Teaching Whilst Leading: Why Do University and Business School Leaders also Teach (or not)?

Abstract:

This symposium explores the benefits and costs to the institution, and personal motivation, of academic leaders whom choose to teach whilst leading. Speakers will include the President of a University, whom has lead it through major university wide curriculum reform, that university’s Dean of Teaching and Learning, in addition to two Heads of Business Schools, one of whom chooses to teach whilst the other made the choice to step back from teaching, and a faculty member whom has moved between the roles of Head of School (teaching and leading) and now is a Professor focused on teaching and research.

Keywords: Teaching; University Leadership; Research practice gap

Session Type: Symposium

**INTRODUCTION**

*Primary Purpose*

The primary purpose of this symposium is from the perspective of university and business school leaders to explore why they believe leaders ought (or not) to teach and from both their perspective and that of business school faculty what are the costs and benefits to the institution of leaders teaching. There has been considerable debate in the literature on the relevance-practice gap of universities and business schools and the role that both academic administrators and faculty can play in managing this (Balkin and Mello, 2012; Lewicki, 2012). There has been little discussion of how academic administrators are themselves managerial practitioners and, thus, that when they teach management they embody their experience not only as researchers and educators but also as managers. They are in essence practice-research engaged educators, and also educator-research engaged managers of universities and business schools.

*Intended Audience*

This symposium is designed to offer insights into the benefits and costs of teaching whilst leading from the perspective of both faculty whom are not in leadership positions and also those that lead. It will help faculty to gain an appreciation of the perspective of university and business school leaders, and for leaders an appreciation of the perspective of faculty. This symposium will therefore be successful when the audience is a mix of faculty and academic leaders. It will also afford those thinking about taking on academic administration in the future, insights into these roles from the perspective of active teacher and also mentorship opportunities.

*Main Topic*

Does teaching whilst leading offer universities and business schools a way of managing the research-practice divide discussed in the literature (Bennis and O’Toole, 2005; Burke-Smalley, Rau, Neely, and Evans, 2017; Goodall, 2009; Pfeffer and Fong 2002; Quinn, 2016)? We believe that it can, but more importantly that leaders whom teach signal to the university community the central importance of students and teaching in the mission of universities and business schools. Teaching also adds meaning to the lives of academic administrators.

Amongst other costs and benefits of teaching whilst leading, four issues in particular emerge. First, teaching whilst leading provides leaders with legitimacy amongst students, faculty, and external stakeholders, as well as offering legitimacy for those that choose to dedicate time to teaching as opposed to the exclusive prioritisation of research or service. Second, teaching provides leaders with important environmental knowledge of their institution, leading to more effective governance decisions on the balance between teaching and research. Third, in the case of business school leaders, being an academic manager may be a source of practice knowledge, improving their ability to teach and bridge the practice-research relevance gap. Fourth, teaching for leaders is a powerful personal motivator: it brings them joy and a place where they are an educator and not a resource allocator.

Business Schools are often studied from the perspective of the faculty-student engagement, faculty-administration interaction, and more occasionally from the perspective of the business school-university interaction. The reality is that whilst these three units of analysis rarely speak to each other about the core activity of teaching, each plays an important role in shaping the teaching environment and in making resource allocation decisions between teaching and research at an individual, school wide and university level. At this symposium we will have a President of a university, a university wide Dean of Teaching and Learning and a Head of School of Business, and a faculty member of that university, all of whom both lead within their unit and teach undergraduate students themselves. We will also have the Dean of a School of Business whom does not teach, offering a counterbalancing perspective of why teaching whilst leading is not necessarily a universal good.

The university leaders (President and Dean of Teaching and Learning) will offer their perspective on why leaders ought to teach and how doing so adds value to the process of strategy formulation, implementation and practical management of a university. They will also offer insight into the personal value and cost that comes from teaching for them as educators. The leaders of the Schools of Business will offer insights from the perspective of a business school. The faculty member will offer insights into the impact of working in an institution were leaders teach and also into his previous experience of being a leader whom taught and returned to faculty life.

**THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND TEACHING IMPLICATIONS**

Business Schools have faced a crisis of relevance, where on the one hand multiple stakeholders question the relevance of our research to teaching, whilst others argue for the need to reinforce the connection between research and teaching through a process of research led teaching. We argue that academic administrators whom teach can play a key role in managing this challenge. Academic administrators, be they the President of a university, the Dean of Teaching and Learning, or the Head of a School of Business, are all effectively practicing managers, formulating and implementing business strategies, managing people, attracting and retaining customers, and making resource development and allocation decisions. Where leaders teach they both have the opportunity to bring their managerial experience into the class setting, and also directly understand the needs of students. This contextual understanding influences their decisions around whom to hire, how to develop teachers, the balance between research and teaching, and the importance of relevant teaching.

*The Research-Teaching-Practice Relevance Gap*

Pfeffer and Fong (2002) argue that business schools have gone so far down the scientific approach to research that little of this research is read by managers, nor is much of it considered effective if applied in managerial contexts. Bennis and O’Toole (2005) argue that Business School faculty have little if any managerial experience and so teach what they know (scientific research), rather than the managerial competencies that managers need. This intuition is empirically supported by Rubin and Dierdorff (2009) and Harker, Caemmer and Hynes (2016), whom observe that MBA curricula do a poor job of teaching the competencies that mangers in the field need and that this gap is not being effectively narrowed.

Others argue that business school research has a positive impact student outcomes and managerial practice. O’Brien et al. (2010) found that MBA alumni salary was positively associated with increased in highly ranked publications of faculty. Birkinshaw, Lecuona and Barwise (2016) have explored the types of business school scientific publications that are cited by managerial bridge journals, arguing that these do impact managerial behaviours.

Solutions to the relevance-practice gap typically focus around either increasing the practice experience of faculty directly, or indirectly through more relevant research. Bennis and O’Toole (2005) and others argue that a core problem is the hiring and promotions process of universities. They argue that universities ought to hire clinical professors, whom have significant managerial experience and post hiring maintain this experience. Clinical professors therefore become a key bridge between teaching and practice. Others argue that research led educators ought to focus on researching issues that improve managerial performance. They argue that researchers whom read widely and carefully can apply the principles of evidence-based management to their teaching. Much of this perspective can be seen in the Special Issue on evidence based management (Rynes, Rousseau and Bardends, 2014). These two perspectives in essence argue that to bridge the relevance-practice divide we ought to follow the practices of professional schools in universities, such as medicine, where those that teach often both practice and research medicine, with these faculty acting as a key bridge between medical researchers, training of doctors and doctors in practice.

*Academic Administrators as Part of the Solution: Teaching, Practice and Research Bridges*

Academic administrators play a central role in shaping the strategic direction of a university, acquiring resources from external stakeholders, creating and developing resources from within, and resource allocation between units, including their Schools of Business. Academic administrators typically start their career as teachers and researchers. At some point they are promoted into managerial roles, making decisions about businesses with a diverse range and scale of employees, customers, competitors and external stakeholders. Thus, they have practical experience as managers, teachers and researchers. They have both ability to shape the resource allocation decisions and strategy of the university and to maintain (if they wish) roots in all three communities: managerial practice, teaching and research. Academic administrators play a key role in addressing the relevance gap.

We know that the experience of leaders has an impact on the performance of universities, schools of business and their students. Academic university Presidents, have been shown to have a positive impact on the research performance of universities (Goodall, 2009), and upon both student retention and graduation rates (Wesley, 2014). This experience gives Presidents a better understanding of the context in which universities operate, enabling them to design and implement more effective strategies than Presidents that do not have an academic background. More broadly, we believe that there may be value in academic leaders, including Presidents, Deans and Heads of Schools, continuing to teach whilst leading. We explore four possible reasons why leading whilst teaching may have performance impacts.

First, legitimacy. Leaders whom teach are seeking to be seen as legitimate by students, faculty and external stakeholders. They lead organisations that say teaching matters and they follow up on this by taking their most scarce resource, their time, and dedicating it to teaching.

Second, environmental knowledge leads to more effective governance. Balkin and Mello (2012) have five domains that academic leaders can take action within to improve the teaching capabilities of faculty and balance the relationships between teaching and research. Leaders that teach understand at a practical level what the teaching environment is like within their institution and the relationships between teaching, research, service and the resources available and applied to each. This practical knowledge of the teaching environment in their institution provides important contextual knowledge within which they can create the governance changes that Balkin and Mello recommend, or those recommended by others in the literature.

Third, leading can make you a better teacher. The literature argues that teachers ought to be research led and explores if being an effective researcher can make you a better teacher (or not). This debate of separateness, synchronicity or even synergy between teaching and research is well explored. There is little if any discussion on whether or not leading in an institution has an impact on that person’s teaching capabilities. An academic leader is a practicing manager. They got to their position on the basis of a research expertise. They are therefore the nexus of practice and academia. Just as a practicing manager takes a PhD and becomes an industry-research engaged teacher, so a PhD whom teaches and then becomes a practicing manager within their institution can be a research-management engaged teacher.

Fourth, the joy and escape of teaching. This is a fundamental aspect of leading whilst teaching. Many of us enter this profession because we love to teach. Fundamentally we want to be connected to teaching. It brings us joy. It is an escape from the demands of faculty lobbying for resources, or other benefits. It is a space within which we remain connected with the core of our profession – teaching – and is thus a fountain from which we as leaders are refreshed and willing to contribute to the development of our institutions.

**GENERAL DISCUSSSION OVERVIEW**

The structure of the session will be a talk by each person on the core reason why the lead and teach and to then widen the discussion to the impact of that decision on legitimacy, governance, improving as a teacher and maintaining balance in stressful leadership positions. Along the way we seek to draw the wider faculty group into a discussion about what they think the benefits or costs of leading whilst teaching. We will also have mentorship opportunities for those thinking about leading within their institution and how they can keep their teaching alive and valuable during this leadership process.

**SESSION DESCRIPTION**

Speakers will offer their perspective on the following questions:

1. What are the benefits and costs to the institution of academic leaders teaching?
2. Why do I choose to teach (or not) whilst being an academic leader?
3. What advice would I offer an institution or an individual when thinking about teaching whilst leading?

The audience are central to this session. Each leader is looking for insights from the audience on the position they take regarding teaching whilst leading. Some of us have made the decision to step back from senior university leadership roles to concentrate more on our teaching and research; some have chosen to step back from teaching whilst leading; whilst others have chosen to continue to teach whilst leading. We do not say one choice is better than another. We would like to learn from the community what they think about the performance impacts of each of these decisions.

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| **Time** | **Purpose** | **Presenter(s)** |
| 0-5 minutes | Introduction to the purpose of the session |  |
| 5-25 minutes | Benefits and costs of teaching whilst leading at a university level. | University President  University Dean of Teaching and Learning |
| 25-35 minutes | Feedback and discussion with audience | Audience |
| 35-55 minutes | Benefits and costs of teaching whilst leading at a School of Business level. | Two Heads of Business Schools from Europe and the USA |
| 55 to 65 minutes | Feedback and discussion with audience | Audience |
| 65 to 75 minutes | Moving between roles: leading and teaching simultaneously and sequentially | Faculty member whom has served as a Head of School |
| 75 to 90 minutes | Roundtable discussion between audience and individual leaders | Break-outs where audience meet with individual presenters to share perspectives |

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