The Development of an Inspirational Leadership Workshop:
An Academic-Practitioner Collaboration

Dwight M. Hite, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Management

Ankur Nandedkar, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Management

Jenna Mercer
Organizational Leadership Graduate Student
School of Business, Cameron University
Lawton, OK
dhite@cameron.edu

Warren Martin
Executive Director
General Tommy Franks Leadership Institute
Hobart, OK
warren@tommyfranksmuseum.org

Abstract

All too often leadership programs are developed in relative isolation; that is, they tend to be either academic or practitioner in nature. Arguably, much more effective leadership programs are possible through collaboration between academics and practitioners. This application brief describes one such successful collaboration to develop an inspirational leadership workshop based upon the leadership experiences of retired four-star U.S. Army General Tommy Franks. The result is an award winning leadership workshop designed for both students and professionals.

Introduction

Former high-ranking military officers oftentimes continue to share their leadership experiences after retirement through various speaking engagements and events. In addition to such activities, retired four-star U.S. Army General Tommy Franks lends his experiences to an "Inspired Leadership" workshop hosted by the General Tommy Franks Leadership Institute. Early in its existence, further development of the inspirational leadership workshop was necessary to ensure appropriate content and effective delivery for multiple audiences. In order to further develop and enhance this workshop, the Leadership Institute partnered with faculty

members at a medium-sized public university to engage in efforts aimed at significantly improving the workshop.

In this application brief, we first provide a rationale for collaboration between academics and practitioners. Then, we discuss the status of the "Inspired Leadership" workshop prior to the collaborative effort. We describe the nature of the collaboration, and the process we used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the workshop. We also discuss the status of the workshop following collaboration and provide evidence to suggest that such collaborations are indeed valuable. Finally, we recommend that academics and practitioners partner together to achieve excellence in the development of future leaders. The primary purpose of this application brief is to advocate effective collaboration between practitioners and academics in multiple contexts.

Rationale for Collaboration

According to Yukl (2013), "leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (p. 7). This definition clearly suggests that leadership requires high levels of collaboration. The concept of collaboration should be emphasized as a key component in a leadership development program. Such emphasis can increase productivity, foster a strong organizational culture, and motivate people to work together. In addition, programs aimed at leadership development should prepare individuals to become change agents (Rost, 1993), and facilitate the transfer of knowledge in various ever-changing contexts (Huber, 2002). Therefore, individuals participating in such programs should become well-equipped to face the challenges of modern leadership including a need for increased collaboration, knowledge sharing, and implementing change.

As the complexity of leadership issues and the velocity of change in business increase, the need for such collaboration must extend beyond leadership instruction to include partnerships between academics and practitioners in the development of leaders. Such partnerships are imperative for several reasons. From a scholar's standpoint, a linkage with practice is important because of the relational nature of leadership. A method which is solely based on observation of leaders may not create knowledge about leadership that is reliable and valid. However, collaborative efforts with practitioners to understand their experiences can certainly add value to leadership instruction. From a practitioner's perspective, the association with scholars will yield a robust connection between theory and practice, which will aid practitioners as they search for ways to understand leadership in the context of their own work (Ospina, Godsoe, & Schall, 2001). Ultimately, it is the responsibility of educators (both academics and practitioners) to integrate leadership concepts with the practical aspects of actually leading others (Cunliffe, 2004).

The need for collaboration is also due to the disjunction that often exists between scholars and practitioner worlds. Many practitioners are not satisfied with the current offerings of the leadership literature, and when scholars strive to develop knowledge relevant to practice, the work oftentimes yields lists of ways to be a leader instead of a way to understand and approach the work of leadership (Ospina, Godsoe, & Schall, 2001). Moreover, the collaboration between these communities will provide a strong foundation for leadership development. The process of

leadership involves transformation. Cartwright (2002) suggested a learning strategy in leadership education aimed at transforming the perception of learners by helping them acquire new information and develop new skills. Knowledge that is an outcome of synergy between scholars and practitioners has the potential to enhance the quality of leadership education.

Another goal for joint efforts is to provide a platform for students to interact with leaders in a variety of social settings thereby encouraging extensive dialogue and informal leadership practice. The collaboration between scholars and practitioners in the context of leadership development is vital for developing accountability (Townsend, 2002). In addition, such association can create an effective educational climate for shared knowledge (AAHE, 1998). Learning is enhanced with increased participation from all stakeholders in the leadership development process, including both academics and practitioners.

Inspired Leadership Workshop "Before"

The "Inspired Leadership" workshop began as a moderately informal presentation of the leadership principles practiced by the General. The workshop consisted of lessons about character, common vision, communication, and caring, accompanied by some anecdotes and a few videos featuring the General. The lessons incorporated aspects of ethical leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership. For the most part, the content of the workshop was sufficient, and without a doubt, it was an important message.

The presenter of the workshop believed that there was great potential in the workshop, and sought out a way to improve the program. He reached out to faculty members at a medium-sized public university to form a partnership to develop and enhance the workshop. The intent was to refine the workshop and make it appropriate for a wide range of audiences. The two parties met, and after establishing deliverables, the collaboration was struck. Discussions regarding how best to proceed resulted in the scheduling of an initial presentation, after which, the faculty would evaluate the workshop and feedback from participants would be obtained. This was to be followed by two additional presentations to evaluate the impact of any program changes and seek feedback from additional participants.

From an instructional design perspective, the workshop had already gone through some developmental processes. However, several of these processes were informal and incomplete. Therefore, one purpose of the collaboration was to formalize the developmental process. Employing a generic ADDIE (analysis, design, development, implementation, evaluation) model, based upon the work of Dick & Carey (1996), additional analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation was conducted to further develop and enhance the workshop.

The Collaboration

We envisioned research that included focus groups and participant feedback surveys. Following the first offering, participants would complete surveys designed to identify what elements of the program resonated with them and what elements needed further development; also, in-depth discussions within two focus groups would provide more detailed information

regarding what elements needed further development. Following the second offering of the workshop, another independent sample of participants would complete similar surveys, as would participants following the third offering. At the end of each stage, we would analyze survey responses to determine what modifications to the workshop were warranted.

Given that the workshop had already been through an informal analysis, design, development, and implementation, we recognized that an evaluation of the workshop was of paramount importance. However, prior to the first presentation, we engaged in some analysis activities in order to determine the audience's interest level, existing knowledge, and preferences regarding presentation days and times. A short survey was administered to a sample of students to determine general interest level, leadership experience, as well as the most favored day and time allotment for the workshop. The survey results indicated that there was sufficient interest in the workshop (interest level averaged 4.3 on a 5 point Likert scale), and that most had little to no leadership experience. The results also indicated that students preferred that the workshop be conducted in a four hour session on a Friday.

Following the first presentation, several evaluative observations were made. We observed that the content was fitting, and it represented contemporary leadership theories. In particular, a common theme was servant leadership, and thus, we recommended that this term (among others) be utilized during the presentation. We also suggested modifications to the format of the presentation, to include more videos and some restructuring of elements of the presentation.

The focus groups were generally impressed with the workshop, but they did offer some criticisms and recommendations for improvement. The first group found that the workshop was too often like a lecture, and that references to authors did not include any specific works. They suggested the use of visual aids and providing participants with handouts, among other ideas. The second group also noted the lecture format, and would have preferred more chances to ask questions. This group suggested more demonstrations and interaction, handouts and more visual aids and videos, among other ideas.

Following the first presentation, participants completed surveys that included open-ended questions related to format and content. Examples of the open-ended questions include: "What part of this section was most beneficial to you?" "What did you like least about this section," and "How could this section be improved?" At the conclusion of the presentation, participants identified which sections were their favorite and least favorite and what improvements they would suggest overall. Altogether, participants were asked 40 questions regarding the format of presentation and content of the workshop.

These survey responses provided important recommendations, many of which echoed those made by others such as more visual aids, handouts, more interaction, etc. In addition, the participants provided very specific suggestions regarding content and presentation. While the detailed feedback is beyond the scope of this brief, it should be noted that such feedback was obtained and was very useful in making specific modifications to the content and presentation.

In general, after the first presentation, several issues became clear. For example, while the content was appropriate, some formal terminology would enhance the workshop. It was also clear that more visual aids, such as videos, and demonstrations were warranted. All parties found the suggestion to provide participants with handouts valuable, particularly given the depth and length of the workshop. It also became clear that more audience interaction would be beneficial.

The feedback obtained from this evaluation was used as we engaged in developmental activities. This involved a more formalized instructional design strategy specifically intended to improve the existing workshop. While the content required little change, significant changes were needed regarding other aspects of the workshop.

Given that the learning objectives had already been established, and we had already identified the audience's interest level, existing knowledge, and timing preferences, no additional analysis was deemed necessary. However, we were able to identify design aspects that would improve the workshop. For example, based upon the survey feedback obtained during evaluation, we chose to adopt Prezi presentation software for future presentations and to include additional stories and videos related specifically to the General. Additionally, we decided to provide participants with handouts and to enhance the workshop with formal terminology where appropriate.

The decisions made in the design phase led to the development of a revised presentation in Prezi format with additional stories and videos. Furthermore, participant handouts were developed for use during the workshop. These included interactive activities and synopses of certain topics. Formal terminology was also added to the content of the workshop to establish the link between practical leadership principles with formal leadership theories. For example, the section on character included aspects of ethical and authentic leadership, and thus, these terms were integrated into the content of the workshop; the section on common vision included aspects of transformational leadership and the caring section focused upon servant leadership, therefore, these concepts were also integrated into the content of the workshop.

The implementation phase involved a second presentation of the workshop with the enhancements described above. The handout materials were distributed to participants and served an important role in learning. The second presentation involved more interaction between presenter and participants. Altogether, the improved version of the workshop was far superior to the first, but in order to establish this, additional evaluation was conducted.

The participants of the second workshop completed the same survey as those of the first. The survey responses for the second workshop were generally much more favorable than those of the first. In fact, one-way ANOVA analyses indicated significant mean differences ($p \leq .05$) in scores for overall satisfaction with the workshop and whether participants would recommend the workshop to others between the first and second workshops. That is, participants of the second workshop found the workshop significantly more satisfying and were much more likely to recommend the workshop to others. Further, a one-way ANOVA analysis indicated that there were significant mean differences ($p \leq .001$) in ratings for the presenter; the participants of the second workshop rated the quality of the presenter as significantly more effective than those of the first workshop.

In addition to ANOVA analysis, content analysis of open-ended responses was also conducted to determine the frequency of positive and negative comments. The survey responses for the first workshop included 322 comments related to the four sections of the workshop. 213 comments, related to perceived benefits of the workshop and what respondents liked about the workshop, were categorized as positive. 109 comments, related to improvements and what respondents disliked about the workshop, were categorized as negative. The survey responses for the second workshop included 297 comments; 243 positive and 54 negative, categorized in the same manner as those for the first workshop. Hence, there were 46 more positive comments and 53 less negative comments for the second workshop, as compared to the first. Of the 53 negative comments for the second workshop, 34 were recommended improvements, leaving 20 comments related to what participants disliked about the workshop, which included some related to minor matters such as air temperature. Altogether, the responses for the second workshop were much more favorable than the first.

Presented with this information, the Executive Director was extremely pleased with the results. Given the nature of the limited negative feedback received following the second presentation, it was decided that further analysis was unnecessary. While the third presentation was scheduled and offered, additional analysis was not conducted. The Executive Director was satisfied with the improvements made to the workshop.

In summary, as a result of the collaboration, several improvements were made to the workshop. The content of the workshop was enhanced with the inclusion of formal theories and terminology. This provided participants with an important link between practical leadership principles (i.e. practitioner perspective) and formal leadership theories and terminology (i.e. academic perspective). The presentation of the workshop was enhanced with the use of Prezi and additional stories and videos. This made the workshop much more visually appealing and engaging. Handouts were created and provided to participants, which greatly improved presenter/participant interaction. The results obtained from these enhancements are demonstrated by the more favorable feedback received after the second presentation; both participant satisfaction levels and quality of delivery were improved.

Inspired Leadership Workshop "After"

The "Inspired Leadership" workshop underwent several changes during the collaborative effort. The changes made to the workshop were largely driven by the focus group comments and survey responses. As a result of participants' feedback, revisions were made to the presentation format (e.g. use of Prezi), the use of visual aids (e.g. more videos), the inclusion of interactive activities and handouts, and other specific changes related to detailed feedback received. The changes between the first and second presentations were significant and important.

The resulting workshop is an engaging and interactive learning experience for participants. The extensive use of illustrations, visual aids, worksheets, and activities enhances the participants' learning and retention of the practical leadership principles presented in the workshop. The workshop is structured but also flexible, informed and entertaining, enlightened but not pretentious, and it is practical while building upon strong academic theories.

Conclusions

Since the completion of this collaborative effort, the "Inspired Leadership" workshop has been presented to thousands of people. Attendees have included university students, law enforcement officials, community outreach organizations, chambers of commerce, business professionals, and numerous military officials from the U.S. Army and Air Force. The response from participants has been overwhelmingly positive and is evidence of the success of the collaboration designed to develop and enhance the workshop.

Further reflection of the success of this collaboration became evident when the General Tommy Franks Leadership Institute was awarded a 2013 Community Impact Award by the Oklahoma Business Ethics Consortium for the "Inspired Leadership" workshop. This award recognizes organizations that are "positively impacting their communities in ways that inspire integrity" (Oklahoma Business Ethics Consortium, 2013). To achieve such an honor only months after completion of the collaborative effort speaks volumes to the value inherent in a successful collaboration between academics and practitioners.

The collaboration described herein is but a singular example of how partnerships between academics and practitioners can enhance leadership development and truly make a difference. There are certainly other situations in which such partnerships can enhance the development of future leaders. We encourage academics and practitioners alike to reach out to one another and form alliances that are certain to benefit all involved.

The purpose of this application brief is not to advocate any particular instructional development model or learning theory; rather, it is to describe how collaboration between academics and practitioners can result in benefits to those desiring to become leaders. We assert that such collaborations do not occur as often as they should. We also assert that such collaborations are beneficial at any level (i.e. local, regional, state, national, and international). While the larger collaborations are the ones that tend to receive attention, even smaller collaborations can result in positive outcomes. We challenge both academics and practitioners to engage in collaboration at any level feasible in order to enhance leadership instruction and leader development.

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Author Biographies

Dr. Dwight M. Hite is an Assistant Professor of Management in the School of Business at Cameron University. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in leadership and organizational behavior, as well as courses in ethics and management principles. His research interests include leadership modeling, social behavior and leadership in virtual environments, modern and traditional work ethic, social identity and norms, and anti-normative behavior. He is the Faculty Advisor and Chair of the Program Quality and Assessment Committee for Cameron University's Master of Science in Organizational Leadership program. He holds a Ph.D. in Management from the University of North Texas, a M.B.A. from the University of Texas at Arlington, and a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Kansas State University.

Dr. Ankur Nandedkar is Assistant Professor of Management in the School of Business at Cameron University. He teaches organizational behavior, international management, and management information systems at the undergraduate and graduate level. He is the Faculty Advisor for the Society for Human Resource Management Chapter at Cameron University. He holds a Ph.D. in Management from the University of Texas- Pan American, a M.S in Computer Science from the University of Texas- Pan American, and a B.S in Computer Science from Rajiv Gandhi University in India.

Jenna Mercer is a graduate student at Cameron University pursuing a Master of Science in Organizational Leadership degree within the School of Business. She is also an Academic

Advisor and freshman seminar Instructor at Cameron University. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Texas A&M University.

Warren Martin is the Executive Director of the General Tommy Franks Leadership Institute. He is known for his unique teaching style which incorporates story-telling, activities, personal experiences, and humor to communicate leadership principles in a manner that motivates and inspires audiences. He has conducted leadership workshops with Fortune 500 companies, non-profit organizations, public schools and universities, military and law enforcement organizations, as well as community outreach organizations and chambers of commerce. He is a Philosophy graduate of Texas Tech University.