

Reconceptualizing “Leadership” Development Programs: A Discussion of Whether Alternative Terminology Better Speaks to Programmatic Efforts and the Modern Student

Ilya Gokhman (igokhman@gatech.edu) & Eric Kaufman (ekk@vt.edu)

Abstract

This roundtable session is intended to be a community discussion of how we can re-conceptualize leadership development to better serve our students and communities. Informed by trends in the leadership literature and the personal experiences of the session’s facilitators, we want to discuss how alternative terminology and design of leadership-related initiatives could impact the appeal of such programs. This will be a highly interactive session that we hope will inform participants of the experiences of their fellow leadership educators and challenge them to introduce novel approaches at their home institutions.

Session Learning/Participant Objectives

The overarching goal of this session is to facilitate a community discussion of how leadership educators should conceptualize programs aimed at improving students' abilities to influence others and bring about positive personal, team, organizational, and societal change. We have three learning objectives for session participants:

1. Gain a broad understanding of how leadership programs are perceived across a variety of campuses.
2. Learn of alternative or additional language and terminology educators are using to describe leadership related efforts and the campus response to such efforts.
3. Review and evaluation of key considerations that should be made in determining what to name or re-name these types of initiatives.

Session Description

The leadership field is evolving. The facilitators of this session note this evolution from two perspectives. The first is the change in how leadership is conceptualized in the academic literature. What was once a discipline focused on the individual has now evolved to consider the broader context within which leadership exists, as evident by the growth of work on followers (Oc et al., 2023), the burgeoning domain of team science (Hall et al., 2018), and the exploration of distributed approaches to leadership, such as shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2002).

The second perspective comes from the personal experiences of this session’s facilitators. With nearly four decades of combined experience as leadership educators, we have observed several informal trends, including shifts in how students think of leaders and leadership roles, demands for the inclusion or exclusion of qualifiers in the names of leadership development programs (e.g., servant leadership or leadership and social impact), and changes in support from administrators for leadership programming.

In considering these two perspectives, we want to engage with our community on how to best conceptualize and articulate the work that we do. This round table session is intended to serve as

a community discussion of leadership educators to better understand the experience of others in providing leadership programming, appreciate the context and nuances of these various experiences, and consider actions we can take to ensure we best serve our students, institutions, and communities.

To begin this session, the facilitators will take a few minutes to introduce themselves and the learning objectives. We will then share a brief anecdote of a recent personal experience in the leadership space that connects to the topic of reconceptualizing leadership, after which we will open a dialogue with and between participants. Below are some questions we will pose to participants to spark discussion. Additionally, we will interject personal insights, if needed, to help frame the discussion.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do students at your institution perceive leadership and your leadership offerings?
2. In what ways might your campus' leadership initiatives be misaligned with the needs of your students, institution, or community?
3. Beyond students, how are leadership initiatives perceived by staff, faculty, and administrators at your institution?
4. In what ways do you think leadership development should be rebranded, and what role should leadership educators play in that rebranding process?

References

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