

**Context Matters:  
An Interdisciplinary Studies Interpretation of the  
National Leadership Education Research Agenda**

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**Abstract**

This perspective piece addresses specifically future lines of inquiry and practice that advance the goals of the agenda through an interdisciplinary approach to leadership studies. Here, the authors explain in-depth the contexts of an interdisciplinary approach to the agenda and address specific challenges therein. In order to provide clarity to this approach, considerations are made with respect to the language, contextual reference points, and tensions regarding measurement of learning. The authors provide impetus for inclusion of particular, salient priorities from the agenda, and address opportunities for practice and future research. Suggestions reveal unique opportunities within an interdisciplinary perspective such as the integration of diverse content and perspectives as well as collaboration across disciplines.

**Introduction**

The National Leadership Education Research Agenda (NLERA) presents a complex and thoughtful summary of the current “state-of-play” in the evolution of the broad literature that informs leadership education. It also offers critiques and recommendations designed to promote theory development, empirical research, and educational practice to more fully realize the potential impact of leadership education programs. However, like any document of its type attempting to advance a field of study, its effectiveness will largely lie in the degree to which the varying disciplinary homes in which leadership, scholarship and education take place are able to translate its content to practice.

The translation of NLERA into *interdisciplinary* contexts is of particular importance given this is the birthplace of so many leadership programs as well as a critical point of delivery for leadership education (Morris & Seeman, 1950; Riggio, 2011a). In many ways, the NLERA is well suited for an interdisciplinary environment as it was constructed from a range of disciplinary perspectives. The NLERA also offers a compass providing potential trajectory for

interdisciplinary considerations in the study and delivery of leadership education. The purpose of this article is to examine ways in which the enactment of NLER in an interdisciplinary context elicits particular challenges and opportunities as well as how best to address these.

### **What Defines an Interdisciplinary Approach to Leadership?**

Interdisciplinarity is an approach to learning that involves setting academic disciplines in dialogue with one another to adequately address the complex issues and problems of our world. Likewise, interdisciplinary courses expand and cross “boundaries” of what are often separate areas of thought and study. As expressed in the *University of Southern Maine’s, Lewiston-Auburn College: Employee Handbook for Faculty and Staff (USM-LAC Handbook)*, sometimes this most simply involves the use of materials from multiple academic fields, keeping one disciplinary approach “primary.” In other instances, methods, concepts, and applications from multiple disciplines will be brought together in a complementary manner to address different facets of a topic. Accordingly, interdisciplinary leadership studies keeps the study of leadership as the primary focus and is informed by myriad academic fields. Moreover, leadership studies is mostly composed of scholars who are primarily trained in a single, specific discipline—the majority of whose advanced degrees are outside leadership or leadership studies (Jenkins, 2012)—while much of the work that is done in studying leadership crosses disciplinary lines (Riggio, 2011b, p. 15). Likewise, Riggio, Ciulla, and Sorenson (2003), among others, have argued that, “the study of leadership is not limited to a single discipline.” They continue:

Correspondingly, faculty from a plethora of disciplines have contributed to research and education in leadership. In the same way that one cannot do competent research in leadership without surveying literature across multiple disciplines, it is very difficult to teach leadership from a single disciplinary view. (p. 228)

The review of literature discussing interdisciplinary approaches to leadership studies and education suggests more of a hodgepodge of approaches (e.g., Harvey & Riggio, 2011), tireless lists of learning outcomes that can only be addressed by an interdisciplinary approach (e.g., White, 2006), and conceptual work that promotes the approach (e.g., Colvin, 2003) rather than defines it. For example, in a critical review of the development of an interdisciplinary leadership studies program, Hackman, Olive, Guzman, and Brunson (1999) proposed that:

Leadership studies as an autonomous discipline is in its infancy, yet the study of leadership is generations old ... However, we are building new programs on a solid body of knowledge from such fields as psychology, history, organizational studies, communication studies, business management, education, and recreation studies. (p. 47)

Arguably, leadership is so complex it *requires* coursework in multiple disciplines. The unfortunate reality, however, is that many programs label themselves as interdisciplinary, while delivering a decidedly multidisciplinary curriculum. In other words, they introduce concepts from different disciplinary approaches without interrogating their assumptions or integrating across the disciplines to construct a holistic approach. Multidisciplinary approaches give voice to

multiple perspectives on leadership, but often fail to advance the integrative knowledge necessary to evolve our shared understanding of the term.

An interdisciplinary approach, however, has its share of strengths and weaknesses. An advantage of interdisciplinarity is that the approach “prompts greater appreciation of the importance of *how* one thinks about different types of problems and solutions” (USM-LAC Handbook, p. 6). Being flexible—and rigorous—in one’s examination of varied areas of inquiry and knowledge expands the intellectual and practical resources at one’s command. One of the most profound levels of learning to be offered through higher education occurs with the deepening and broadening of the range of processes with which one can formulate questions and evaluate the answers and actions available to us as individuals and as a society. Correspondingly, an interdisciplinary approach to leadership studies promotes application across contexts, exposure to multiple ideas, and the recognition of situational influences such as what leadership looks like across disciplines.

Conversely, subscribing to myriad approaches and separate areas of thought and study may create ambiguity of discipline-specific terminology, paradigms, or social constructs. Each discipline will have its own core literature and parameters where an interdisciplinary context *has* to subscribe to ambiguity. Too, an interdisciplinary approach may not necessarily go deep into one specific context; so then educators have to create experiences that allow students to practice in their “own” field of study (e.g., an internship). Grounding academic knowledge in practical reality becomes an essential component of leadership studies from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Cronin (1984) suggests that the very fact that leadership is so complex and requires investigation from multiple disciplinary perspectives is somewhat intimidating given the increasing specialization of higher education. Likewise, interdisciplinary courses raise a number of questions about the level of expertise needed in the various disciplines for a course to meet the same level of academic rigor as a single-discipline course. Professors sometimes make the mistake of trying to put too many things into an interdisciplinary course. “This allows them to skate with ease through material from a number of disciplines, but such courses run the risk of fragmentation and failure to treat subjects with sufficient depth” (Ciulla, 2011, p. 29).

### **Interpreting the Research Agenda in an Interdisciplinary Context**

A clear strength of the NLERA lies in its breadth and scope of considerations. However, when this combines with the diverse nature of interdisciplinary leadership programs, also characterized by a breadth of influences, its translation to practice can become unwieldy. To make this process more manageable, this article will avoid an analysis of each priority in the context of interdisciplinary programs and focus on a thematic analysis of the *most* salient considerations. These will be highlighted through direct connections to the research priorities and presented as over-arching challenges and opportunities for advancing the work of leadership education.

### **Contextual Challenges**

By its very nature an interdisciplinary context exposes learners to a variety of literature and pedagogies offering rich opportunities to integrate these in complex ways. As stated previously,

this is an asset that contributes to a variety of benefits ranging from gains in complex reasoning to exposure to diverse academic perspectives. However, this strength is also a contributor to numerous challenges. At the heart of this is the need to balance the breadth of disciplinary diversity with the recognition that in the subject area of leadership context matters deeply (Riggio, 2011b). These two seemingly oppositional claims must coexist in an interdisciplinary context. This contributes to at least three challenges ripe for exploration in the interpretation of the NLERA: (a) the power of language, (b) the need for contextual reference points, and (c) tensions regarding measurement of learning.

**The power of language.** Interdisciplinary programs expose students to a variety of content representing a vast array of disciplines pushing students to deconstruct and integrate varying perspectives. This is a source of richness in the approach, but it can lead to confusion on the part of learners. A challenge for leadership educators is to ensure that interdisciplinary learning contexts aid students in translating terms across disciplinary boundaries identifying semantic differences as well as points of departure based on disciplinary perspectives. This may present a challenge if the educator is unfamiliar with the disciplines' informing content. Furthermore, the advancement of NLERA goals in an interdisciplinary context requires educators to avoid multidisciplinary approaches that situate a particular disciplinary framework as dominant. This may unintentionally occur based on an educator's own academic training and/or the academic home where the interdisciplinary program resides (e.g., business, public policy, education). Thus, leadership educators working in interdisciplinary programs must become good stewards of language and the ways in which its use may confound understanding and/or privilege a particular vantage point.

The challenge of language in an interdisciplinary context is perhaps best illustrated with an example stemming from NLERA *Priority One*, which focuses on pedagogical priorities associated with teaching, learning, and curricular development. This priority addresses the need for content representing multiple disciplinary perspectives to inform leadership education. The priority specifically states that "a program architect may look to any number of research streams to help develop a 'best in class' learning experience" (Andenoro, Haber-Curran, Jenkins, Sowcik, Allen, Dugan, & Osteen, 2013, p. 6). In an interdisciplinary learning context, however, this approach would be insufficient on its own. The educator would not just select best practices, but would situate the interdisciplinarity present as a source of both content and process learning. For example, a graduate-level, interdisciplinary course on leadership might introduce four perspectives on social justice and leadership each from a different discipline (e.g., education, counseling psychology, human resources, public policy). Alignment with the NLERA would involve highlighting how each was selected based on its ability to highlight a useful discipline-specific approach each valuable in its own right. An interdisciplinary approach might do the same, but ask students to also interrogate how the infusion of social justice in each reading is a function of the particular discipline, to deconstruct strengths and limitations, and use the varied approaches to form an integrative understanding of contextual influences on social justice and leadership. The significant challenge here is to avoid resting on the laurels of multidisciplinary approaches.

Moreover, leadership has "peer disciplines" who, like it, are composed of scholars trained in various disciplines or, like public administration, are characterized by an

interdisciplinary “blending” (Riggio, 2011b). This claim is most certainly grounded in truth and central to the delivery of leadership education in an interdisciplinary context. However, we offer a point of caution here that may be uniquely interdisciplinary itself. History in general and the evolution of leadership scholarship in particular is rife with attempts to create a universal approach (Wren, 2011). Cognitively, it is appealing to have a shared language with precise definitions across disciplinary contexts. This is not to suggest that multiple definitional perspectives on terminology cannot co-exist, but clarity of intended meaning is essential to advance a cohesive body of scholarship that can be effectively translated to practice across fields and disciplines. There is a fine line, though, between crafting shared meanings that are allowed to exist within and across unique environmental contexts and a universal language. The former is central to an interdisciplinary approach while the latter challenges its base assumptions.

**The need for contextual reference points.** Because context matters deeply, interdisciplinary leadership programs must intentionally structure learning opportunities that facilitate the application of content in the specific communities of practice that individuals will enter (Ciulla, 2011, p. 31). The acquisition of interdisciplinary knowledge related to leadership on its own is insufficient if students are unable to translate that knowledge into the attitudes, skills, and behaviors needed for a specific environment. *NLERA Priority One* explicitly states the importance of designing educational interventions that contribute to both knowledge acquisition and the ability to apply that knowledge. The priority also calls for a significant increase in scholarship exploring the complex ways in which multimodal learning evolves.

The need for contextual reference points tied to particular communities of practice is essential to interdisciplinary leadership education. It also, however, represents a significant challenge given the emphasis in most of these programs on breadth of content. Contextual reference points are opportunities within interdisciplinary leadership programs that allow students to “drill down,” examining/practicing the manifestation of leadership within a particular discipline. This includes the need for practicum, internship, and laboratory experiences within individual disciplinary homes in which students can experiment with the interdisciplinary content they are learning. *NLERA Priority Four* examines the sociological development of leaders, followers, and learners, highlighting the critical importance of context in leadership learning. The authors share “learners are eager to have real-world opportunities where they can gain valuable work experience and procedural knowledge” (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 18). Yet, gaps in scholarship identifying how best to leverage student learning through contextual reference points in interdisciplinary leadership contexts make this difficult.

**Tensions regarding measurement of learning.** There exists perhaps no greater challenge in interdisciplinary leadership programs than in the process of setting learning outcomes and documenting educational gains. Hackman et al. (1999) describe the myriad challenges of interdisciplinary leadership programs including a lack of institutional structure. Pressure may be placed on interdisciplinary programs to conform to standards of learning outcome designation and measurement associated with institutional norms or those of their disciplinary home (e.g., education, psychology, business). Similarly, pressure from within the leadership education community to standardize learning outcomes and assessment—and a trend

towards increasing support for formalized program review (Ritch, 2013)—may be untenable for interdisciplinary programs either by their very nature or their “positionality” within university structures.

NLERA *Priority Two* addresses the issues of programmatic assessment and evaluation directly capturing the tension that exists between pushing for accountability for student learning and the adoption of shared standards to inform educational practice. The authors petition for researchers, “...to explore how one can create a system of standards to promote quality leadership education practice, without infringing on the creativity and autonomy of leadership educators that is essential to innovative teaching and learning” (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 10). On the one hand, this nuanced approach captures well the challenge presented to interdisciplinary programs concerned with enhancing the quality of student learning. On the other hand, an overall lack of consistency and standards for students of leadership creates increasingly muddier waters for interdisciplinary programs vested in evidence-based pedagogy leading to measurable learning gains. One way in which this plays out is in the questions that arise about how best to developmentally sequence the delivery of educational content based on the learning readiness of participants (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Dugan, 2013; Dugan, Kodama, Correia, & Associates, 2013; Hannah & Avolio, 2011). If there is ambiguity regarding appropriate developmental sequencing of learning outcomes within specific disciplines educating on leadership, to what should leadership educators refer when further complicating leadership education through the use of an interdisciplinary approach? This is not to suggest a need to rectify this complicated reality, but instead draw attention to the need for leadership educators to be well prepared to design differentiated learning experiences and scholars to target research that aids in linking learning outcomes with developmental levels of learners.

### **An Interdisciplinary Approach: The Most Salient Priorities**

The preceding examination of unique challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of the NLERA in an interdisciplinary context surfaced several direct connections with individual priorities. With respect to future inquiry in an interdisciplinary perspective, this section explores specific considerations associated with both practice and future research that are necessary for advancing the goals of the agenda.

As stated above, this article will avoid an analysis of each priority in the context of interdisciplinary programs and focus on a thematic analysis of the *most* salient considerations. Accordingly, the authors found *Priorities One, Two, Four, and Six* most salient due to the unique and specific opportunities presented by an interdisciplinary approach. For example, where the Pedagogical Priorities developed in *Priorities One and Two* of the NLERA prompt perspective on the impact of instructional strategy use amongst disciplines as well as the impact of transdisciplinary approaches to academic assessment and evaluation, the charge of *Priority Six*—Social Change and Community Development—lends itself towards more closely related academic or co-curricular perspectives, lines of inquiry, or approaches.

### **Contextual Opportunities**

Just as the context of interdisciplinary leadership programs presents certain challenges for translating the NLERA to practice, it presents a number of opportunities as well. Perhaps no

other contextual area is better prepared to address the complex issues presented in the NLERA than interdisciplinary programs given their ability to draw on all of the strengths associated with the diverse range of disciplines informing leadership scholarship.

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### Opportunities for Practice

**Priority I: Teaching, learning, and curriculum development.** An interdisciplinary approach to pedagogy and curricular design allows for a variety of streams of thought such as borrowing best practices from multiple disciplines and integrating them within a shared language of leadership studies. Moreover, this approach does not rely on one or two primary criteria of which to evaluate leaders or leadership. Hence, leadership educators should be cognizant of shared language, promote it, and contribute interdisciplinary perspectives and pedagogies that also promote and support the shared language. Yet, it is integral to this approach that considerations are always made with respect to each leadership program's unique context. Nonetheless, practitioners should continue to push boundaries and experiment with new ways of teaching and learning not tied to specific disciplinary norms. Ciulla (2011, p. 29) suggests team-teaching courses as a potential solution for interdisciplinary courses and while costly, this exposes program stakeholders to a wider variety of perspectives.

**Priority II: Programmatic Assessment and Evaluation.** Central to an interdisciplinary approach are the privileges of creative work within, between, and among institutional departments as well as multiple contexts. Accordingly, it is important that practitioners seek to build comfort with the ambiguity that may exist among faculty, students, and the search for shared language. Of key concern with respect to the trend toward formalized program review is the critical importance of considering program context first, and then to intentionally design curriculum. Case in point, the International Leadership Association's *Guiding Questions: Guidelines for Leadership Education Programs* (2009) states: "Context of the leadership program affects the conceptual framework, which, in turn, determines in large measure program content, teaching and learning approaches, and outcomes and assessment" (p. 12). For example, Allen and Martin (2012) outline in detail the process by which they developed and aimed to assess an interdisciplinary leadership minor. Accordingly, considerations were made specific to context. Thus, the ambiguity with respect to shared standards and the lack of an accrediting body

is both a challenge and an opportunity. If initiatives towards accreditation occur too quickly, interdisciplinary programs may struggle or suffer from identity loss should they be forced to subscribe to specific standards. Alternatively, programs may simply opt out of the review process entirely.

Nevertheless, a real opportunity exists in interdisciplinary programs to showcase an increased understanding of program differences as interdisciplinary programs, by definition, facilitate learning through integration of thought, approach, and pedagogy. Interdisciplinary program faculty and administrators are also frequently positioned as translators of how to engage with ambiguity as well as question embedded structures that challenge integrated approaches. This often manifests through concerns such as ownership of course prefixes or numbers, location in a designated college or department, dispersion of resources such as where the FTE would go, and other issues that are not new in interdisciplinary contexts. The skill set derived from this reality uniquely positions those working in interdisciplinary contexts to facilitate considerations of how best to assess learning gains in a manner that both respects unique disciplinary needs as well as pushes for dimensions of integrated leadership learning.

**Priority IV: The sociological development of leaders, followers, and learners.** An interdisciplinary approach presents rich opportunities for praxis among leaders, followers, and learners. As stated in the NLERA, “leadership does not operate in a vacuum” (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 16). An interdisciplinary approach to leadership presents a unique opportunity to deeper explore the sociological development of leaders, followers, and learners in multiple and complex adaptive systems (CAS), given the approach does not restrict scholars and practitioners to a single disciplinary perspective. Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007) define adaptive leadership as, “...emergent change behaviors under conditions of interaction, interdependence, asymmetrical information, complex network dynamics, and tension. Hence, adaptive leadership manifests in CAS and interactions among agents rather than in individuals, and is recognizable when it has significance and impact” (p. 309). In practice, the acceptance and integration of multiple streams of thought, critical inquiry, and issue formation through diverse points of view presents teachers and students of interdisciplinary leadership studies opportunities to naturally study and address these problems. Moreover, as suggested in the NLERA, efforts that promote effective and innovative means of engaging learners in research-based activities within organizational contexts could provide tremendous potential for transferability and replication across the curriculum. In particular, leadership educators must continue to integrate high-impact as well as outside learning practices (e.g., study abroad, internships, collaboration with other disciplines) with interdisciplinary curricula that promotes the amalgam of experiences and further develops the important sociological elements of leadership, followership, and leadership education.

**Priority V: Influences of social identity.** It should not be a surprise that when issues associated with social identity are given marginal attention *within* multiple disciplines that they also rarely surface in complex ways *across* disciplines. The institutional and human silos we create as it relates to “diversity work” are replicated in both the literature and delivery of practice. Dugan and Velázquez (in press) stress the ways in which educational silos perpetuate dominant narratives that make it difficult to examine considerations of power, privilege, and oppression pervasively in the literature. Multiple scholars advocate the particular need of a

critical perspective in leadership education that interrogates these assumptions and attempts to center issues of social identity in both research and practice (Dugan & Velázquez, in press; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009).

Interdisciplinary leadership programs are positioned in powerful ways that could potentially alter the dominant narrative to better address issues of social identity. Because theory and research are drawn across disciplines, educators can craft a more complete picture. Interdisciplinary contexts also reward the integration of a diverse range of literature rather than labeling it as subordinate to the primary discipline, which sends implicit messages regarding value. Thus, educators and scholars in interdisciplinary programs are poised to help center considerations associated with social identity in the literature and infuse this content into the delivery of leadership education programs.

### **Opportunities for Future Research**

Separate from opportunities for practice are those intended for scholarly inquiry and future research. This section highlights opportunities for future research through an interdisciplinary approach and addresses *Priorities One, Two, Four, and Five* specifically.

**Priority I: Teaching, learning, and curriculum development.** Perhaps the most important research will come from studies that search for opportunities to enhance practice by examining key differences and similarities between interdisciplinary and other discipline-specific approaches to leadership education. With respect to individual differences, practitioner scholars in interdisciplinary programs have a unique opportunity to collect rich data on student and faculty experiences in leadership education such as learning and programmatic outcomes, curricular and co-curricular learning environments, and the effectiveness of instructional and assessment strategies. Moreover, studies that provide comparison of the aforementioned between interdisciplinary and other approaches may identify specific high-impact practices or pedagogies. For example, phenomenological studies reporting on the experiences of students and faculty engaged in interdisciplinary leadership studies may further the NLERA by providing elements that further define the discipline.

An opportunity exists to experiment with variations of learning naturally occurring within interdisciplinary programs. Duly, these may not be prevalent in other disciplines and thus an interdisciplinary perspective is a ripe laboratory for emerging “best practices.” Moreover, specific attention to pedagogies, capacities, and competencies specific to leadership development should be explored methodically.

**Priority II: Programmatic assessment and evaluation.** Interdisciplinary program contexts present unique opportunities to pilot much of the programmatic evaluation and assessment tools available to leadership educators without the weight of formal accrediting bodies. In the same way, an interdisciplinary perspective may naturally bring out rich data not evidenced in other siloed approaches to leadership studies. Fittingly, The NLERA (Andenoro et al., 2013) states that:

Having an opportunity to learn from a multitude of disciplines and borrow those pieces that are effective will provide an increased opportunity to be innovative with respect to assessment practices. This collaborative approach prioritizes learning from the successes and failures of our interdisciplinary colleagues and provides an interdisciplinary application for your unique Leadership Education contexts. (p. 11)

Accordingly, research that results in data on the effectiveness of available assessment and evaluation resources in interdisciplinary programs will provide key information. For example, outcomes-based assessment could prove critical for the future of leadership education, specifically in interdisciplinary programs, in particular if data shows greater gains with respect to specific competencies for these approaches versus those embedded in a primary discipline such as business. Of particular interest in an interdisciplinary context may be two considerations. First, to what extent do students demonstrate the ability to translate learning into specific disciplinary contexts and/or across multiple contexts? The unique nature of interdisciplinary programs targets students' abilities to integrate information in a complex way that allows for transfer into different environmental contexts, and ensuring that this occurs is essential. Second, are there learning gains in cognition in an interdisciplinary program above and beyond that which is typically seen among students? Again, the unique nature of an interdisciplinary program attempts to build comfort with ambiguity, advance capacities to critique and integrate knowledge, and enhance abilities to engage with multiple perspectives. Understanding the specific benefits of this on cognition and how these can be translated to other learning contexts would not just add credibility to interdisciplinary approaches to leadership, but also help evolve leadership education as a whole. Moreover, the interdisciplinary perspective of evaluating available means for evaluation, assessment, shared standards, etc., should ultimately offer the most output of data; because the variety of perspectives should raise the most questions versus being stratified by one in particular (e.g., business).

**Priority IV: The sociological development of leaders, followers, and learners.** An interdisciplinary approach presents a unique opportunity to more deeply explore the sociology of leaders and followers because of the multiple lenses the method will employ. To explain further, take Harvey's (2011) definition of leadership, "an interaction between leaders and followers rather than the traits or actions of leaders alone," which he describes as, "...the most complex of human relationships" (p. 199). As Harvey posits, "...rather than the traits or actions of leaders alone," the variables are emergent and could not realistically be limited to management or psychology alone (p. 199). Therefore, future research on the dynamics of leaders, followers, and learners within educational and organizational contexts can best be met through methods of interdisciplinary perspectives or discourse.

The NLERA stresses that, through a purposeful examination of organizational complexity and practice, leadership educators and researchers can find the most holistic approaches and processes to address situational dynamics and organizational change with respect to the learners they serve. Research aimed at developing an understanding for diffusion of innovations, organizational strategy, and enhanced collaboration within Leadership Education contexts would create a foundation for successful leadership practice and organizational direction for learners entering the workforce (Andenoro et al., 2013). Moreover, the NLERA supports research efforts

that generate perspectives about the intricacies of distributed leadership and suggests that future research has the potential to contribute to increased understanding of organizational dynamics and prevent the realization of Argyris and Schon's (1978) contention that the demise of an organization is often indelibly linked to its failure to adapt to the complex challenges it faces. An interdisciplinary approach allows for a more comprehensive dealing of this presupposed impasse than a single disciplinary lens.

**Priority V: Influences of social identity.** An interdisciplinary perspective presents innumerable opportunity associated with the NLERA *Priority Five* focused on advancing the understanding of influences of social identity in leadership. An interdisciplinary approach allows for a more complex treatment of this issue and the ability to advance this content in ways that no single discipline is able to do on its own. Management alone, while exploring identities within systems, fails to recognize the psychological implications of social identity. Psychology explores meaning making and identity structures, but often omits the full exploration of environmental influences. Education explores ways to leverage learning, but often omits how social identity shapes this. The result is attention across all areas, but attention that is inadequate in addressing seemingly intractable justice issues related to identity across each as well. The full exploration of social identity research is further problematized by the unfortunate reality that “diversity” research in almost any discipline is typically pushed to the margins. The centering of social identity in leadership research is absolutely essential as evidenced by attention to the subject matter in the NLERA in both a dedicated section as well as across the report. Finally, we offer an important pinch as it relates to future research on social identity meant to stimulate collective self-reflection in our own “embeddedness” in identity structures. Why is it that the leadership literature so directly stresses the importance of examining international cultural differences yet typically glosses over domestic differences associated with social identity? What does this say about our own developmental readiness as scholars and educators to deeply interrogate the issues in which are simultaneously situated? There is significant work to do not just to advance the study of social identity influences in leadership, but to specifically engage with what this looks like in a US cultural context.

## Conclusions

An interdisciplinary approach to leadership affords a variety of strengths as well as unique challenges associated with the delivery of leadership education. Much of this reflects the opportunities that arise from integrating diverse content from multiple perspectives yet needing to ensure that knowledge acquisition remains transferable to specific disciplinary contexts. The NLERA captures well compelling dimensions of this work including how to better focus research and practice to advance the efficacy of interdisciplinary leadership education. Perhaps more importantly, the NLERA provides a framework to advance the collective work of leadership education across disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts. The agenda highlights the complex nature of leadership theory and practice as well as the necessity for scholars and educators alike to see our ability to evolve this critical work as a shared responsibility.

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John P. Dugan, Ph.D., currently serves as an Associate Professor in the Higher Education graduate program at Loyola University Chicago where he teaches courses on leadership, student development theory, and multiculturalism for social justice. John's research interests focus on the influences of higher education in shaping college students' involvement and leadership development with a specific emphasis on marginalized voices and ideas. John currently serves as the Principal Investigator for the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), an international research program examining the influences of higher education on socially responsible

leadership and other educational outcomes (e.g., efficacy, resilience, social perspective-taking, identity development). To date, more than 250 institutions in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Jamaica have participated in the study yielding over 300,000 college student participants. John's research has generated 24 printed or in press publications (e.g., refereed articles, books, and book chapters), more than 60 presentations at national and international conferences.