education” (Butin, 2006, p. 488).

Negative aspects of service-learning

Researchers are beginning to take a serious look at the benefits of service learning; however, there has only been one examination of the “enduring influence” that service learning has on students’ identity development (Jones and Abes, 2004). Although service-learning is becoming accepted and more widely seen in academia, it is hard to tell the long-term effects of service-learning on the education system. Funding is always an issue with new programs and currently, the majority of service-learning programs are funded by “soft” short-term grants. This means that the funding is not permanent and could easily be taken away. Also, many faculty members are still unsure about the significance and worth service-learning will have on students’ educational development. Some believe service-learning is too time-consuming and that traditional tenure and promotional committees will not take the impact of service learning seriously. If that is the case, teachers are much less likely to incorporate service-learning into their curriculum. Not only are fewer than half of all service-learning directors full-time, but also 46% of all service learning offices have annual budgets below \$20,000. Considering these factors, service-learning is not secure in the educational system (Butin, 2006).

Along with budgeting issues, service-learning also faces a dilemma in regards to the quality or perceived quality of the teachers who decide to incorporate service-learning into their curriculum. It is used by the “least powerful and most marginalized” faculty, such as people of color, women, and the untenured. The fields they are teaching it in are considered the “softest” and most “vocational” disciplined fields (Butin, 2006). What Butin considers to be “soft” disciplined fields are ones such as English, education, or

management. “Hard” disciplined fields would be in the areas of chemistry, physics, and engineering.

Yet another problem with service-learning is that 83% of all faculty members at universities use lecturing as their primary form of instruction. Lecturing is considered to be the traditional form of teaching material to the students and many faculty members believe it is the only way. Because of this, few faculty members are likely to adopt service-learning practices. Service-learning requires projects and hands-on activities. This, as opposed to lecturing from PowerPoint or notes, is a very different way to present material to the students and teachers are often not eager to change their ways (Butin, 2006).

While there is literature that supports the statement that service learning practices helps students better understand themselves, cultural difference, and social justice, Butin says that only a select few students are exposed to service learning. He says they are White, sheltered, middle-class, single, without children, un-indebted, and between the ages of 18 and 24. He goes on to point out that those are not the demographics of higher education today, and that 20 years from now, the student population will be even more diverse (Butin, 2006).

Although data may exist that supports the future of service-learning, there are many more variables involved. Teachers have to be persuaded to accept service-learning. They are not automatically going to start teaching it just because the research says it will aid in student development. It does not take long for an instructor to find a method of teaching that works for him or her. Once they do, it is very hard to convince them to teach using other methods. Many of the faculty members have been in the profession for many years and have plenty of success stories from their former students (Butin, 2006). Service-learning advocates must find a way to fit in today’s educational system and not only show teachers why they should use service learning, but how.

Outcomes of service-learning

Many colleges and universities today are looking to experiential learning as the capstone of what the students have learned while in school. John Dewey calls it “learning by doing” (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996). The National FFA Organization calls it “learning to do, doing to learn.” Many others call it creating “lifelong learners” (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996).

Learning is not complete when a student passes a test or gets an A in a class. They have completed the requirements for that specific course, but what about the requirements to become an active member of society? Ryan (1996) says the cycle of learning is complete when students can “reframe what they know, the content, and understand how they learned it, the process” (p. 9). She says that it is not very often that institutions fully integrate experiential education into their curricula (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996).

Experiential learning allows students to test what they have learned in the classroom. However, it is not the typical multiple choice, short answer test. This examination tests the foundations of their educational experience. It tests whether or not institutions are doing what they say they are doing; preparing students to be successful adults in society (Steffes, 2004).

Steffes looks at students' involvement in undergraduate research, internships, and service learning. She says many studies have documented an increase in teaching techniques involving internships and or service learning in some way. Those non-traditional educational techniques allow students to connect their "cognitive learning inside the classroom with their affective learning in the lab, on the job, or at the service learning site" (Steffes, 2004, p. 3). What were once seen as instructors to the students, are now mentors who shape and develop young adults' lives. Mentors teach the students how to succeed in their selected field before they leave college. Not only do students have the knowledge required, but they also have the skills, professionalism, and know-how (Steffes, 2004).

Service-learning and internships differ from traditional classroom instruction in that they allow students to translate knowledge into action (Steffes, 2004). While classroom instruction is a vital part of students' educational experiences, it is only a part of their total education. Internships and service-learning also help students decide what field they want to go into and it gives them the freedom to change their minds early into the process. According to a 2001 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employees, more than 93% of respondents said that their institutions offered internship programs. Many interns leave the internship with a job in the company or organization. They might not get a job immediately, but employers surveyed said they often hire past interns for full-time positions. Internships are one form of experiential learning and they are a major source of experience in many universities. The partnership between academia and the job market allows students to determine their appropriate career path. There is also an opportunity for students to try something they had never thought of before. Internship applications and selections take into consideration the student's skills and interests (Steffes, 2004).

Steffes found studies that suggested internships help students make valuable connections after college. Networking is such a major part of finding a job and just about everything else a person does in life. They say it is not what you know, but who you know. Internships and service-learning projects give students multiple opportunities to build relationships with other people in their chosen field. C.M. Jagacinski conducted a study in 1986 that dealt with a work-to-job connection. He found that new college graduates whose internship positions were related to their course of study were "employed earlier, had significantly higher levels of responsibility, were paid more, and were more satisfied in their current work positions than those with no related internship experience" (Steffes, 2004, p. 26).

Not only are service-learning activities beneficial to the participating student, but they offer much-needed assistance to local organizations and businesses (Steffes, 2004). Many service learning projects involve students giving back to their communities, such as Habitat for Humanity. Unpaid internships are also a way to help non-profit organizations such as the Red Cross. Many organizations depend heavily on the work of their unpaid interns to carry out day-to-day duties.

Janet Eyler and Dwight Gile Jr. did a comprehensive study in 1999 detailing several possible outcomes of service learning for participating students.

They found that participating students:

- have an increased sense of citizenship, developed stronger analytical and problem-solving skills, enhanced personal development, increased leadership

skills, fostered greater cultural awareness and tolerance, enhanced social development, and improved interpersonal development (Steffes, 2004, p. 31).

In a related study, Barbara Joacoby found that students involved in service learning projects may earn higher GPA's and suggested that the "experience increased self-esteem, increased moral sensitivity and reasoning abilities, and enhanced ethical development" (Steffes, 2004, p. 32).

Students going into service-learning projects do not usually expect to get out of them what they do. Most students entering these programs think they are going to learn about other people, situations, and job opportunities. They come away with that and much more. Many of them have said some of their greatest learning was about themselves (Jones and Abes, 2004).

In a study done by Jones and Abes in 2004, they found that participants in the service learning project were able to gain experience in areas they never would have otherwise. But an even more interesting finding was that they developed a drive to take risks and broaden their range of friends to include people from a diverse group. They also walked away from the study ready to take on more experiences and learned the importance of self-reflection and exploration. The study "facilitated new and more complex thinking about participants' personal and social identities, the construction of identity in relation to serving others, and the kinds of commitments participants wanted to make in their lives" (Jones and Abes, 2004, p. 163).

Specific Programs

There are quite a few service-learning and internship organizations and programs that are already established. One of those internship programs is the Institute for Experiential Learning (IEL). IEL has written standards for an academic internship. They look at the make up of the internship and the specific standards set by that particular program. IEL says they are "committed to the principle that experiential learning should be as challenging and rigorous as any classroom learning experience" (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996, p. 8).

A second program is Campus Compact. This organization has been a leader in service-learning for over 10 years. It is an organization of over 520 college and university presidents "committed to emphasizing the value of student community service. The leadership of Campus Compact has been complemented by Presidents Bush and Clinton, who enacted legislation to involve young people and college students in their communities" (Bringle and Hatcher, 2000, p. 716).

A third program is the Beyond the Classroom Living & Learning Program (BTC). The program is partnered with the University of Maryland's Division of Undergraduate Studies, Student Affairs, and a private housing-management firm. The program works with juniors and seniors and helps them obtain research opportunities, internships, or service learning experiences on the University of Maryland campus and in the greater Washington, D.C. area, (Steffes, 2004, p. 7).

Connecting service-learning with leadership development

Colleges and Universities, more than any other institution, have the ability to truly make a difference in the development of students' leadership skills through internships and service learning projects. Day (2000) says the first thing they must do is come to the

realization that leadership development can happen anywhere. It does not only take place in the classroom or through specially designed programs. “Leadership development in practice today means helping people learn from their work rather than taking them away from their work to learn” (Day, 2000, p. 587).

Universities can accomplish the task Day challenged them to complete by getting students involved in service learning projects and internships. Stedman, Rutherford, and Roberts (2006) believe internships are the key to bridging academic courses with the students’ future careers. They say internships give students a glimpse of the knowledge and skills required by future employers.

As stated by Bringle and Hatcher (1996), “Ernest Boyer challenges higher education to reconsider its mission to be that of educating students for a life as responsible citizens, rather than education students solely for a career” (p. 221). Ryan and Cassidy (1996) believe that colleges are only teaching students how to learn. They call the learning a “process and not an outcome... the internship experience is an introduction to lifelong learning” (p. 3).

Bringle and Hatcher (1996) believe universities have what it takes to become the national leaders in developing service learning programs and activities. They say “higher education is in a period of transition from teaching to learning, from independent discipline-based work to interdisciplinary team-oriented work, and from isolation to engagement” (Bringle and Hatcher, 2000, p. 716).

Most people will say that higher education’s main objectives should be that the students will leave campus with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful, effective employees and concerned, knowledgeable citizens of their communities and country. Stefes (2004) says undergraduate research, internships, and service learning are aimed at assisting universities with that task. “Faculty who use service learning discover that it brings new life to the classroom, enhances performance on traditional measures of learning, increases student interest in the subject, teaches new problem solving skills, and makes teaching more enjoyable” (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).

Faculty members and experiential educators have the same goal in mind: helping students develop their potential. Faculty members do this often times through delivering an outstanding lecture. Experiential educators want students to practice what they have learned and try to improve their skills. “In experiential learning programs, we want students to be curious about the world around them and to anticipate the next question, to read critically with an eye to practice. We want students to be better practitioners and better human beings, and above all, to learn both while doing and from their experience” (Ryan and Cassidy, 1996, p. 8).

Many of the studies conducted came up with much of the same findings. Service learning projects developed students as individuals and as leaders:

No longer were they relying on parents, friends, teachers, and texts as irrefutable sources of instruction on what is right for their lives and to what viewpoints they should subscribe. They weighted options, challenged previously held ideas, and ultimately relied on their own thinking to reach conclusions and take action (Jones and Abes, 2004, p. 162).

Many universities and colleges state that cultivating citizenship and social responsibility is just as important of a task as teaching students the skills and knowledge necessary for their future career (Jones and Abes, 2004). Bringle and Hatcher (2000) state

“service learning engages students in community service that is meaningful to the community and to student learning” (p. 715). Service learning gives universities the opportunity to cultivate that citizenship while they are still students and before they are out in the communities on their own.

Bringle and Hatcher (2000) looked at 10 case studies dealing with developing leadership through service learning. They found that each of the 10 case studies demonstrated how “student, faculty, community, and institutional leadership is developed through community engagement and service learning. In this way, service learning strengthens campus and community assets and creates learning communities for all constituencies” (p. 505).

Bringle and Hatcher (1996) believe service learning plays a major role in the development of two things: the individual and the community. They found research that suggests that “service learning has a positive impact on personal, attitudinal, moral, social, and cognitive outcomes” (p. 223). They also believe that “emphasizing service has the potential to enrich learning and renew communities, but will also give ‘new dignity to the scholarship of service’” (p. 221).

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