**Panel Symposium:**

**The Role of Transformative Curricula in Leader Education and Development**

**Abstract**

This panel symposium will engage participants and those attending in discussion and debate regarding the need for, and role of, Transformative Curricula (i.e., values and character development) in management/leadership education. Participants will discuss best practices, and exchange ideas about how to integrate values and character development within a diverse array of courses, topics, and learning activities. The panelists include educators with a combined total of over 75-years of leadership experience in both public and private contexts. Panelists will address the topic of Transformative Curricula through three interrelated themes: 1) innovative pedagogy that incorporates real-world scenarios; 2) academic courses that leverage reflective writing and mentorship; and 3) the utilization of technology to deepen, extend, and create shared learning experiences.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Education, Development, Character, Values

**Panel Symposium**

Leader education and development continues to draw considerable attention in academic and applied fields. Still, educational institutions and organizations struggle to create effective educational and developmental experiences to generate meaningful character development and lasting change in learners. The purpose of this panel is to discuss role of what we call “transformative curricula” in leader education and development. We define transformative curricula (TC) as the combination of classic educational objectives, accomplished through syllabi, intentionally designed to deepen the student’s understanding of his or her core values and purpose, while developing character.

The panel consists of educators with a combined total of over 90-years of leadership experience in both public and private contexts. Panelists will address the topic of TC through three interrelated themes: 1) innovative pedagogy that incorporates real-world scenarios; 2) academic courses that leverage reflective writing and mentorship; and 3) the utilization of technology to deepen, extend, and create shared learning experiences.

*Brief Background*

In their overview of leadership models, methods, and application, Avolio, Sosik, Jung, and Berson (2001) specifically identified the importance of furthering our understanding of leadership development and the influence of context on leaders/leadership. Leadership development is a dynamic process involving multiple interactions that persist over time, which includes experience, skills, personality, self-development, and role modeling (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). This dynamic process is enriched through the incorporation of mentors who are able to assess the developmental readiness of learners and encourage reflection (Avolio, & Hannah, 2008).

There are many suggestions in the literature on how to create developmental programs for leaders, most fall short satisfying themes typical of transformative curricula. For example, Fielder (1996) suggests it is important for training and development programs to focus on abilities and knowledge, but fails to connect the learner to pragmatic real-world scenarios where they can explore *when* and *how* to use these abilities and knowledge effectively. Day and Sin (2011) recommend promoting learning goal orientations during training and development, but do not adequately address the foundational importance of selflessness and character. Hunter, Cushenbery, Thoroughgood, Johnson, and Ligon (2011) explain that there are a number of paths to being an effective leader and that developmental programs may need to be tailored based about an individual’s personal leadership style, but little is said about how to design curricula that are adaptive enough to serve individual idiosyncrasies, but structured enough to drive increased self-awareness, and character development in every member of the class.

*First Theme: Innovative Pedagogy*

One way to effectively facilitate educational discussion is through the use of controversies, problems or cases (McKeachie, & Svinicki, 2010). In leader development contexts, real-world scenarios add an element of realism to training, and enable participants not only to learn about decision making, but also to learn about the professional domain in which they are preparing to serve. Leader Challenge, a scenario-based instructional method developed by the Center for the Advancement of Leader Development and Organizational Learning, offers a rich example to consider. The Leader Challenge is a powerful cognitive tool that taps into the existing wealth of professional experience and allows for timely, focused professional reflection (Kimball, 2013). Twice per semester, students in the senior three classes at the United States Military Academy meet in small classrooms to discuss a complex decision making scenario related to either combat or non-combat scenarios. While the content of each session is important, the real innovation comes in the method of Leader Challenge. Each hour-long session is split into four segments where small groups (four or less) discuss a portion of the scenario through thought provoking questions. After each segment, participants “starburst” by shuffling to a new small group. This practice maximizes interaction between learners, and offers an opportunity to let the analysis of the scenario develop over time since we find participants tend to stick with their initial assessment of a scenario if there is no starburst. Additionally, discussion facilitators train and rehearse prior to the event and are integrated into every small group. These innovations, along with several others (e.g. published question guides, discussion timers, and leader oversight) to be discussed by panelists, contribute to a developmental leader experience with lasting impact. The purpose behind the inclusion of this topic is to promulgate a best practice with application potential in any profession.

*Second Theme: Academics and Mentorship*

The next theme is addressed through a discussion of leadership courses taught in three different institutions: 1) the United States Military Academy’s 300-level course in the behavioral and sociological sciences and leadership (PL300: Military Leadership); 2) several leadership courses taught at the University of Virginia, and 3) courses taught at the University of Arkansas’ Tyson Center for Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace. These programs seek to expose students to rich bodies of research on leader development, character, perceptions and bias, decision making, resilience, theories of motivation, and power and influence. Additionally, there are several lessons on prominent leadership theories, building effective teams, and how leader values and purpose translate into value for organizations. This broad exposure to the science of human behavior satisfies the objective to educate leaders, but the transformative component is found in the incorporation of volunteer mentors and assignments that encourage deep guided reflection that each of these programs mandate.

Students often build meaningful relationships with their mentors as they work together on assignments and emerge with a refined self-concept including their core values, purpose, strengths, weaknesses, and leadership philosophy. The importance of these relationships is supported by meta-analytic findings: individuals who have a mentor benefit from higher levels of job and career satisfaction, career commitment, and expectations for advancement (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Further, having a mentor is associated with important favorable behavioral, attitudinal, health-related, relational, and motivational outcomes—though effect sizes vary (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008). Panelists will explicate the structure of mentor-related assignments and data to support the importance of mentoring in transformative curricula.

*Third Theme: Technology as a Tool for Leader Development*

The final theme explored in this panel is leader development through leveraging innovative technology. West Point’s Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership (BS&L) and collaborating partner, Rowan Technologies, have created an Interactive Digital Textbook (IDT) for the Military Leadership course that goes far beyond typical digital learning materials and typical digital learning experiences. Students are able to use the textbook to interact with one another and the instructor, participate in engaging interactive content, and they retain access to the book, and through it, to their classmates and mentors, throughout their professional career. By providing students with an online social environment built around the concept of leader education and development, we create long-term opportunities for leaders to promulgate knowledge and development forward into the organizations they join in the future. The purpose of this theme is to discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with the emergence of digital course materials in leadership training contexts, and provide initial data to reinforce best practices from the United States Military Academy.

*Proposed Session*

This 60-minute session will address the challenge of transformative leader education and development, and these three themes of Transformative Curricula. Attendees will enjoy a combination of presentation and discussion with ample time for audience participation through a question and answer period. After a five-minute introduction by the panel moderator, each panelist will have ten minutes to present a conceptual framework for the three themes of Transformative Curricula. What follows is a free-flowing conversation between audience members and panel members moderated by the panel chair through thought provoking questions such as:

* Addressing the challenges of leader education and development programs:
  + Given Kaiser and Curphy’s (2013) criticism of most leader development programs, how do you:
    - 1-Measure the effectiveness of your programs?
    - 2-Further, how do you balance your focus on individual leaders while also incorporating focus on followers and teams more broadly?
* Addressing Transformative Curricula Structure and Content
  + Does Transformative Curricula imply that a one-time transformation occurs and no further development is needed?
  + How are Transformative Curricula for leader development used to address salient topics such as diversity, mental health, work-life balance, and person-organization fit?
  + What is meant by the term “character-based profession”?
  + How are character-based mentorship programs established and maintained?
  + How do you replicate the complexity of the real-world in academic settings?
  + What is the relationship between a leader’s core values and the values espoused by his or her organization?
  + How does the interplay between individual and organizational values influence the concept of authenticity?

*The panelists are:*

**LTC Daniel Smith, Ph.D.,** an Assistant Professor and Senior Editor of the *West Point Leadership* Interactive Digital Textbook (IDT). His research focuses on the implications of implicit personality for leadership in stressful and dangerous situations. As an Army officer, research psychologist, scholar, and educator, he has spent 25 years studying leadership, developing leaders, and leading others in a variety of settings.

**Daniel Harris** (Panel Moderator)recently retired as director of the Tyson Center for Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace at the University of Arkansas. Dan brings 40 years of international experience, including 12 years in business and 29 years as an American diplomat. Among other leadership roles, he served as the U.S. Consul General in North Rhine Westphalia (Germany), Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for International Operations and Minister Counselor for Commercial Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Paris. At the University of Arkansas, Dan created a transformational leadership course and continues to pursue his passion for transformative leader education through the Academy of Management and other organizations.

**Denise Breaux-Soignet** is a clinical assistant professor in the Sam M. Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas. She received her Ph.D. from Florida State University and holds M.B.A. and B.S. degrees from Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. Her research focuses on interpersonal interactions in the workplace and includes topics such as injustice, negotiations, stress, leadership, and social stigma in the workplace. Her research has been published in Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes, the Journal of Management, Organizational Dynamics, and the Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies.

**LTC Jordon Swain, Ph.D.,** an Assistant Professor and Director of the Leader Development Science Program in the Department of Behavioral Sciences & Leadership at the United States Military Academy at West Point. His research explores the impact and perceptions of humility within the context of leadership and management.

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