



Teaching Conference for  
Management Educators

**OBTC 2017 at Providence College  
June 14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**Submission Template**

**SUBMISSION GUIDANCE**

*\* Remove all identifying properties from this document \**

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*\*Only one document should be submitted\**

**Creative Leadership Development:  
Curating an innovative learning community**

## **Submission Template for the 2017 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators**

### **1) Title, Abstract & Keywords**

*In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.*

#### **Creative Leadership Development: Curating an innovative learning community**

How to effectively engage research and practice in building meaningful, creative, results-driven leadership development initiatives? In light of the punishing competitive environment that is defined by uncertainty and change, this is a considerable challenge in academic institutions, corporations and nonprofit organizations. This session shares the lessons and experiences of a university-based leadership development consortium that has operated successfully across these three domains for many years. We demonstrate the approaches and provide examples of recent unique and effective leadership development initiatives to enhance creativity, innovation and decision-making for leaders in complex situations during times of high stress and uncertainty.

Key Words: Leadership, Creativity, Innovation, Complexity

### **2) Teaching Implications:**

*What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.*

This session rapidly explains and explores the successes, challenges and lessons from an innovative university-based leadership development consortium that has successfully operated at the intersection of academia, corporations and nonprofit institutions for over thirty years. Having evolved from a research-driven center in its early years to become more of a network organization to respond to today's faster moving and more demanding contemporary marketplace, this Leadership Development Center (LDC) works creatively with key stakeholders to examine best and emerging practices in leadership in innovative and unique ways. At OBTC 2017 we will share and discuss the recent LDC initiatives that were successfully implemented in examining the specific core theme of creativity and innovation in leadership development.

Our primary goal during the session is to stimulate dialogue around specific ways that we can successfully design and implement creative, dynamic and meaningful leadership development initiatives that are practical and replicable as well as being research-based and conceptually well grounded. We will provide an overview of the LDC and share approaches, techniques, exercises and modules that have been effective for us with business executives and will explain how this work also richly informs our curriculum development and teaching practice at the MBA and undergraduate levels.

Our work here is driven principally by an engagement model of learning, following, of course, the classic Kolb (1984) experiential learning model. As is well known in the learning and development field, experiential learning occurs through a cycle of four stages described by Kolb (1984; 2005) as: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE). CE attends to the immediate experience and what is happening in the present. On the other hand, AC refers to the abstract representation and the underlying symbolic meaning that connects the immediate experience to other past and future events. RO emphasizes cognitive processing and the mental activity undertaken to understand the current event and its meaning. AE stresses the behavioral component, the active manipulation of the external world through trial and experimentation. Real learning occurs through the process of moving through and between each stage. We design our LDC learning initiatives and programs in ways that will move participants fully through the entire 4-stage experiential learning cycle, where participants are led through specific, unique, creative experiences and are also prompted to carefully reflect and distill lessons.

In addition we also leverage and extend the leadership meta-competency framework (Hall, 1986; McCarthy, O'Connell & Hall, 2005; Karaevli & Hall, 2006) of *adaptability* (openness to change and actively seeking out challenging situations) and *identity awareness* (possess a clear sense of self and being more aware of one's capabilities and characteristics), where both must be developed in tandem to enhance learning and development. Given the heightened pace of change in all organizations today and the need for innovative and resilient leaders (Hill et al., 2014), we seek to implement leadership development initiatives that exercise and build both of these key meta-competencies.

It is in this combination and integration of classic experiential learning theory and the contemporary leadership meta-competency framework that the creative LDC initiatives make a contribution to our pedagogy through the design and delivery of practical, impactful, meaningful learning experiences. At OBTC 2017 we plan to provide a dynamic summary of our experiences, share some of the exercises that have been productive for our LDC members, describe the impact this consortium has had on our teaching, and seek recommendations for future improvements.

### 3) Session Description and Plan:

*What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.*

The OBTC 2017 session is designed to begin with an initial framing of the leadership development challenges today for business/organizational behavior (OB) faculty and professionals in the learning and development domain. We plan to open the session by leading a short rapid-fire exercise with the audience on defining the key leadership drivers today, engaging with participants in briefly outlining the defining leadership challenges today that are at the forefront of their minds and are different and more problematic than the past (e.g., heightened pace and intensity of change, global interconnectedness, hyper-competition, intense market/business change cycles, deep workforce diversity, pervasive technological change, shifting power/income dynamics, widespread societal/global unrest, environmental/climate change, etc.). This discussion will then be quickly extended to a short conversation around consequences and action, in terms of seeking ideas and comments about what can be done to prepare and help develop capabilities for individuals and organizations to perform more effectively under these punishing conditions. This goal is central to our mission in our role as business faculty and leadership development professionals.

This initial conversation is intended to set the stage for our explanation of the evolution and development of recent LDC initiatives with which we have had some success in these areas. We will also briefly describe the history and structure of LDC for context and will explain how we organize our learning community and some of our approaches to leadership development and learning. The LDC participants are comprised of business executives in corporations and nonprofit organizations who lead the leadership development and talent management function for their firms along with faculty members who teach and research in the OB and leadership domain. A significant factor contributing toward the long term success of LDC is in the cultivation of a creative and innovative learning community, where our participants are ready and willing to experiment, adapt, innovate, take risks, collaborate and push boundaries for the benefit of their own learning as well as that of their peers and colleagues at LDC.

In particular, at the OBTC session we will explain and demonstrate the sequence of initiatives that the LDC recently implemented to examine the core theme of innovation and creativity in leadership development. For this, we designed a series of meetings, learning journeys, conversations and support materials that were executed over an 18

month period of time, principally in the form of three 2-day meetings, each six months apart, which served as an integrated arc of discovery for participants seeking to better understand how to develop more innovative, agile leaders. At OBTC 2017 we will describe the curriculum, key lessons and integration of learning across these initiatives.

The first element of our design was comprised of laying the foundation of the requirements for innovation and creativity. For this we traveled as a group to one of the world's greatest and enduring hubs of innovation: Palo Alto and Silicon Valley, California, where we visited innovative companies such as Google and LinkedIn as well as the Institute for the Future and the D-school at Stanford University.

The next step on the learning journey was our visit to a hub of research and discovery in the neuroscience domain: Boston, Massachusetts, where we had conversations and workshops with leading neuroscientists and holistic physicians on emerging knowledge about our brain, our bodies and how we perform under stress and complexity. We also integrated mindfulness exercises into our curriculum to stimulate reflection and to practice some of the relaxation techniques that many experts in this field prescribe.

For the final stop, in an effort to clarify and specify the linkages for the body and mind connections for high performance leadership, we visited Colorado Springs, Colorado, where we visited with sessions at the US Olympic Training Center and the US Air Force Academy. At these sites we discussed the challenges of leadership decision making under stress with combat pilots and elite Olympic athletes as well as with world class sports and military psychologists, nutritionists and physical trainers. We also engaged participants in physical activities including the collection of critical biometric data to examine the physiological properties of activity and stress. Significantly, we ended this learning experience with a surprise physical challenge, where participants were brought back to the stunning and majestic rock formations (the Garden of the Gods national monument) in which we had conducted dawn hiking exercises earlier in the day. For the site return we had set up a rappelling course, and we asked each LDC participant to try to put our collective lessons on leadership under stress and uncertainty into action by taking the risk of rappelling down an incredible and frightening rock face. We worked with mountaineering experts from nearby Colorado College and with specialists from the US Olympic Training Center and Air Force Academy to design and staff the rappelling course, which was a profound and breathtaking capstone learning experience.

The outline for our proposed 60-minute session is as follows (in minutes):

- Introduction & Overview (5)

- Discovery Café: Leadership challenges in a "VUCA" world (15)

- Learning Journeys (10)

- Stress Exercises (10)

- Discussion, Debrief & Teaching Applications (10)

## Feedback, Recommendations & Lessons (10)

Our goal at OBTC is to facilitate a fast moving, engaging dialogue with ongoing group interaction, accompanied by photos and video clips that display the learning experiences. Several exercises will be conducted with OBTC participants to demonstrate the applications and lessons in a real-time manner.

### 4) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

This session corresponds especially well with the OBTC 2017 theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*. The LDC has embraced the opportunity to evolve and adapt to rapidly changing conditions in the academic world as well as elsewhere across the learning and development field in both corporate and nonprofit organizations. The key for success in successfully navigating change is to become more agile, adaptive and collaborative while striving to develop and implement new approaches that will meet the needs of the competitive marketplace. This is as true in the learning and development domain as in industry or institutions across all sectors. This session will describe ways in which academic research can be readily translated and effectively delivered to diverse, demanding audiences inside the university as well as externally to corporate and nonprofit organizations.

In particular, the session will explicitly focus on the LDC initiatives related specifically to the topic of creativity and innovation in leadership development. The initiatives and approaches that we will describe at OBTC 2017 will therefore be directly applicable to the conference theme and will provide practical examples that could be replicated and/or adapted for use by faculty members or practitioners at other institutions. We seek to share our experience to stimulate dialogue and conversation about how to extend and improve the lessons and pitfalls we have seen to strive to move the field forward in strengthening the development of leaders who can navigate more effectively in organizations today. This work is relevant and applicable for executive programs as well as for MBA and undergraduate teaching and curriculum design.

### 5) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

*Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?*

We have been operating the LDC successfully for three decades, working directly with researchers and faculty colleagues at our university and other educational institutions as well as with business executives who head up the leadership development function in their organizations and participate in the LDC learning community. However, this proposal has never been presented before and is not under review elsewhere.

In addition to demonstrating a creative model for a leadership development curriculum and providing practical examples of initiatives designed stimulate learning and complex decision-making under stress and uncertainty, we also hope to capture some of the energy and enthusiasm that participants have expressed about being LDC participants as members of an innovative learning community. In this way, the LDC serves not only as a forum for participants to learn innovative leadership development practices as faculty members but also as a place to exercise and strengthen their own development as leaders.

## References

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