

Grooming Service Leaders from Lingnan University through Service- learning Practicums in NGOs and Social Enterprises

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Aim of this Paper

- To present the findings of our qualitative study on identifying 'success factors' for the learning and development of service leadership attributes among students, who participated in a full-time, 8 week long summer practicum programme, organized by LU, in collaboration with a number of host NGOs/SEs.



The Nature of the Service Leadership Practicums offered by Lingnan U

- They differed from service leadership internships organized by The University of Hong Kong (Chow & Lam, 2015) in that:
 1. They *were* extra-curricular, not credit-bearing, and were not subsumed under the respective student's major programme, so were not about applying knowledge from a major programme.
 2. For each participating student, the practicum involved a portfolio of tasks, broadly guided by a 'mini-mission', rather than being entirely project focused.
 3. They were essentially not team based. The portfolio of tasks for each practicum student was assigned *individually* by the respective POR, even though some tasks were undertaken in conjunction with project teams, or in collaboration with others.

Why the Difference?

- Other than the practicum, LU offers students alternative opportunities to undertake course-embedded service leadership through team-based service-learning projects, co-curricular with 7 courses offered by the Depts of MGT and MKT:
 - Introduction to Business
 - Corporate Social Responsibility
 - Leadership & Teamwork
 - Service Leadership
 - Strategic Management
 - Social Marketing
 - Service Marketing
- Because the summer practicum is not linked to a particular course and is not tied to a particular project, it offers students opportunities to participate in the workplace culture of the respective host organization, while still undertaking (service) leadership work.

Reasons for the Research

- There is already a body of research on developing service-leadership attributes through team-based service-learning projects that are either course-embedded, (Snell et al., 2015) or linked to students' disciplinary major programme (Chow & Lam, 2015).
- **But**, no one seems to know much about how to set-up and support service leadership internship experiences that are not co-curricular to a particular discipline-based course or programme.

Assumptions

We assume that powerful and positive learning and development as service leaders can ensue for practicum students if:

1. There is generally favourable, dignified, and friendly contact with 'other' groups (e.g., needy people in the community; employees at the host site; interns from other Universities).
2. They feel that they are capable of initiating something useful.
3. They can see the value of what they are doing and have discretion in working out what to do and how to do it.
4. They can receive guidance and observe good practices.

Learning Mechanism: Intergroup Contact Theory

Allport (1954) held that positive effects of intergroup contact occur only in situations marked by four key conditions:

- (1) equal group status within the situation;
- (2) common goals;
- (3) intergroup cooperation; and
- (4) the support of authorities, law, or custom



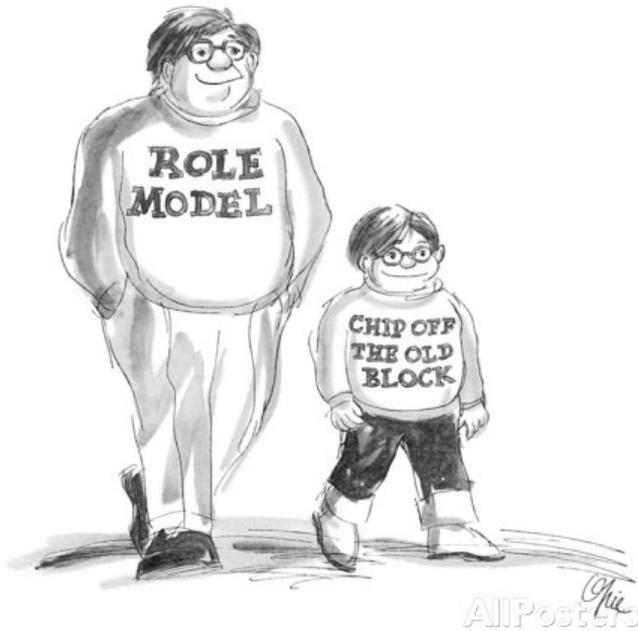
Learning Mechanism: Self-determination theory

- Autonomous motivation comprises both intrinsic motivation and the type of extrinsic motivation in which people have identified with an activity's value and ideally will have integrated it into their sense of self.
- When people are autonomously motivated, they experience volition, or a self-endorsement of their actions.



Learning Mechanism: Social Learning

- Observation learning, or modeling (Bandura, 1977), has both informative and motivational effects on behaviour. Information-wise, actions of others provide good guides on how to perform in certain ways and which actions are appropriate in particular settings. Motivationally, modeling influences behaviour by demonstrating the probable consequences of an action.



Research Questions

- What are the 'success factors' for service leader development through the LU practicums?
 - (1) Task-related factors?
 - (2) Student-related factors?
 - (3) POR and other site-related factors?



<i>Site and host organization domain (in Summer 2014)</i>	<i>Informants</i>	
	<i>PORs</i>	<i>Students (sex, year, major)</i>
Site 1: Elderly education.	1a, 1b	F1 Year 2, Social Sci.
		F2 Year 2, Social Sci.
Site 2: Surplus food distribution	2a	M1 Year 2, Social Sci.
		F3 Year 1, Translation
Site 3: Univ. service learning	3a, 3b	F4 Year 2, Philosophy
		M2 Year 2, Translation
Site 4: Translation	4a	F5 Year 2, Translation
Site 5: Elderly recreation	5a	F6 Year 2, Social Sci.
		F7 Year 2, Social Sci.
Site 6: Clothes recycling	6a	F8 Year 2, Social Sci.
		M3 Year 2, Cultural St.
Site 7: Social enterprise corporate services	7a	F9 Year 2, Social Sci.
		F10 Year 2, Marketing
Site 8: Language education	8a, 8b	F11 Year 2, Social Sci.
Site 9: Rehab/ outdoor development	9a, 9b	M4 Year 2, Social Sci.
Site 10: Advocacy for refugees	10a, 10b	F12 Year 2, English

Host Sites and Informants



Sources of Data

- F2F interview (90-120 minutes) with at least one POR from each site
- Summary performance appraisal reports by PORs for 9 of the 16 students
- F2F interview (90-120 minutes) with each student
- Fortnightly journals by each student
- 'End-of-term' reflective reports by 15 of the 16 students
- F2F interview (60 minutes) with LU's senior field coordinator



FINDINGS



Task Related Factors: The Significance and Challengingness of the Work

- a. The palpable sense of addressing real community needs;
- b. Facing difficulties and tackling problems while shouldering responsibility for overcoming/resolving them and not merely following orders and/or procedures; and
- c. Practicing service leadership attributes and not merely clerical/technical skills.



Palpable sense of addressing real community needs

- 'I have stronger sense that I am helping people. In previous jobs, the major aim was to earn money. But now, I am helping the senior [elderly] people. They show that they are eager to have someone to teach them to use the IT devices.' (F1, interview).
- 'I can clearly see that these activities can restore their self-confidence and dignity - the elders seem more energetic and more likely to talk. I am glad to see the elders' smile because of our efforts.' (F6, reflective report).

Facing difficulties and tackling problems while shouldering responsibility

- 'I had to ask the salespeople and the owners of the bakery shops to complete a survey to indicate the amount of bread that they were throwing away every day.... This was the first time of me to do this kind of work alone and I was quite nervous.... To be honest, after asking two bakery shops, I was very depressed since both of them refused to complete the survey... However, I didn't give up. Instead, I cheered myself up and improved my speaking skill to ask the rest of the bakery shops.' (F3, journal entry for weeks 3 & 4).

Practicing service leadership attributes and not merely clerical/technical skills

- 'I could see that [F7] has leadership quality.... She is a charismatic leader. I could see her power from her face. She is good at coordination, and is strong in allocating tasks according to the strengths of different members.' [F6, interview].
- '... I made the list of division of labor according to their ability and set the deadlines of every single task. I monitored the progress by reminding other interns their tasks and deadlines in order to make sure all the work could be finished on time. If they had any problems, I would try my best to help them to deal with it. ... I acted as a bridge to coordinate the work of the carnival (and) my project coordination skills were improved.' (F7, journal entry for weeks 7 & 8).

Student-related Factors: Disposition for Socially Agentic Self-initiation

- (a) Willingness to initiate activities or proposals, rather than waiting passively for instructions;
- (b) Being prepared to 'step out of the comfort zone' to face challenges;
- (c) Being proactive in building relationships with co-workers and service recipients;
- (d) Orientation to getting things done with other people rather than through solo technical tasks;
- (e) Appreciation of participative management;
- (f) Sense of self-efficacy; and
- (g) Pro-social values orientation.



Willingness to initiate activities or proposals

- 'I appreciate that [F4] is passionate for continuous improvement. She would have additional thoughts for achieving better outcomes, in addition to the job assignments that were allocated to her. For example, when the participating students arrived here, she considered that there could be some additional activities, e.g., social events, organized so that the participating students would be...'. (POR 3b, interview).



Preparedness to 'step out of the comfort zone'

- 'I worked as a normal staff in the OSL, responsible for providing support to the entire Overseas Immersion Programme, to manage logistical arrangements, as well as to communicate with [Singaporean] students and lecturers. All this, together with... leading students at site visits and during interviews with agency staffs gave me abundant opportunities to step out my own comfort zone and to talk, liaise and communicate with various people.' (M2, reflective report).

Being proactive in building relationships with co-workers and service recipients

- I tried to find some mutual interest (with other team members) and I brought them to eat in my favorite restaurant.... The (other) colleagues were all very nice and...I spent time to talk with them I tried hard to contribute to cohesiveness and close relationships...' (F9, journal entry for weeks 1 & 2).
- 'I learned that it is important to keep smiling and being pleased when customers come, even if you are very exhausted. Sometimes, chatting with customers can give you have a better understanding about him/her, so you can give better advice about which product suits him/her most.' (F9, journal entry for weeks 3 & 4).

Oriented to getting things done with other people rather than through solo technical tasks

- 'We would ask for the opinions of the part-time staff how to allocate the vegetables properly. As the part-time staff are mainly housewives and they have the experiences in cooking vegetables and so we would ask them.' (M1, interview).



Appreciation of participative management

- 'In our office, there is no strong hierarchy of power. Everyone works very closely together and can express their opinion and they are all equal, including the three of us [interns]. We can suggest our opinions freely and they will really listen... For example...In this organization , I can really express my views and learn how to cooperate with others.' (F9, reflective report).

Sense of self-efficacy

- 'I settled in after one or two weeks, as I became more familiar with the [operations centre] and the work procedures there. I got closer to the staff there. I then settled in and felt that I was one of part of the team during the rest of the practicum period.' (M3, interview).
- 'I might feel that I lack sufficient knowledge and so this feeling of humility led to a sense of detachment and inadequacy. And since my counterpart [M3] is knowledgeable and capable, this perception of difference made me feel detached.' (F8, interview).

Pro-social values orientation

- 'Before I came, I realized that there are needy people in the society that need care from others. Now I've learned that there are various ways to help them.' (M3, interview).



POR and other Site-related Factors: Co-educator Presence and Supportiveness

- a. PORs provide orientation at commencement of the practicum;
- b. PORs are available for *ad hoc* discussions about emerging issues;
- c. PORs provide guidance, coaching and constructive feedback; and
- d. PORs provide exposure.



PORs provide orientation at commencement of the practicum

- 'When I arrived there, on the first day, there was a large gap between my prior expectations and the real situation Right away, we observed how the classes were conducted on the first day. [POR 1a] also spent much time talking with us. He explained to us the services of the Centre. ... During lunch, we kept asking him about the Centre. We absorbed a great deal of information on the first day of work.' (F1, interview).

PORs are available for *ad hoc* discussions about emerging issues

- Due to [inappropriate registration], some elderly participants complained... that we were cheating them out of their money (and) I felt unhappy.... [POR 1a] explained to us that... the ones who complained had often made a fuss in other classes. His explanations put me at ease right away. But in future classes, in the presence of those [members], I would be very wary. Other colleagues... advised us to keep a watchful eye on them in class.' (F2, interview).
- After the [incident], [POR 1a] was concerned that [such] interruptions may hurt our feelings and so he spoke with us after the lesson. "Do you feel bad, as this is common incident? Those few elderly people usually have complaints..." (F1, interview).

PORs provide guidance, coaching and constructive feedback

- 'I almost cried and she patted my shoulder and consoled me. [POR 10a] advised me to be more careful next time.' (F12, interview).
- '[POR 9a] had a saying that had a big impression on me. He asked me a question, "[M4], what are the two major types of clients in the world? I said I didn't know. "They are the internal clients and the external clients." What [POR 9a] meant is This maxim is very useful in every workplace. If you want to reap a good business harvest, you should not only maintain contact with your customers, but you should also have a good relationship with your colleagues. (M4, journal entry for weeks 1 & 2).

POR provides exposure (and reviews it)

- '[At the lunch, POR 10a] arranged for me to sit beside the Commissioner... I was anxious as he was a foreigner and also I needed to speak to him in English... It was the first time I had met such a senior and professional person. It was a good opportunity to learn how to communicate with senior people and also for table manners.... His English had some accent, which I sometimes could not catch well. Then [POR 10a] would explain to me.... On our way back to office, [POR 10a] asked if I had been nervous. I said, "OK." She said it was a good experience for me as not many people have the opportunity to meet the Commissioner, sit next to him, and talk with him.' (F12, interview).

DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

Developmental outcomes

- Improved service leadership attributes.
- Learning/developmental need identified.
- Values transformation.
- Situational awareness.



Improved service leadership attributes

- 'My EQ in handling people issue [has improved]. One situation is when someone becomes emotional in front of you. I felt that I handled that well, the second time it happened.' (M4, interview).
- All in all, I found myself improved most in the area of "showing originality in expressing opinions'. In the past, I used to hide my thoughts and accept whatever my supervisor said. But I realized that .. daring to voice out what is in your mind is the most effective way to handle difficulties and tasks.' (F11, reflective report).

Learning/developmental need identified

- 'I need to enhance my confidence.... Even when I had had made up my mind what should be done, whenever I could find my supervisor, I would tell her before confirming the decision and so I was still very dependent on her in this regard. Only if she was not available, then I had no alternative but to make the decision on my own. So, this is an area for me to improve.' (F3, interview).

Values Transformation

- 'Before the practicum, I used to find elderly people rather annoying, repeating things many times and very talkative. But I found that I liked to listen to the stories of the elderly people in the programme. I could learn from their life experiences and their wisdom... accumulated after so many years of life. Old people are treasure.' (F1, interview).
- Before the practicum, as a general citizen, when I saw the poor faces of children on TV and the call for donations, I didn't have any sympathy and I even felt disgust. After this experience, I feel a sense of responsibility to contribute... (F12, interview).

Situational awareness

- 'I know more about social enterprises. I used to think that social enterprises are non-profit making and with a noble social mission. Now I learn that just like normal companies, they need to gain profit while also achieving social missions. I should not treat a social enterprise as a charity. I should treat them as companies which need to gain profit.' (M2, interview).