

## Proposal to ISLC 2014

### Presentation: Advancing relevance and rigor in 21<sup>st</sup> Century leadership pedagogy through a “blended learning” experiment

Robert D. Austin, Professor  
Copenhagen Business School  
[ra.mpp@cbs.dk](mailto:ra.mpp@cbs.dk)

Shannon Hessel (O'Donnell), Assistant Professor  
Copenhagen Business School  
[she.mpp@cbs.dk](mailto:she.mpp@cbs.dk)

Business schools all over the world claim educating leaders as a primary objective. Consider these from the “mission statements” of prominent players:

- “We educate leaders who make a difference in the world” (Harvard Business School),
- “...to develop innovative, principled, and insightful leaders” (Stanford Graduate School of Business),
- “Through teaching, we develop responsible, thoughtful leaders” (INSEAD)

At the same time, however, there have been many claims that business schools have not delivered on these commitments. Just two weeks ago, Robert Reich, a former US Treasury Secretary, criticized Harvard Business School for “inculcating in [its graduates] a set of ideas and principles that have resulted in a pay gap between CEOs and ordinary workers that’s gone from 20-to-1 fifty years ago to almost 300-to-1 today,” implying that social ills have been a direct result of the content and nature of the school’s leadership training.<sup>1</sup> David Brookes, writing in the New York Times on September 22 suggests we are experiencing a “leadership crisis” in today’s world.<sup>2</sup> There is a pressing need for leadership pedagogy to (continue to) evolve, especially in business schools. Progress needs to be made in terms of content, but also, in this time of MOOCs and advancing educational technologies on every front, in terms of modes of delivery.

We propose to present a multi-faceted experiment in the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership pedagogy in which we are currently engaged. The experiment employs a blended learning approach in which students take an active role in organizing their learning experience. Content delivery (lectures, videos, readings) is accessed through an online platform. Class time is spent on group dialogue and debate, case analysis and discussion, exercises, conversations with guest leaders, and the collaborative generation of leadership theory. Simultaneous with this course, a MOOC is in development that will soon run in parallel with live classroom sessions, offering opportunities for students and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://robertreich.org/post/97357974470>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/23/opinion/david-brooks-snap-out-of-it.html>

teachers to explore opportunities for bridging the live and virtual spaces and broadening our collective inquiry.

Our presentation will elaborate on the ways in which we apply an inductive approach to developing leadership theory together with students in order to rigorously challenge 20<sup>th</sup> century-based leadership assumptions and generate insights better suited to our emerging and future context. We will report on the course curriculum design and on student evaluations and feedback to date.

We will also present material we have generated to enable us to better explore the often difficult-to-access inter-personal and ethical dynamics involved in leadership. To pursue this, we leverage the “extended narrative” approach for teaching leadership which we developed in prior leadership curriculum.<sup>3</sup> This approach enables students to experience and evaluate the “hero”/leader’s actions along an episodic journey, and gives special access to the social and relational dynamics involved in leadership dilemmas. To advance this pedagogical approach, we scripted and produced (with a cast of professional actors) scenes in which our hero-leader engages with his senior leadership team, the board of directors, advisors, and the press. These dramatizations form the foundation from which discussion and theoretical insights emerge in the (live or virtual) classroom.

These pedagogical experiments in both content and mode of delivery constitute our current best efforts to address the urgent need for rigor, relevance and responsibility in leadership practice, and in the education of our future leaders.

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<sup>3</sup> Austin, Robert D., Richard L. Nolan and Shannon O’Donnell. (2009). The Technology Manager’s Journey: An Extended Narrative Approach to Educating Technical Leaders. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8 (3): 337-355.