



SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF A CROSS-CULTURAL BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

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This longitudinal cross-cultural case study demonstrates that sustainable leadership can evolve from carefully orchestrated educational programs. Using a mixed-methods approach to study learners during a two-year graduate program and two years post-graduation, this research confirmed that leadership sustainability was an intricate weaving of multiple factors in three critical areas: (a) sustained communication in the ICT/Blended environment, (b) sustained mentoring, and (c) sustained curriculum and learning. In response to the research question—how do we enhance leadership sustainability in a cross-cultural blended learning leadership education program—we found the synergy of sustained educational and communicational elements to be key. Together, they immersed learners in a virtual/blended learning environment that focused on ethics, values, and transformation at the personal and organizational levels. Through modeling and mentoring, learners received intentional leadership support while learning to build leadership sustainability within themselves and their followers. Such learning creates a cycle of ongoing leadership development that continuously moves current and future leaders from information to the creation of reservoirs of knowledge and wisdom, further deepening and sustaining leadership. This continuous leadership growth provides an important constant in the evolution of sustainability, demonstrating that like sustainable development, *sustainable leadership* represents a *process*, not an end state.

Leadership's role in sustaining corporate and societal change is well-documented by renown experts such as Burt Nanus (1992) with his focus on visionary leadership, the late Peter Drucker (1996) with his emphasis on leaders of the future, and Warren Bennis (1998) with his notion of becoming a leader of leaders. Further reinforcing the leader's significance in sustainability, Brady (2005) cited Burson-Marsteller's (2001) study conducted on the CEOs of the top 30 publicly traded companies in Germany, in which "the result suggested that the public

reputation of the company is to almost two-thirds determined by its leader” (p. 107). Confirming this finding, a subsequent Burson-Marsteller study conducted in the U.S. “of 1155 key stakeholders found that the reputation of the CEO contributes heavily to how companies are perceived today” (as cited in Brady, p. 108). With a proclivity toward receiving ongoing sustainability accolades, Brady noted that leaders at companies such as Ben and Jerry’s (Ben Cohen), BP (Lord Browne), DuPont (Chad Holliday), and Patagonia (Michael W. Crooke) have made sustainability an organizational priority. But what is sustainability and how does it relate to sustainable leadership development in global societies; and, most importantly for the work here, does advanced education through modern technologies promote leadership sustainability across and among cultures?

Sustainability and Sustainable Development

Driving sustainable development in the global environment, the UN resolution *Agenda 21* called for the examination of four key areas: (a) social and economic dimensions (e.g., promoting health, combating poverty, and decision-making based upon environmental development); (b) conservation and management of resources (e.g., combating pollution and protecting forests and other fragile environments); (c) strengthening the role of major groups (e.g., children, women, and workers); and (d) means of implementation (e.g., education and technology) (UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 1992). One cannot combat poverty or promote sustainable agriculture and rural development without sustainable leadership in economic, educational, and civil realms. Nor can one strengthen the roles of children, workers, farmers, business and industry, or the scientific and technological communities without leadership that recognizes the need for an ongoing investment in the community. From these initiatives, one thing is clear: a key element to the success of this agenda and the productive advancement of society in this century is leadership, thus making sustainable leadership development imperative.

One critical challenge is to define sustainability and its related concept, sustainable development. Acknowledging a need for explicit definitions, Portney (2003) conceded that these are often considered broad concepts with multiple meanings. Asserting that while sustainability is often understood, Riddell (2004) concurred with Portney that it is not well-defined. In contrast, Brady (2005) subsequently tackled the definitions. In his opinion, “sustainability refers to the ability of something to keep going *ad infinitum*” (p. 7), and sustainable development “represents a journey, not a destination” (p. 6).

Although some trace the genesis of the term sustainability to Lester Brown, an ardent environmentalist and founder of Worldwatch Institute (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), others identify the 1987 *Brundtland Report*. Interwoven with sustainability, this report claimed that sustainable development “implies meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987, ¶ 2). This theme was reiterated in *Agenda 21*, emanating from the 1992 United Nations (UN) Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (Earth Summit), and again at the UN 2002 Johannesburg Summit (Earth Summit 2).

Historically, the term sustainability is most often seen in the environmental and ecology lexicons (e.g., Brandon & Lombardi, 2005); however, it more recently has been embedded in economic development literature, particularly in the realm of sustainable cities (Ling, 2005; Portney, 2003; Riddell, 2004; Sorensen, Marcotullio, & Grant, 2004). Beyond

economics and the environment, Brady (2005) found a sustainability emphasis in what he classifies as “‘hard-core’ business journals” (p. 11). He went so far as to say that “corporate sustainability could be set to represent the revolution of the twenty-first century . . . [He further claimed that] ‘smart companies’ are trying to engage civil society, moving from being a part of the problem to being part of the solution” (p. 12). This is in keeping with Fullan’s (2005) definition of sustainability: “the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose” (p. ix). To achieve this sustainability, Fullan called attention to the role of leadership. He noted Archimedes, the first to explain the principle of the lever. In Fullan’s judgment, Archimedes pointed to a very important element of sustainability when he said, “‘Give me a lever long enough and I can change the world.’” Fullan further declared, “for sustainability, that lever is leadership” (p. 27).

Implying the importance of leaders to not only understanding organizational structures but also ethics and morality, Fullan (2005) stressed that all levels of a system must take moral purpose seriously in the sustainability process. In conjunction with this, the Sustainability Leadership Institute (n.d.) teaches that “humanity has the ability to make development sustainable” (¶ 3). Such institutes develop and increase leadership capacity locally, nationally, and internationally to create economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

While a paucity of literature on leadership sustainability exists, one primary study sponsored by the Spencer Foundation emphasized the importance of sustainable leadership. In their three-decade study of educational change at eight Canadian high schools, Hargreaves and Goodson (as cited in Hargreaves & Fink, 2003) indicated “that one of the key forces influencing change or continuity in the long term is leadership, leadership sustainability” (p. 2). Furthering this and embracing the environmental stance, Hargreaves and Fink claimed that sustainability is more than merely making things last:

Sustainable leadership matters, spreads and lasts. It is a shared responsibility, that does not unduly deplete human or financial resources, and that cares for and avoids exerting negative damage on the surrounding educational and community environment. Sustainable leadership has an activist engagement with the forces that affect it, and builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross-fertilization of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development. (p. 3)

From this definition, Hargreaves and Fink specifically cited seven critical principles of sustained leadership:

1. Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning.
 2. Sustainable leadership secures success over time.
 3. Sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others.
 4. Sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice.
 5. Sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources.
 6. Sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity.
 7. Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment.
- (pp. 3-10)

In 2004, Hargreaves and Fink reframed these seven principles into a more concise form: sustainable leadership matters, spreads, lasts, is socially just, is resourceful, promotes diversity,

and is activist. Continuing the evolution of this concept in 2006, the authors promoted the depth, length, and breadth of sustainable leadership while reinforcing justice, diversity, resourcefulness, and conservation, which they clarified as learning “from the best of the past to create an even better future” (p. 20). In fact, Hargreaves (2007) went so far as to say that sustainable leadership “preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefits for others around us, now and in the future” (p. 224). At the core of these principles is the need for leadership education to encourage leaders to know themselves, their gifts, and personality tendencies, as well as their leadership abilities within the organization.

While meeting leaders where they are, developing today’s leadership in a global society demands an educational model that enhances leader sustainability. This begs the question that became our foundational research inquiry: how do we enhance leadership sustainability in a cross-cultural blended learning leadership education program?

Methods

Leadership sustainability is the ability of leaders to recognize the intricate systems interwoven with human values that promote sustainability. Therefore, examination of a successful leadership development program will provide insight regarding leadership education. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study involved a longitudinal case study of a two-year cross-cultural graduate-level leadership program. In addition, the researchers tracked these participants for two years post-graduation (a) to determine the participants’ leadership sustainability and (b) to assess program quality in sustaining leadership development.

The Program

The selected program emphasized leadership transformation and ethics, consistent with Hargreaves and Fink’s (2003, 2004, 2006) concern for social justice and Fullan’s (2005) concern for the moral underpinnings required for sustainable leadership development. It also reflected the complexity of systems, information, and culture with which today’s leaders constantly wrestle.

Cross-cultural in nature, the program used face-to-face (f2f) communication and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). Garnering resources and using wisdom to cross multiple boundaries—geographical, interdisciplinary, and intercultural—successful educational models often employ ICTs to reach and sustain leaders as learners who in turn sustain their societal and corporate structures. The use of these ICTs in this institution allowed educators to not “just do education as normal,” but to diffuse education throughout even remote areas of society as it brought professors and learners together across geographic, national, and intercultural boundaries. It also required an understanding of distance learning pedagogical frameworks, such as that of Bocarnea, Grooms, and Reid-Martinez (2006). In many ways, this blended-learning approach transcended the customary face-to-face environment that requires participants to limit their dialog and interaction to specified learning periods in any given week.

Employing multiple delivery modes, this blended learning program incorporated two course modules per term, with six terms throughout the length of the program. Each module consisted of a one-week onsite residency in Sao Paulo, Brazil with intensive f2f instruction followed by six weeks of online learning in a virtual classroom using ICTs. While the content of

each course rested on theoretical principles, each course required practical leadership application.

Participants

Although this program consisted of 11 professors (7 males, 4 females) from a university in the southeastern US, the study focused on the two lead professors (2 females) and the 17 Latin American learners from multiple professions (7 males, 10 females). Learners chose this program to enhance their leadership skills by pursuing a master's degree with a concentration in educational leadership. Upon entry into the program, the age range of the learners was 23 to 53 with a mean age of 34. All except two learners completed the program and all forms of data collection. The two who discontinued their studies (1 male, 1 female) terminated at the conclusion of the second term for personal reasons.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

In order to understand this group, the researchers used multiple data collection strategies to assess personal leadership development as it related to their respective roles within their organizations throughout the two-year program and two years post-graduation. While so much measurement over a four-year period has the potential of "tool fratricide," multiple instruments were used because of the intercultural and international dimensions of the program. Stark language and cultural differences were presumed to require more attention to the nuance of change within the learners. Constant and diligent oversight of the progress of the students in understanding leadership in a global context was achieved through "erring" on the side of over-measurement.

Self-assessments were administered at strategic points throughout the program—first and second terms, midway, and end of program— not only providing insight into where the learners began in this leadership journey, but also revealing their growth and development throughout the program. Providing a psychological and leadership profile, these metacognitive activities facilitated formative opportunities for learners to specifically explore their personal psychosocial and cultural dimensions, leadership traits and styles, and conflict resolution preferences. Learner communication preferences were also examined in light of the program's mentoring functions and how communication supported conflict resolution.

First, psychosocial and cultural dimensions of the learners were probed. The psychosocial dimension included self-assessments of learners' motivational levels, functional gifts, and personality tendencies (Selig & Arroyo, 1989) as well as the 93-item *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Form M*. In addition, two underlying cultural issues were continually monitored: ethnocentrism and high/low context. Cultural acuity was first measured through a modified 18-item ethnocentrism scale based on the work of Neuliep, Chaudoir, and McCroskey (2001), and second by a 9-item high (collective) and low (individual) context scale developed from DeVito's (2004) work, which was based on the research of Hall (1983), Hall and Hall (1987), Gudykunst (1991), and Victor (1992). Due to the cultural differences in learners and the two lead professors, both groups self-assessed in these areas.

Second, learners explored their various leadership traits and styles using Northouse's (2004) 10-item *Leadership Trait Questionnaire* and 20-item *Style Questionnaire*. While highlighting the leader's strengths and weaknesses, the *Trait Questionnaire* "quantifies the

perceptions of the individual leader and [five] selected observers” (p. 30). The *Style Questionnaire* provided the opportunity for learners to self-assess their tendency toward task or relationship behavior. To complement these quantitative measures, learners also reflected on their leadership through time logs, personal leadership autobiographies, personal leadership philosophies, and culminating portfolios.

Third, the learners’ conflict resolution preferences were explored using Shockley-Zalabak’s (2002) *Personal Profile of Conflict Predispositions, Strategies, and Tactics*. This 44-item instrument measures preferred style for handling conflict: avoidance, competition, compromise, accommodation, and collaboration.

And fourth, communication preferences were assessed with McCroskey and Richmond’s (1996) *Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTC)* and Grooms and Bocarnea’s (2003) *Computer-Mediated Interaction Scale (CMIS)*. The *WTC* is a 20-item instrument that measures an individual’s predisposition to communicate in a variety of contexts. Based on Grooms’ (2000) work on computer-mediated interaction, the *CMIS* is a 122-item instrument that measures the importance of task and social learner-faculty and learner-peer interaction.

After compiling a personal psychological and leadership profile, learners conducted organizational assessments to clarify their leadership roles, which helped them develop strategic organizational goals. This process included planning, scheduling, implementing, and evaluating organizational growth and aligning personal leadership goals within that context. All of these activities were facilitated through the curriculum, which culminated in participants’ professional portfolios.

An additional instrument appraised mentoring the learners received during their program. Based upon Jacobi’s (1991) work, the following mentoring functions were explored on a 15-item assessment: (a) acceptance/support/encouragement, (b) advice/guidance, (c) access to resources, (d) challenge, (e) clarification of values and goals, (f) coaching, (g) information, (h) protection, (i) role modeling, (j) social status, (k) socialization, (l) sponsorship, (m) stimulation of acquisition of knowledge, (n) training/instruction, and (o) visibility/exposure.

To assess program quality in sustaining leadership development, the researchers conducted formative program assessments using surveys, multiple onsite interviews, and onsite focus groups to enable necessary adjustments to meet learner needs as they surfaced. The study also used summative assessments such as graduation rate, cumulative grade point average (GPA), and learner self-assessment of their leadership growth. Two years post-graduation, the researchers solicited open-ended responses via email to determine where the graduates were in terms of their careers and ongoing leadership development, also asking what impact the program had on their current leadership placement.

Findings and Interpretations

Following analysis, findings and interpretations were divided into four major categories: Leadership Development Program Outcomes, Strategically Designed Curriculum for Leadership Development, Mentoring, and ICT/Blended Communication.

Leadership Development Program Outcomes

In examining program quality for sustaining leadership development, two levels of summative outcomes were measured: one immediate and the other longitudinal. The first level of

outcome measurement was at the conclusion of the two-year program. This included graduation rate, cumulative grade point average (GPA), and a qualitative component of leadership growth self-analysis. Eighty-eight percent of the cross-cultural learners graduated ($n = 15$). Based on a 4-point scale, the mean GPA was 3.8. Self-analysis comments reflected that 100% of the learners experienced significant leadership growth at program completion. For example, one learner noted, "Before I started this [program], I would look at my natural skills and find it hard to detect the profile of a leader. Nevertheless, today I have a different view." A second student expressed, "My conclusion is that I have been transformed through the knowledge and wisdom acquired during this master's." Finally, another said, "I have learned so much about myself and my leadership style, traits, and abilities, and that has helped me to improve my performance . . . in every situation I am expected to exert leadership."

The second level of summative outcome measurement followed learners two years post-graduation. These longitudinal outcomes fell into two categories: career development and continued self-assessed leadership growth. Aligning with the goals of the program, all learners cited increased and sustained capacity for leadership in terms of their career development. Four were pursuing additional graduate studies at institutions such as Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; two had moved to East Asia to assume educational leadership responsibilities; and two were serving on executive educational boards. One, an entrepreneur in the field of security, reported expanded growth and capacity in his organization. A second entrepreneur began an English language program for adults and children. One, a banking vice-president, credited the program with his ability to better understand human resources and for increasing his team's capacity, which in turn increased quarterly earnings. Others also continued to excel in their endeavors as a marketing research director, a teacher, a translator, and an export analyst in a major medical supply company.

In addition to career development, learners reported continued leadership growth. Some claimed that due to the learning and application of the knowledge gained from the program, they were placed into higher levels of national and international leadership. All credited the program with challenging and giving them space to develop their own leadership philosophies, resulting in attitudinal and behavioral changes still demonstrated two years post-graduation. As represented by the following response, learners provided powerful self-reports about their changes: "the leadership training . . . gave me more knowledge of peoples' behavior and polished my soul and heart . . . It brought me wisdom and experience which I can apply in the relationships of everyday life and work." Others concurred, reporting that the most important leadership moral and ethical principles they learned were how to deal with and influence people. This influence included their ability to more effectively handle issues of social justice by implementing appropriate policies, processes, and procedures that assured equity within their organizations and teams. In turn, this increased the human resource capacity within their leadership span. According to the participants, such attitudes and behaviors sustained their leadership and helped them grow other leaders.

Strategically Designed Curriculum for Leadership Development

Catapulting the success of these outcomes was a curriculum strategically designed around three areas: (a) course content, (b) personal self-assessments, and (c) organizational assessments. Interviews with students two years post-graduation resulted in an interesting finding best expressed by one student representing the group: "I can say that the curriculum is still alive

within me and I really perceive myself as living, walking curriculum.” This reflects that the curriculum lives within learners as they now employ and teach concepts gained in the program either directly or indirectly. They see themselves as living curricula as they constantly evolve and continue to grow as leaders. As another student stated, “I do believe it is still living within me—especially about leadership.”

Course content. Guided by professors, the first dimension of the curriculum provided materials and experiences essential for leadership. The course content included effective leadership theories and models; philosophical and ethical/moral moorings in leadership; effective communication, conflict resolution, and negotiation theory and skills; organizational strategic planning, finances, start-up, and operations; and specific school applications, such as curriculum methods and assessments. Learners also studied research design and developed a culminating professional project while completing multiple strategically structured exercises incorporating worldview, values, and ethics. The program and curriculum were consistently monitored and assessed on a quarterly basis, ensuring continual alignment with immediate and projected longitudinal learner needs in the cross-cultural context.

Personal self-assessments. To understand their psychological and leadership orientation, learners’ used multiple measures. Assessment occurred in three categories: (a) psychosocial and cultural dimensions, (b) leadership traits and styles, and (c) conflict resolution preferences.

Psychosocial and cultural dimensions. Using assessments from Selig and Arroyo (1989), learners demonstrated capacity for self-appraisal while recognizing the diversity of gifts, motivational levels, and personality tendencies of others. Equipped with this knowledge, they learned to use encouragement and positive reinforcement to empower their teams. For themselves and those around them, they demanded a high ethical and moral standard.

Based on the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, almost 75% ($n = 11$) of the learners had judging style personalities, which indicated a preference for structured and decisive environments. Forty percent ($n = 6$) were sensing, thinking, and judging (STJ). Thorough, dependable, logical, practical, and realistic are characteristics representative of the STJ personality, which values “security, stability, belonging, preserving traditions, and applying established skills” (Clancy, 1997, p. 434). Analytical and concrete with a keen sense of responsibility, these learners work steadily toward goals while their desire for routine and order match their linear-thinking style. They carried out their responsibilities consistently and forcefully (The Myers & Briggs Foundation, n.d.). There was an almost even distribution between those preferring Introversion and those preferring Extraversion (one additional extravert), and the remainder of the learners represented a range of the *Myers-Briggs* psychological types.

The *Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale* reflected that all 15 Latin American learners and the two lead U.S. professors and mentors had low ethnocentrism scores. In response to the high- and low-context scale derived from DeVito (2004), all 15 Latin American learners had high high-context scores, aligning with the expected cultural norms. This reflects a need for face-saving and conflict avoidance, yet also that relationship is of utmost importance. Follow-up focus group responses demonstrated the same theme. In contrast, the two lead U.S. professors scored high in low-context, which revealed their individualistic natures and attendant explicit and direct communication.

Leadership traits and styles. From their *Leadership Trait Questionnaire* self-assessments, this group primarily described themselves as trustworthy, determined, perceptive, and persistent. The *Style Questionnaire* revealed that 40% ($n = 6$) of the group reported a balance

in their relationship versus task leadership orientation. Three were task-oriented, one of which was extremely task-oriented. These were of particular interest because at the end of the program, all three reported dramatic leadership changes. One credited the program with significant improvement in his people skills, while another noted he now appreciated people more. The learner who identified as extremely task-oriented said, "For the first time in years, I am paying more attention to people . . . than to tasks and results . . . this [program] time was a turning point in my life."

Self-reflection through learners' autobiographies, philosophies, time log analyses, and portfolios demonstrated that this program enhanced leadership capacity. These exercises required learners to increase their self-awareness, resulting in what they referred to as personal transformation. Each learner reported that this transformational process helped them prioritize and focus while gaining strength to overcome obstacles and achieve leadership vision and goals. Leadership trait and style transformation, a recurring theme, occurred through and throughout this educational process.

Conflict resolution preferences. Important to leaders is the ability to manage conflict (Hackman & Johnson, 2004; Shockley-Zalabak, 2002). From the learners' results on the Shockley-Zalabak (2002) *Conflict Profile*, this group preferred a collaborative style of conflict resolution, with males preferring a competitive style more often than females. Compromise was the second most popular choice, and one learner chose accommodation. Of interest, when responding to the *WTC* scale, this group confirmed their need for relationship: almost 75% of the cohort was willing to communicate, with 40% highly willing. This may explain why this group was primarily collaborative in their conflict resolution style.

In summary, these learners were well-balanced, self-reflective individuals. They were predominately relationship rather than task-oriented and were willing to collaboratively resolve conflict. Their ability to incorporate program information, self-reflection, and lived experience enabled learners to transform themselves and their leadership capacity. By placing these psychosocial, cultural, leadership, and conflict resolution assessments at strategic points throughout the program, the curriculum modeled the need for ongoing self-transformation through sustained self-learning.

Organizational assessments. Learners assessed their organizations by directly applying knowledge gained from course content. Organizational assessments enabled learners to determine direction for their leadership, while Gantt charts and other planning tools helped them anticipate and define strategic goals for organizational growth.

As the above assessments suggest, learners gained substantial self-knowledge during this program. In tandem with the organizational assessments and strategic organizational goal development, learners evaluated their personal leadership growth and adjusted it in light of organizational needs, assuring alignment. In evaluating themselves, learners eagerly applied what they discovered; however, challenges, including the *angst* of personal reflection, assailed the learners on many fronts. As one student described it, "I can say that the whole program was like a 'watershed' for me." Throughout the process as learners discovered their strengths and weaknesses, professors mentored them in not only developing a strategic plan for personal growth, but also in refining their leadership at each stage of development.

Mentoring

Embedded throughout the program, Grooms and Reid-Martinez's (2006, 2008) interaction function and Jacobi's (1991) mentoring function surfaced repeatedly. Supporting Grooms' (2000) work, the *CMIS* responses revealed learners desired task interaction in three categories: (a) informational feedback, (b) evaluative feedback, and (c) intellectual discussion. Regarding informational feedback and mentoring functions, all learners stated that access to resources and information about organizational culture and key personnel were *frequently to always* provided. In addition, all reported that professors *frequently to always* clarified goals and values through evaluative feedback and mentoring. While all noted knowledge acquisition occurred through intellectual discussions, one learner asked for more challenges in those discussions. This illustrates that task interaction directly related to the mentoring functions.

Additional *CMIS* findings support that socio-emotional functions of mentoring and interaction in the leadership development process fell into two categories: (a) motivation/support and (b) socializing, again aligning with the work of Grooms (2000). In the area of motivation/support and its related mentoring functions, all learners indicated they *frequently to always* received: adaptation of instructional materials; acceptance, support, and encouragement; advice and guidance; coaching; role modeling; and a safe and supportive environment in which to learn. For mentoring functions that paralleled socializing, learners had varied responses. Fifty-seven percent agreed that professors *frequently to always* enhanced their social status. Fifty percent said they *frequently to always* received visibility and exposure, while 64% said they received sponsorship or advocacy. Only 7% ($n=1$) said they were socialized into their professions, perhaps indicative of the variety of professions represented and the transcontinental dimensions of the program with professors and students in different cultures and geographical locations. Thus, all 15 mentoring functions occurred at various levels with mentoring sustained throughout the program.

ICT/Blended Communication

Designed to meet the needs of current and future leaders and to provide learning from a cross-cultural perspective, one distinctive element of this program was the virtual, blended learning environment. This context, which demanded the use of ICTs and f2f platforms, required learners to operate in today's technology-laden global environment while maintaining the richness of interpersonal communication. As was expected, learners and professors used the f2f environment to establish and deepen relationships. It also afforded the opportunity and format for quickly resolving issues as they sat together in one location. At the same time, the virtual environment allowed learners to connect with greater breadth of information and with the broader community of experts while remaining in touch with their professors after the f2f meetings. By combining the richness of f2f and the connectivity of ICTs, learners sustained communication over time and space.

Through assignment assessments, observations, and interviews, the professors observed student use of ICTs in the learning process. Although the program was designed with designated roles for technology, learners quickly adapted ICTs to meet their cultural expectations and needs. For example, in online assignments created to teach problem solving, these learners automatically moved to a blend of f2f and virtual communication. Requiring sensitivity and adjustment in working with learners on technological adaptations, professors modeled empowerment, an important leadership skill. Additionally, the process taught learners advantages and disadvantages of various communication channels.

Through ICT connectivity, professors gave the cross-cultural learners guidance; as a team, they provided responses to learners on an almost 24/7 basis. As technology allowed learners to interact continuously with peers, it also facilitated swift and easy connections with local, regional, national, and international experts. This experience further prepared learners to incorporate ICTs at new levels of organizational team building as they came to understand which medium applied most appropriately to which messages and functions of communication and leadership. For example, learners were encouraged to network for virtual mentoring and to use ICTs for the content of their courses (e.g., virtual libraries, audio and video streaming, chat rooms, and the early stages of Web2 technologies). Furthermore, they gained an understanding of how to lead in cross-cultural, virtual contexts as they immediately applied this new leadership knowledge in their organizations. This presented yet another avenue for assuring the ease of sustaining learners' leadership through sustained learning, sustained support of a network of peers, and sustained and deepened organizational relationships as they learned to use ICTs as an important means of communication for broader networking and knowledge development.

Discussion

From this case study, an educational model emerged illustrating the synergistic relationship that facilitates sustained leadership in educational programs. Key elements confirmed that leadership sustainability, demonstrated through learner outcomes, was an intricate weaving of multiple factors in the educational program. Three critical areas emerged: (a) sustained communication in the ICT/Blended environment, (b) sustained mentoring, and (c) sustained curriculum and learning. Figure 1 portrays the elements and relationships of sustainable leadership development model.

Sustained Communication in the ICT/Blended Environment

The first key element, sustained communication, resulted from the blended learning environment that combined f2f and ICTs, including the use of virtual classrooms, so that learners were connected with information, peers, professors, and experts. Due to the cross-cultural, cross-continental dimensions of this educational endeavor, use of ICTs made a dynamic 24/7 learning opportunity possible. It also facilitated timely post-graduation leadership development follow-up.

Additionally, in this case study learners used media for their own purposes and in their own ways, and the professors adapted to that usage. This was congruent with traditional understanding of media uses-and-gratifications and functions of such media, such as transmission of information and culture (e.g., Carey, 1989; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973; McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972).

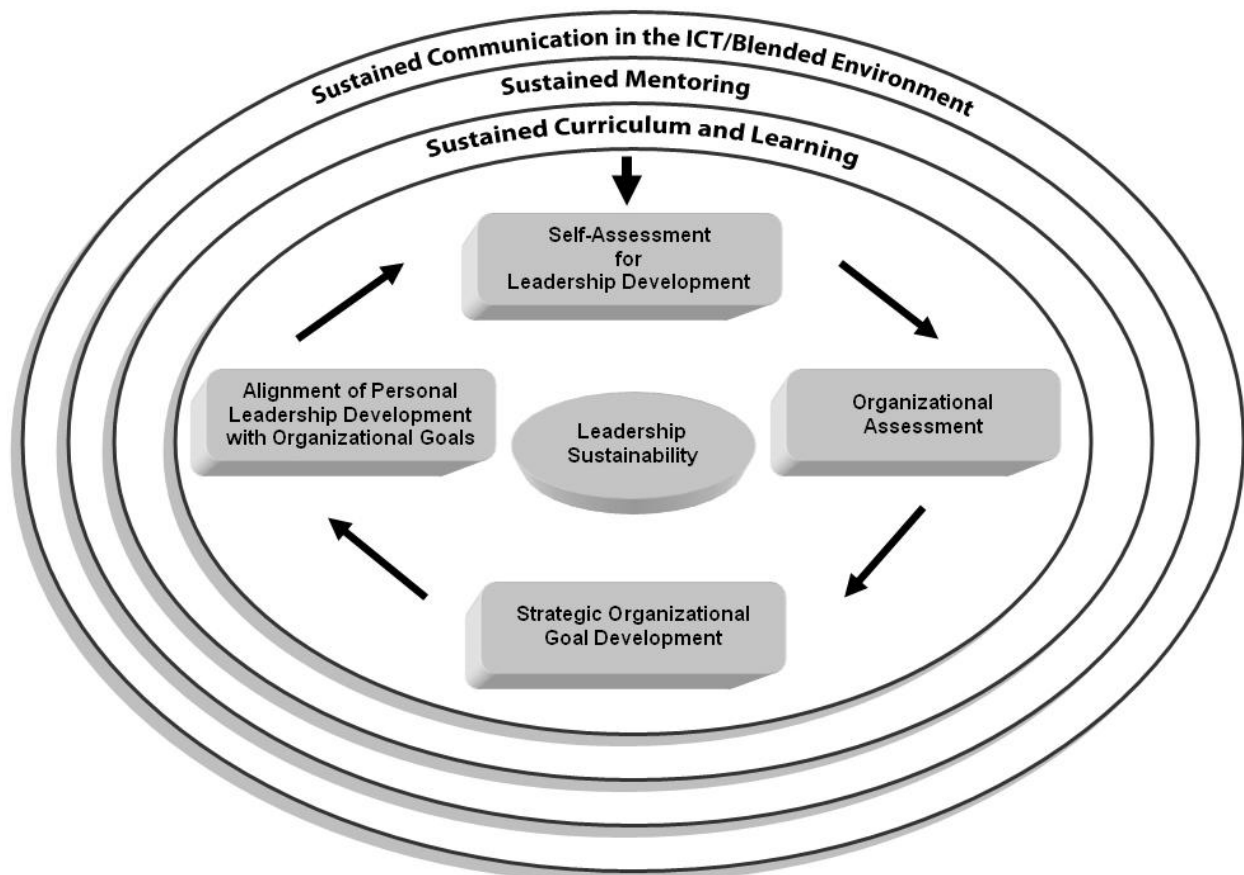


Figure 1. Sustainable Leadership Development Model. Adapted from Reid-Martinez & Grooms (2008).

In the communication process, students were empowered to more clearly manifest their leadership roles in both the f2f and virtual environments as they transmitted a new cultural ethos grounded in their axiological, ontological, and epistemological development. This development, especially the learner's self-analysis with its transformational dimensions, revealed the strategic and essential roles of both the educational medium and the learner's newly enhanced ontological and axiological leadership character and fiber. This character was the important membrane through which learners' virtual communities evolved as they were created and sustained through the transmission of culture using multiple mediated channels. With the merger of medium and culture, the old adage that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964) surfaced as media influenced the ways in which these learners defined their newly created virtual communities with their related leadership and learning development.

Most importantly, the creation of these communities deepened learners' leadership capabilities. The connectivity offered by technology aided in sustaining the participants' leadership in healthier and more intentional ways. Taking advantage of the strengths of available media, learners came to understand best leadership communication practices. This sustained communication in the ICT/Blended environment promoted leadership sustainability over time along with leadership succession as the learners trained future leaders.

Sustained Mentoring

Sustained mentoring surfaced as an essential element in this leadership development program, confirming Stoddard's (2003) conclusion that "in a real sense, mentoring is leadership—leading a mentoring partner to self-discovery, self-fulfillment, and paradoxically, selflessness" (pp. 192-193). Wilkes (1998) further stated that mentoring is how leaders "prepare the next generation of leaders for service [and] unless there are future leaders, there is no future" (p. 236). Indeed as individuals in this study were observed two years post-graduation, all were actively teaching, modeling, or implementing, as well as mentoring, what they had been taught.

These learners understood mentors to be professors who were guides and facilitators providing content, pointing the way, assessing for quality, and filling in gaps with recommendations, information, and wisdom as needed. To further assure that mentoring took place, the curriculum was embedded with assessments related to Jacobi's (1991) mentoring functions and was designed to operate in tandem with the professors mentoring in the f2f and ICT learning environments. These assessments allowed timely and quality feedback to learners throughout the process. As a team, professors provided 24/7 mentoring support through interpersonal and mediated communication. When combined with the embedded mentoring functions, this created a fail-safe opportunity to ensure sustained mentoring.

Sustained Curriculum and Learning

Designed to provide transformational opportunities for learners, the curriculum also created a sustained learning environment. As mentioned earlier, learners demonstrated this by noting that the curriculum "still lives within them," indicating the sustained curriculum had a dynamic rather than a static effect.

The curriculum's transformational element resulted from the synergy of leadership theory, self-analysis, and praxis. Most importantly, these three were placed within ethical and practical applications that pushed the learners to understand themselves in real-life contexts. The learners had to first "know themselves" and their ethics and values to better assess their organizational leadership. This ontological and axiological perspective required learners to complete a number of leadership self-assessments that were revisited and reassessed at different points of the program. This process demonstrated levels of personal internal transformation. When combined with their organizational assessment, learners checked for alignment and made appropriate changes in their personal leadership development in light of strategic organizational goals. By helping learners continuously make connections and alignments between their deep internal locus of control with leadership and their external leadership environment, the learners as leaders were better positioned to effectively influence and meet the needs of their evolving organizations. This resulted in sustainable leadership through sustained curriculum and learning that granted a high level of satisfaction for these learners as they transformed themselves and their organizations.

The Model and Sustainable Leadership Education Programs

Mirroring contemporary learning theories and consistent with the earlier works of Reid-Martinez (2006) and Reid-Martinez, Grooms, and Bocarnea (2009), the Sustainable Leadership Development Model demonstrates the importance of educational programs combining social

constructivism (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Vygotsky, 1978) and connectivism (Siemans, 2005) for successful learning. This approach recognizes that students do not learn strictly within the confines of their educational institutions, but rather within the broader context of their personal lives. In this educational program, use of ICTs expanded the learner's ability to gather knowledge from multiple contexts.

Consequently, the boundaries of the educational institution blurred as ICTs and the larger community were integrated into the learning process. With ICTs and their capacity to transmit both information and culture, learners worked collaboratively to bring their own and others' worldviews and experiences into the learning community. In this process, they negotiated and generated meaning through shared understanding and experiences filtered by their axiological screens. Thus, in this constructivist environment education moved from a single individual's solitary pursuit of knowledge to a collaborative learning community that reciprocally shaped and informed learners as they in turn shaped and informed the community. Such an approach focused on constant regeneration, refinement of personal internal values, and transformation of the leaders within their learning communities, supporting the earlier work of Hargreaves and Fink (2003, 2004, 2006) that implied the leader as learner is key to sustainable leadership.

Simultaneously, a connectivist approach to learning was observed as well. Technology created a dynamic nature of multiple networks, and leaders as learners sifted through rapidly changing databases. They gleaned and gathered from the montage of regional and global experts, journeying through constantly evolving social networks and congregating electronically with others to discuss themes and ideas. In these shifting and fluid digital communities, learners used a constructivist approach filtered through their ontology and axiology to garner what they needed for leadership empowerment and sustainability. As they married their internal constructivist state with their external connectivist environment, the learners developed knowledge in the social construction and practice of their leadership. This ongoing connective and constructive process of learning and leading helped to create sustainable leaders.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of the current study center on the question of over-measurement. As noted earlier, over-measurement can create a problem with "tool fratricide," which may have skewed the results in this leadership development study. Future researchers should select instruments that would be most effective for studying nuances of leadership development in specific intercultural and international learning environments. Future research could also focus on which learning methods and andragogies are best aligned within the cultures of both the learners and the facilitators. At the same time, research could focus on third culture development as it relates to leadership education. Third culture here references what occurs in the new learning spaces created through contemporary use of virtual and f2f blended education to create and sustain leadership development in global learning initiatives.

Conclusion

In conclusion and in response to the research question, this study suggests that a strong leadership program will model the way of empowerment and development of individuals rather than deplete human resources as it encourages sustained leadership through sustained communities of learning. This educational initiative immersed learners in a virtual/blended

learning environment that focused on personal transformation in order to transform their organizations and communities.

Through modeling and mentoring, learners were provided with intentional leadership support structures and, for their futures, they gained the ability to build sustained learning communities for sustained leadership within themselves and their followers. Such sustained learning creates a cycle of ongoing leadership development that continuously moves current and future leaders from information to the creation of reservoirs of knowledge and wisdom, further deepening and sustaining leadership. This continuous leadership growth provides an important constant in the evolution of sustainability, demonstrating that like sustainable development, sustainable leadership represents a process, not an end state.

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