

## How Should a Leadership Practicum Course Be Designed?

**Abstract:** This roundtable discussion would focus on how a practicum course in leadership should be designed and taught, both in a classroom setting and remotely. As with any practicum course, the intention of a leadership practicum course is to allow practical application of the leadership principles taught. To begin this roundtable discussion, we would engage participants in discussions around the following questions: What are the intended learning objectives of a leadership practicum course? What assessment activities should a leadership practicum course include? How can these learning objectives be achieved in a face-to-face course? How can they be achieved in an online course? Following these discussions, we would explain the structure for an asynchronous online leadership practicum course that we have used at our university. We would then seek participant feedback on how well this asynchronous course meets the learning objectives identified by participants at the session.

**Keywords:** leadership courses; practicum courses; course design

## **Introduction**

A practicum course at a university provides students with an opportunity to allow practical application of the course material using a setting that closely resembles professional practice. This practicum course takes on many forms, depending on the discipline and the university. It may include “field experience, cooperative education, sandwich program, internship, clerkship, clinical practicum” and other variations (Ryan, Toohey, & Hughes, 1996, p. 355).

Academic programs in leadership often include a practicum course as a means to allow students to apply leadership principles (Diallo & Gerhart, 2017). But what are the intended learning objectives of a leadership practicum course? What assessment activities should a leadership practicum course include? How can these learning objectives be achieved in a face-to-face course? How can they be achieved in an online course?

The intended outcome of this roundtable discussion would be to address these and other related questions as they pertain to leadership practicum courses offered in programs of management and organizational behavior. We anticipate the audience for this session at MOBTS would consist of those who currently teach leadership courses or practicum courses, and those who are considering offering a practicum course as part of their leadership major or minor course offerings.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

A leadership practicum course ideally should be grounded in a conceptual framework or model. The relational leadership model, developed by Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998), is

one possible theoretical framework upon which a leadership practicum course may be built. The relational leadership model emphasizes leadership as a process of understanding self (values, beliefs, and commitments) and understanding others (groups, teams, organizations, communities) where self-awareness is central to this process” (Raffo, 2012, pp. 40-41). The unique aspect of this framework is its 5 key elements of leadership: Purposeful, Inclusive, Empowering, Ethical, and Process-Oriented. Each of these elements can apply to a leadership practicum course.

### **Session Description**

To begin this roundtable discussion at MOBTS, we would spend a few minutes introducing the topic of practicum courses in higher education and establishing a uniform understanding of the purpose and definition of a practicum course.

After this introduction, we would engage participants in small- or large-group discussions around the following questions:

- What are the intended learning objectives of a leadership practicum course?
- What assessment activities should a leadership practicum course include?
- How can these learning objectives be achieved in a face-to-face course?
- How can they be achieved in an online course?

Depending on the number of participants who join the session, we would either address these questions with all participants jointly in a large-group discussion, or we would use breakout rooms in Zoom to address these questions in a small-group setting. If breakout rooms are employed to conduct small-group discussions, we would engage participants in a large-group

discussion following the breakouts to identify and record the learning objectives revealed by the breakout groups.

Following these discussions, we would explain the structure for an asynchronous online leadership practicum course that has been used for several semesters at our university (see Appendix A). We would then seek participant feedback on how well this asynchronous course meets the learning objectives identified by participants at the session.

We expect this session could work well in a 60-minute time frame allotted by MOBTS for roundtable discussions. We anticipate the session would generate lively discussion about the purpose and design of not only a leadership practicum course, but any practicum course related to management or organizational behavior.

### References

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## **Appendix A: An Asynchronous Leadership Practicum Course**

### Learning Objectives:

At the conclusion of the course, students will be able to do the following:

- Explain the major leadership theories and approaches
- Describe their own leadership style using the major theories and approaches
- Identify and present about current issues related to leadership
- Mentor others in describing their leadership styles

### Unit 1: Leadership Theories & Approaches

Using the Northouse (2018) book *Leadership*, students study 11 leadership approaches and theories and reflect on how closely these approaches and theories match the students' current leadership styles. The objective of this unit of the course is for students to answer the following question commonly asked in job interviews: "Describe your leadership style." Students discuss these approaches and theories on weekly asynchronous discussion boards. They complete a summary of these approaches and theories as an assignment submitted to Canvas. They culminate this unit of the course with a "Leadership Style Assignment" that requires a student to submit a detailed written description of his or her current leadership style, along with an action plan that explains how the student will further develop his or her leadership style into the future. Each student also submits a 1-page Canva document that describes his or her leadership style in a visually appealing way that is attached to his or her LinkedIn account.

### Unit 2: Leadership Issues

Students study the remaining chapters of the Northouse (2018) book that focus on leadership issues of team leadership, ethics in leadership, gender and leadership, and leadership and culture. Students prepare Loom presentations on these topics and discuss them on asynchronous discussion boards. Each student also prepares a separate Loom presentation on a leadership topic not previously discussed in the course and shares this with classmates on a discussion board.

### Unit 3: Leadership Practicum Project

The final unit of the course allows students to mentor 2 of their university peers in answering the same question the students answered in Unit 1: “Describe your leadership style.” Using their knowledge gained from studying the Northouse book, including the document they created that summarized the major approaches and theories, students pair up with 2 current students at the university to help them each create a 1-page Canva document that summarizes their leadership styles. One of the 2 mentees is assigned to each student; the students choose the second mentee on their own. These Canva documents are posted to the mentees’ LinkedIn accounts and uploaded to the course learning management system for grading.