

Current and Future Leadership Potential of Students: What do Business School Students Value?

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ABSTRACT

This research addresses two questions namely which leadership qualities matter in the short versus long run and what is the role of the business education in developing a person as a leader in the short versus long run. Data have been collected from 97 business school students on their current leadership qualities, current leadership potential and future leadership potential. Results revealed that being an achiever mattered only in the long run and being responsible mattered in the short run only. Being motivating, friendly and sociable mattered both in the short and long runs. While the quality of the MBA program played a significant role both in the long run and short run, friends and peers played a significant role in the long run only. Interestingly, faculty did not play any significant role either in the short run or in the long run. The findings are of theoretical importance and are of practical significance to business schools.

INTRODUCTION

The success of managers is often attributed to their leadership qualities. Leadership qualities are most of the time defined in terms of task orientation and people orientations. Being achiever, problem solving and responsible are mostly considered as task related, while being motivating, friendly, sociable, acceptable and empathizing are considered to be people related. The quality of business education may be judged in terms of the quality of the MBA program, the quality of the faculty and the quality of peer group. Students may consider themselves as having leadership potential currently as well as in future. This research attempts to find answers to the questions as to which of the leadership traits are important in defining the leadership potential in the short run and in the long run. Similarly it also tries to find out which aspects of the business education or business school is considered important by students in defining the leadership potential in the short run and in the long run.

Literature Review

Gerhart, A., & Grunow, M. (2009) had studied the shift in students' general perceptions of

“leadership skills including problem solving, teamwork, self-confidence, group management, ethics, organization, social awareness, and confidence”, from near the beginning of the course to the end of the course. They reported that comparison of the pre and post-course surveys demonstrated a shift in perceptions. The authors also reported that the students’ motivation for being a leader had a shift in perception, and the peer assessment also had shown some shifts in leadership development.

Weinstein, R. S. (1983) had studied student perceptions of teachers in terms of “concepts of the teacher, perceptions of teacher behaviour, differential treatment of students by teachers, and instructional behaviour” and the relationship with students’ academic performance and concluded the effect of instruction has a mediating effect on student achievement. The author used the attribution framework to different aspects of perceived achievement, and suggested that the many Student perceptions of the school or the entire “academic climate” contributed significantly to a variance in their academic achievement.

In a study, Whitaker, K. S., King, R., & Vogel, L. R. (2004) analysed the perceptions of graduate students of a leadership development program and said that while most of the participants regarded the curriculum content of the program to be highly relevant and satisfactory, the inclusion of district administrators in course instruction and delivery was perceived to add a significant value to the learning derived. This study suggests that students appreciate the importance of leadership development in the curriculum, and believe that senior administrators of the institute need to take an active interest in developing such leadership skills among students.

Lear, J. L., & Hodge, K. a. (2011) studied different kinds of skills of students and faculty, and found out that there are significant differences between faculty and students in the areas of management, problem solving, leadership, time management, etc., and concluded that a significant gap exists in the skills needed for employment among students.

Sprinkle, J. E. (2009) had studied the impact of perceived educator effectiveness in relation to student-held biases and found a positive relationship between the two. His earlier research also suggested student biases in areas such as “gender, age, teaching style, learning style, grade awarded, and educator personality traits” and found out that the perceived educator effectiveness is significantly influenced by these biases. In this research, we have explored the relationship perceived by the students in their future leadership potential with different aspects of their business school curriculum and dimensions of leadership.

It is proposed that there could be a significant relationship between the leadership dimensions considered important by business school students and their perceived leadership potential in the future. Also it is hypothesised that the different business school characteristics are considered significant in determining students’ current and future leadership potential.

Hypotheses

- H1** Dimensions of leadership qualities are significant predictors of current leadership potential
- H2** Dimensions of leadership qualities are significant predictors of future leadership potential
- H3** Dimensions of leadership qualities differentially predict current and future leadership potential
- H4** Business school characteristics are significant predictors of current leadership potential
- H5** Business school characteristics are significant predictors of future leadership potential
- H6** Business school characteristics differentially predict current and future leadership potential.

Methodology

Data have been gathered from 97 MBA students of a business school in Goa, India. A scale with 31 items has been used to measure leadership qualities. The data have been subjected to exploratory factor analysis to unearth the underlying dimensions in the leadership qualities. Current leadership potential and leadership potential 5 years hence have been measured using single items. Further regression analysis was performed with the dimensions of leadership qualities as independent variables and leadership potential as dependent variables.

Whether MBA program or faculty or peer group helped in developing the leadership skills of the students was measured by three single item questions and these items were used as independent variables in predicting current and future leadership potential. Further the significance in the difference between the beta coefficients of predicting current and future potential using leadership dimensions were tested using t tests. Similarly the differences in the beta coefficients of the MBA program related predictors of current and future potential were also tested for significant differences using t tests.

Results

The regression analysis results of prediction of current and future potential are given in table 1. Being an achiever mattered in the long run with a significance level of 1 percent and did not matter in the short run. People skills like being motivating, friendly and sociable mattered in both the short run and the long run. However being responsible mattered only in the short run but did not matter in the long run. Other qualities like being problem solving, acceptable and empathizing did not matter either in the short run or in the long run.

Table 1 Relation between leadership qualities and potential

No	Predictor	Current Potential	Leadership in 5 years
1	Achiever	NS	S***
2	Motivating	S***	S***
3	Friendly	S***	S***
4	Problem Solving	NS	NS
5	Acceptable	NS	NS
6	Sociable	S*	S*
7	Responsible	S**	NS
8	Empathizing	NS	NS
	R Square	0.364	0.350
	ANOVA	Significant	Significant

The results of the t tests between beta coefficients of leadership quality dimensions in predicting current and future potential are given in table 2. None of the beta coefficients of the dimensions except those of being responsible were found differ between the prediction of current and future leadership potential. The difference was found to be significant at 10 percent level only.

Table 2 Difference in beta coefficients between prediction of current and future potential

	Beta (current)	Standard error	Beta (Future)	Standard error	T value	Sig
Achiever	0.110	0.095	0.247	0.078	-1.11	0.267
Motivating	0.389	0.095	0.323	0.078	0.53	0.592
Friendly	0.357	0.095	0.209	0.078	1.20	0.231
Problem Solving	-0.038	0.095	-0.009	0.078	-0.23	0.814
Acceptable	-0.050	0.095	-0.020	0.078	-0.24	0.808
Sociable	0.178	0.095	0.137	0.078	0.33	0.739
Responsible	0.192	0.095	-0.022	0.078	1.74	0.084*
Empathizing	0.088	0.095	0.070	0.078	0.14	0.884

Table 3 reveals the results of the regression analysis between business school characteristics and current and future potential. While the quality of the MBA program mattered in the short run in a significant way the influence was, although mattered was found to be less in the long run with a significance at 10 percent level. The influence of faculty was found insignificant in the short run as well as in the long run. However, friends and peers mattered in the long run only. The overall influence was found to be more in the long run with an R square in 0.304 against an R square of 0.198 in the short run.

Table 3 Relation between B school features and current and future potential

No	Predictor	Current potential	Leadership in 5 years
1	MBA Program	S***	S*
2	Faculty	NS	NS
3	Friends and peers	NS	S***
4	R square	0.198	0.304

The results of the t tests between beta coefficients of business school characteristics in predicting the leadership potential in the short run and the long run revealed significant difference only in the influence of friends and peers, that too at 10 percent level.

Table 4 T tests between beta coefficients of business school characteristics

	Beta (current)	Standard error	Beta (Future)	Standard error	T value	Sig
MBA program	0.377	0.118	0.175	0.100	1.31	0.194
Faculty	-0.005	0.101	0.081	0.086	-0.64	0.518
Friends and peers	0.049	0.104	0.297	0.087	-1.82	0.070*
R square	0.198		0.304			

Discussion

As far as dimensions of leadership qualities are concerned, people skills were found to have higher weight in predicting the leadership potential in the long run. This stems from the basic belief of students that human resource is the most important resource in the organization and managing it well is important and can be achieved only through people skills. There is a lower emphasis on the task skills. This may be due to the fact that task skills are more important for non managerial employees. Among people skills, being acceptable was not found to be an important predictor of potential in short run as well as in the long run. This may be due to the belief that decisions can be enforced using rules rather than consensus.

The quality of the MBA program was found to have a high relevance in the short run and a low relevance in the long run. It may be due to the fact that technology and management knowledge are subject to change and the importance of what is learned in the business school fades away slowly in the long run. The non significance of faculty may be due to the fact that processes, facilities and systems take care of education rather than faculty. Also in the particular business school there is lot of emphasis on student centred learning where the onus of learning is placed on the students. Also faculty may be similar in business school not contributing much variance in the data.

Managerial implications

The findings of this research will place a premium for business schools to craft their curriculum and methods around people skills and soft skills rather than hard skills. Also peer group learning methods will have an advantage over traditional methods. While systems and processes have to be strengthened quality of faculty is not something to be worried about.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the relationship between important dimensions of leadership dimensions, business school characteristics and perceived leadership potential, both current and future potential, of students of a business school. Interesting findings have been made, and further research can explore the causes of these relationships and identify measures of improving leadership potential among students. The Business schools can take cognisance of such relationships and plan the curriculum accordingly.

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