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## Integrative and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Leadership Development

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While the preceding chapters explored the role of cognitive processes in leadership development, this chapter posits that it is no longer sufficient for leaders to develop cognitive complexity in only one or two disciplines if they are expected to address complex problems. Rather, if leadership is going to address systemic social issues such as global poverty or environmental challenges, leaders must be capable of multimodal thinking and be educated in *interdisciplinary*, *integrative*, and *intentional* ways. Fink's (2003, 2013) taxonomy of significant learning positions integration, which encompasses interdisciplinary learning, learning communities, and connecting academic work with other areas of life, as one of the realms of significant learning. Exploring diverse conceptions of leadership across different disciplines, perspectives, and epistemologies is imperative if leaders are to operate in a global and networked world. Interdisciplinary and integrative leadership courses and digital learning communities are featured examples.

### Leadership Development as Interdisciplinary Learning

There is an emerging consensus that leadership, specifically the emerging discipline of leadership studies, is interdisciplinary in nature (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2013; Riggio, 2013; Riggio & Harvey, 2012). As Rost (1993) predicted in his seminal book *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*:

Looking at leadership through the lens of a single discipline has not worked well in the past and it will not work any better in the future. Indeed, a case could be made that the organizations and societies of the future, with their

collaborative, community, and global orientations, may not be hospitable to a concept of leadership that is grounded in only one academic discipline. (p. 182)

Although leadership educators should acknowledge that the study and practice of leadership has its roots in numerous disciplines—the study of persuasion in communication, of motivation and influence in psychology, of management and organizations in business, of social movements in history, to name a few—there is general agreement that leadership development now requires learning from multiple disciplines and perspectives. It is not enough to learn or practice leadership in isolation from context. Some argue that leadership development should adopt a *multi-disciplinary* approach to leadership because “it develops a shared understanding of differences and commonalities in leadership principles and practices across professions and cultures” (Komives et al., 2013, p. 6). Others prefer the terms *inter-disciplinary* or *trans-disciplinary*, which imply greater integration and connection across “different kinds of information, perspectives, and methods of inquiry and analysis—all in order to develop a more holistic understanding of a problem or issue” (Fink, 2003, p. 43).

There are multiple definitions and drivers of interdisciplinarity, yet all involve the integration of knowledge and modes of thinking from two or more fields of study for the purposes of addressing questions in ways that would not be possible through the lens of a single discipline (Boix Mansilla & Gardner, 1997; Haynes, 2003; Klein 1990, 2002, 2005). Klein (2005) cites three catalysts for the rise of interdisciplinarity, including the knowledge explosion that resulted in increasing fragmentation of knowledge into subspecialties; complex problems demanding people to draw on multiple sources and kinds of knowledge; and educational reform that embraced pedagogies such as problem-based learning, team teaching, and other collaborations across disciplines. The benefits of interdisciplinary approaches to curricular and cocurricular leadership education are many. The world needs leaders who can synthesize knowledge across seemingly disparate fields and draw conclusions by combining examples, facts, and theories from more than one field of study (Rhodes, 2010). Navigating the “permanent whitewater” of the rapidly changing world requires leaders and leadership educators who can integrate theory and application, scholarship and intuition, and tradition and innovation (Vaill, 1996).

Many leadership studies programs address interdisciplinarity by having required courses offered from a variety of different academic departments. For example, the Ohio State University offers an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor in Leadership Studies that “provides students with knowledge of leadership theories, principles, and concepts to better prepare for success in future professional roles” (<http://leadershipcenter.osu.edu/about-us/leadership-studies-minor>). The minor is structured to include course options from a myriad of departments including communication,

engineering, kinesiology, management, military science, philosophy, psychology, public affairs, and sociology. Courses are clustered into four categories and students must take at least one course in each category, as well as complete a practical capstone experience. The categories include theories and principles of personal leadership, team and organizational leadership, community leadership, and ethics and diversity. In this manner, students are allowed choice and latitude in their selection of courses and can personalize their leadership studies degree to match their interests.

Interdisciplinary approaches to leadership education can be fraught with challenges. As students are exposed to wide variety of learning goals and diverse epistemological orientations to the nature and purpose of knowledge, it can be challenging to form a coherent framework about leadership studies. Without purposeful integrative assignments and reflection, students may struggle to articulate connections across disciplinary views of leadership. Students must be intentionally encouraged to integrate, interrogate, and synthesize learning from diverse perspectives or leadership learning may be disjointed and even erroneous.

Additionally, there are structural challenges to designing and maintaining an interdisciplinary leadership program. University and departmental structures such as curriculum committees may be challenging to navigate, and creating a coherent curriculum with shared learning goals and developmental approaches to leadership education may be impossible. Maintaining commitments across numerous departments can be challenging, especially when facing leadership or faculty transitions. Cocurricular leadership educators may wrestle with facilitating leadership theories and approaches outside of educators' own training and background and instead only design programs based on familiarity.

Despite these challenges, the news is not all grim. Interdisciplinary approaches to leadership education invite students to be "aware of complex interdependencies, able to synthesize learning from a wide array of sources, to learn from experience, and to make productive connections between theory and practice" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 3). Chapter 1 of this volume offered examples of what deeper, more sustained leadership learning could look like. Interdisciplinarity is one lever for deeper learning. Roberts (2007) articulates the power of interdisciplinary leadership education and cross-campus partnerships to transform not only students, but the academy itself:

Because the study of leadership is so dependent on many disciplines and perspectives, exciting possibilities arise—for example, could leadership educators actually help refine or create new models for the generation and integration of knowledge in the academy? . . . Such joint efforts between faculty and staff could demonstrate the power of curricular and co-curricular engagement that is likely to transform the quality of learning in collegiate education in the future. (pp. 35–36)

## Leadership Development as Integrative Learning

In the last decade there have been movements to distinguish *interdisciplinary* approaches, which mainly focus on generalizing and connecting current forms of knowledge, with *integrative* approaches, which focus on constructing new knowledge and raising epistemological questions about the nature and sources of knowledge (Klein, 2005). Integration of learning, and of leadership learning, is necessary in order to move past the increasingly fragmented, piecemeal, and haphazard approaches to undergraduate education. However, there are a wide variety of approaches to integration, many of which intentionally connect processes of reflection and metacognition. The Association of American Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U) *Statement on Integrative Learning* (Huber & Hutchings, 2004) describes several hallmarks of integrative learning, including "connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying theory to practice in various settings; utilizing diverse and even contradictory points of view; and understanding issues and positions contextually" (p. 13). AAC&U has developed a rubric for assessing integrative learning that defines integrative learning "as an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new complex situations within and beyond the campus" (Rhodes, 2010, p. 1).

Examples of integrative approaches include linked courses, integrated general education experiences, capstone projects, learning communities, team teaching, civic engagement, service learning, first-year experiences, bridge programs, and peer mentoring (Huber, Hutchings, & Gale, 2005). Many of these integrative approaches to learning have also been identified as high-impact practices (HIPs) in education that promote deep learning and self-reported personal and practical gains (Kuh, 2008). Each of these HIPs leverages faculty–student interaction, academic challenge, and active, collaborative learning. Additionally, many of these integrative approaches have been shown to positively affect leadership learning and development (Dugan, Kodama, Correia, & Associates, 2013). For more on HIPs in leadership development, see chapter 6 in this volume.

Effective leadership education should similarly incorporate these levers of integrative learning. Table 4.1 offers examples of how to link principles of integrative learning to leadership education and development.

Integrative approaches to leadership explicitly connect academic study with the rest of one's life. Integrative leadership development does not distinguish between curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular. Indeed, Palmer and Zajonc (2010) assert that "integrative education aims to 'think the world together' than to 'think it apart', to know the world in a way that empowers educated people to act on behalf of wholeness rather than fragmentation" (p. 22). If leadership educators want to create leaders who make

**Table 4.1 Connecting Hallmarks of Integrative Learning to Leadership Education and Development**

<i>Hallmarks of Integrative Learning</i>	<i>Example in Leadership Education and Development</i>
<b>Connections to experience</b> —connects relevant experience and academic knowledge	Students should be able to <i>synthesize</i> connections among experiences <i>outside the leadership classroom</i> (including life experiences such as civic and off-campus involvement, family life, artistic expression, cocurricular experiences, and other academic experiences such as internships and study abroad) to <i>deepen understanding</i> of leadership and broaden one's own philosophy and approach to leadership.
<b>Connections to discipline</b> —makes connections across disciplines and perspectives	Students should be able to <i>combine examples, facts, and theories from more than one field or perspective of leadership study</i> . For example, student should understand when a behavioral approach to leadership might be more effective than an influence-based approach, and vice versa.
<b>Transfer</b> —adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations	Students should be able to <i>adapt and apply leadership skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one context to a new situation</i> in order to solve difficult problems or explore complex issues in original ways. For example, student learns resilience from leading a project that was unsuccessful and applies that resilience to a campaign for a campus leadership position.
<b>Integrated communication</b> —communicates in ways that enhance meaning and demonstrate the interdependence of language, thought, and expression	Student can communicate effectively across multiple formats and forms of expression—from visual, digital, evidence-based, written, and oral—and <i>adapt thoughts to diverse audiences and contexts</i> . For example, student prepares a digital portfolio to demonstrate leadership learning and includes multiple forms of evidence such as videos of a speech, a written paper, an artistic expression of an opinion, etc.
<b>Reflection and self-assessment</b> —demonstrates a developing sense of self as a learner, building on prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts	Student <i>recognizes that leadership development is a lifelong process and can evaluate changes in leadership learning over time</i> , recognize complex contextual factors such as organizational and ethical considerations, and plan for future development to increase leadership competence and confidence.

Source: Adapted from Rhodes (2010).

connections across silos, structures, and disparate activities, they need to be practicing integrative leadership development.

One example of an integrative approach to leadership development is the University of Minnesota's integrative leadership minor: [http://www.leadership.umn.edu/education/integrative\\_leadership\\_minor.html](http://www.leadership.umn.edu/education/integrative_leadership_minor.html). The minor is designed to create integrative connections and "to train future leaders to bridge institutional, geographical and national boundaries to address social, economic and political challenges" (accessed at [http://www.leadership.umn.edu/education/integrative\\_leadership\\_minor.html](http://www.leadership.umn.edu/education/integrative_leadership_minor.html), para. 1). The program also aligns multiple campus and community partners including the Center for Integrative Leadership, a joint venture between the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, Carlson School of Management, College of Education and Human Development, and the School of Public Health. Courses and academic learning communities offer training in leadership theory and civic engagement, and conclude with a seminar to stimulate students to apply their knowledge by developing ideas to resolve real-world case studies. Laura Bloomberg, executive director, Center for Integrative Leadership, University of Minnesota, offers the following as rationale for the integrative leadership minor:

We will never be able to solve our biggest societal challenges by working in silos. The future will require leaders who understand the need to work across disciplines and boundaries to craft solutions. This program has the potential to change the way we prepare those future leaders here at the University of Minnesota. (accessed at [http://www.leadership.umn.edu/education/integrative\\_leadership\\_minor.html](http://www.leadership.umn.edu/education/integrative_leadership_minor.html), para. 3)

## Leadership Development as Intentional Learning

No leadership educator can be successful in today's educational climate without their ability to show impact. Intentionality is essential in the design of learning communities, in developmental advising and mentoring, in the use formative assessment to gauge student learning as it is happening, and use of summative assessment to inform future leadership learning. Palmer and Zajonc (2010) underscore the challenge of balancing intentionality and spontaneity:

Integrative forms of teaching and learning must have clear intentionality and trajectory, employing pedagogical designs that will take us and our students somewhere worth going. . . . Doing integrative education well depends on our capacity to hold a paradox: we must open free space for the unpredictable and enforce an educative order. (p. 39)

One way to consider intentionality in leadership learning is to ponder the question "leadership for what purpose?". Though there are many

possible responses and in *Learning as a Way of Leading: Lessons From the Struggle for Social Justice*, Preskill and Brookfield (2009) note that any consideration of leadership learning is dependent on a number of dispositions, capacities, and public practices. Their nine learning tasks of leadership are presented in Table 4.2 with accompanying reflection questions that invite students of leadership to critically reflect on how they are putting learning at the center of their leadership efforts.

Intentionality need not occur at the expense of innovation. Indeed, leadership education should be “adventuresome, exploratory, and discovery-oriented,” meaning we should be embracing change and innovation while simultaneously setting intentions (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 39). The optimal balance among thoughtful pedagogical design, scaffolded learning, and risk-taking is up to each leadership educator. Experimental, technology-infused, and experiential approaches can invite intellectual curiosity and leadership. Christensen (2000) describes how processes of “disruptive innovation” evolve from simple grassroots applications and result in transformative change. Similarly, Heifetz (1994), director of Harvard’s Center for Public Leadership, describes leadership as adaptive work, stating that leadership is “mobilizing people to tackle tough problems” (p. 15). Many are answering the ‘leadership for what purpose?’ question with an avowal of leadership as the intersection of intentionality, innovation, and shared public problem solving. This view “flows from a growing disillusionment with traditional, top-down, hierarchical models that dictate to, rather than work with, real people in real communities trying to find solutions to real problems” (Longo & Gibson, 2011, p. 3).

Intentional approaches to leadership development are especially apparent in integrative online learning (Cambridge, Cambridge, & Blake Yancey, 2009). Universities such as Fort Hays State and Gonzaga University, among others, offer fully online majors, minors, and certificates in leadership studies. These programs go far beyond merely providing access to leadership studies content. Instead, they use a wide variety of digital tools to create virtual learning communities that allow students to personalize learning, connect in meaningful ways with peers and faculty, apply theory to practice through case studies and digital simulations, assess leadership growth and development, and more. As leadership educators work to prepare students to be responsive to global, national, and local concerns, and to work across sectors and disciplines, new approaches to inquiry and knowledge creation must be considered.

## Conclusion

In the face of increasing disciplinary specialization, shifting student enrollment patterns, and the accumulation of complex problems, “fostering students’ abilities to integrate learning—across courses, over time, and between campus and community life—is one of the most important goals and

**Table 4.2 Critically Reflecting on the Learning Tasks of Leadership**

<i>Nine Learning Tasks of Leadership</i>	<i>Questions for Critical Reflection</i>
Learning how to be open to the contributions of others	What leadership knowledge, skills, and habits have you learned from collaborating with others? How open are you to alternative perspectives and creating space for dialogue and deliberation? What happened the last time you engaged in deep listening rather than putting forth your own perspective?
Learning how to critically reflect on one's practice	How often do you consider (and react to) issues of power, power relations, and equitable distribution of power in your leadership? Where does hegemony come into play (i.e., the dominance of one way of thinking)? To what extent are you aware of how you and those you serve may internalize ideas, beliefs, and values that may be undermining democratic outcomes? How do you support the agency of others? How are you supporting colleagues or community members in gaining meaningful control over their own work, learning, and lives?
Learning how to support the growth of others	How are you increasing the capacity of others to be active participants in the life of their community, movement, or organizations? Where are you seeing silence or withdrawal happen? What strategies do you use to stay curious about the lives of others? To ask constructive questions? To learn the stories of your collaborators?
Learning how to develop collective leadership	Where are you challenging the myth of heroic, self-sufficient, and individualistic leadership? How are you working with others to create a shared vision? Are you willing to subordinate your own aims to the group's goals and interests?
Learning how to analyze experience	To what extent are your experiences shaped by forces under your control as opposed to forces that transcend your immediate circumstances? How does your understanding of your experiences change as you adopt different lenses for examining them? Which leadership experiences invite repetition and which encourage avoidance?
Learning how to question oneself and others	How do you move beyond asking rote questions to ones that invite discovery and wonder? How might you use questions to critique and assess shared accomplishments? How might you use questions to "unpack platitudes and deconstruct conventional wisdom"?



**Table 4.2 Continued**

<i>Nine Learning Tasks of Leadership</i>	<i>Questions for Critical Reflection</i>
Learning to live democratically	How is leadership (putting energies and talents toward collective goals) an inherent civic responsibility? How is leadership (participating fully and having an equal opportunity to influence the outcomes of deliberations) an inherent right? Where do you invite democratic dialogue, responsive to each community member's needs and concerns?
Learning to sustain hope in the face of struggle	How is hope a necessary precondition for social change? For leadership? How do you sustain hope over time? How do you use dissent to illuminate shortcomings and consequences of decisions? To what extent do you share examples of ordinary people doing extraordinary things?
Learning to create community	How does your community embody each of the principles described above? How are you harnessing the power of collective thought and action in order to transform society? How do communities invite redistribution of resources? Shared authority and accountability?

Source: Adapted from Preskill & Brookfield (2009).

challenges of higher education” (Huber & Hutchings, 2004, p. 13). Many leadership educators were perhaps attracted to leadership studies because leadership can be a kind of through-line or connection point for students across the fragmented landscape of higher education courses, online learning, cocurricular experiences, and career development. When done in intentional, integrative, and interdisciplinary ways, leadership education and development can be a synthesizing force that invites students to connect cognitive, affective, and leadership learning; to develop habits of mind that invite diverse perspectives and multiple lenses on any situation; to value the processes of discovery and inquiry; and to connect multiple theories to diverse practices and contexts.

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