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What's Your Brand? An exercise for identifying, communicating, and developing a leadership brand.**ABSTRACT**

Identifying and articulating one's leadership brand helps to communicate one's value proposition to followers, customers, investors, and colleagues. Helping undergraduate management students identify their values, intentions, strengths, and challenges relative to leadership is a learning outcome embedded in our undergraduate leadership courses. We offer a fun, engaging activity focused on leadership that allows us to be teaching agents for positive change – that change is to help students identify and articulate their “leadership brand.” In this MOBTS session, participants will create and explain a visual collage that pictorially captures their leadership brand.

Key Words: leadership brand, management education, experiential learning

What's Your Brand? An exercise for identifying, communicating, and developing a leadership brand.

A leadership brand results when leaders understand what they want to accomplish, develop consistent means of pursuing their goals, and work to build attributes that align with the achievement of these goals (Intagliata, Ulrich, & Smallwood, 2000). According to Ulrich (2000), everyone has a personal brand, but a leadership brand conveys one's identity and distinctiveness as a leader. A leadership brand reflects one's priorities, values, behavioral intentions, and what one hopes to consistently deliver to one's constituents (Horth, 2017). According to Ulrich (1996), branding one's leadership involves "turning aspirations into action" (p. 218).

So, how might management educators help students identify and articulate their leadership brand? The process begins with discovery. To develop a leadership brand, students must be aware of their values, goals, strengths, and challenges. In class, we start this process by having students complete multiple self-assessments relative to leadership throughout the semester. Examples of self-assessment topics include emotional intelligence, value clarification, listening skills, resistance to change, motivation to lead, leadership styles, and personality. By completing these self-assessments, students build an awareness of their values and goals along with their strengths and challenges relative to influencing others. The process of creating a leadership brand also entails reflection, an essential part of experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Students reflect upon their experiences as leaders and as followers and identify practices and behaviors that align with leadership theory, foster strong relationships, and contribute to leadership success. Over the course of the semester, students clarify their vision of the ideal leader through the creation of a personal philosophy of leadership, develop a greater understanding of the attributes they possess that align and contrasts with their vision and philosophy of leadership, identify behavioral examples of their strengths in action, and develop

an action plan for addressing their leadership challenges. This process culminates in the creation of a leadership brand poster presentation where student share in class their leadership brand in terms of their leadership philosophy, leadership strengths, and leadership challenges.

Having students present their brand visually capitalizes on their creativity and promotes student autonomy (Fuller, 2000). Furthermore, images can be powerful representations of ideas and may help students more effectively communicate their thoughts in a concise manner. Poster presentations help engage students in the learning process and promote positive attitudes in students (Barry & Huston, 1995). Finally, poster presentations can help reduce speaking anxiety among students (Prichard & Ferris, 2014).

Developed for a face-to-face undergraduate leadership class, this semester-long exercise could also be used in a graduate leadership class or an introductory management or organizational behavior class at the undergraduate level. For MOBTS, the submission primarily focuses on the final phase of the exercise – creating a poster presentation that summarizes one’s leadership brand. However, we will devote some time to reflecting upon and articulating participants’ leadership philosophy as well as participants’ strengths and challenges.

Learning Objectives

The specific learning objectives for the final phase of the exercise and this MOBTS submission include the following:

- Through reflection, create a personal philosophy of leadership statement which includes a detailed description of one’s behavioral intentions regarding how to influence followers to achieve individual and organizational objectives.
- Identify three to five strengths that align with one’s leadership philosophy
- Identify three to five challenges that might hinder one’s leadership effectiveness.

- Create a visual representation summarizing one's leadership brand
- Communicate one's leadership brand

Exercise Overview

Participants will be asked to reflect on their leadership philosophy using prompts. Sample prompts include the following: What are the values that I believe are most important when it comes to leading others? What are my most important priorities when it comes to leading others? How might I ideally influence followers to achieve individual and organizational objectives? What would I like my followers to say about me as their leader after I'm gone? Next, they will need to consider how their strengths align with their leadership philosophy, and what individual challenges might hinder their effectiveness as a leader. After completing this reflection, participants will spend time locating clip art and pictures that capture their leadership brand (philosophy, strengths, and challenges). Next, using poster board, clip art, glue sticks, markers, and other materials provided, participants will be asked to create a collage visually depicting their leadership philosophy, leadership strengths, and leadership challenges. After creating the collage, in small groups, participants will explain their collage to their groupmates. During the debriefing, we will discuss the learning achieved through the process of creating a visual depiction of their leadership brand with the group as a whole.

Session Description

A 90-minute session is requested with time allocated as follows:

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| Introductions and Assignment Overview | 10 | minutes |
| Leadership Philosophy Reflection | 15 | minutes |
| Locate images that represent own philosophy | 15 | minutes |
| Construct Leadership Collage | 15 - 20 | minutes |
| Share collage in small groups | 15 - 20 | minutes |
| Debrief | 10 - 15 | minutes |
| Total time | 80 - 90 | minutes |

We will provide materials for the collage (e.g., glue, markers, photos, clip art, poster board, tape, etc.). A classroom with movable chairs and wall space for displaying the posters is necessary.

This activity has not been presented before nor has it been submitted to a journal.

References

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