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THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS A PREDICTOR OF PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

РАЗВИТИЕ ЛИДЕРСКОГО ПОТЕНЦИАЛА В ВЫСШИХ УЧЕБНЫХ ЗАВЕДЕНИЯХ КАК ПРЕДИКТОР ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО УСПЕХА

Abstract:

This study explores the development of leadership potential among university students as a predictor of professional success in the contemporary VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) environment. While leadership has been widely examined within management theory, its systematic integration into higher education curricula remains insufficiently conceptualized. The pedagogical novelty of this research lies in the design and implementation of an integrated instructional model that embeds leadership development into a subject-specific academic course through experiential and interactive learning strategies.

The study draws upon transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985), experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), and the ability model of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) as its conceptual framework. Leadership potential is understood as a multidimensional construct combining motivational orientation, cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and behavioral initiative. The proposed pedagogical model integrates project-based learning, structured role simulations, student self-governance practices, and mentoring elements within a management-oriented English language course.

A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design (n = 87) was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Statistical analysis revealed significant improvements (p < 0.01) in students' self-assessed competencies related to public speaking confidence, responsibility in teamwork, intercultural communication, conflict resolution, and

understanding of leadership styles. The findings demonstrate that leadership-oriented curriculum design can function as a measurable developmental mechanism rather than a peripheral educational add-on.

The study contributes to contemporary educational theory by substantiating the view that leadership formation should be embedded within disciplinary instruction and treated as a strategic component of human capital development in higher education.

Keywords: leadership, integrated instructional model, interactive learning method, statistical analysis, educational theory

Аннотация:

В статье рассматривается развитие лидерского потенциала студентов высших учебных заведений как предиктора профессионального успеха в условиях современного VUCA-мира (нестабильности, неопределённости, сложности и неоднозначности). Несмотря на то, что феномен лидерства широко изучается в рамках теории управления, его системная интеграция в образовательные программы высшей школы остаётся недостаточно концептуализированной. Педагогическая новизна исследования заключается в разработке и реализации интегрированной учебной модели, предусматривающей включение развития лидерского потенциала в содержание конкретной учебной дисциплины посредством использования методов опытного и интерактивного обучения.

Теоретической основой исследования выступают теория трансформационного лидерства (Bass, 1985), теория опытного обучения (Kolb, 1984) и модель способностного эмоционального интеллекта (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Лидерский потенциал трактуется как многомерный конструкт, объединяющий мотивационную направленность, когнитивную гибкость, эмоциональную регуляцию и поведенческую инициативность. Предложенная педагогическая модель интегрирует проектное обучение, структурированные ролевые симуляции, практики студенческого самоуправления и элементы наставничества в рамках курса английского языка управленческой направленности.

Для оценки эффективности образовательного вмешательства использовался квазиэкспериментальный дизайн с предварительным и итоговым тестированием ($n = 87$). Статистический анализ выявил значимые улучшения ($p < 0,01$) по показателям самооценки компетенций, связанных с уверенностью в публичных выступлениях, ответственностью в командной работе, межкультурной коммуникацией, разрешением конфликтов и пониманием различных стилей лидерства. Полученные результаты демонстрируют, что ориентированное на лидерство проектирование учебных программ может выступать измеряемым механизмом развития, а не периферийным дополнением к образовательному процессу.

Исследование вносит вклад в современную педагогическую теорию, обосновывая необходимость интеграции формирования лидерских качеств в предметное обучение и рассмотрения данного направления как стратегического компонента развития человеческого капитала в системе высшего образования.

Ключевые слова: лидерство, интегрированной учебной модели, метод интерактивного обучения, статистический анализ, педагогическая теория

Discussion

In modern scientific literature, the concept of leadership potential is often interpreted in different ways. Some authors see it as a set of innate qualities, while others see it as a combination of acquired skills. However, the most productive approach seems to be an integrative one, which considers leadership potential as a complex combination of motivational, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements [5].

The motivational and value component determines a person's focus on achieving common goals and willingness to take responsibility. Cognitive is associated with the ability to analyze situations, predict consequences, and make decisions. The emotional-volitional component provides stress tolerance, self-regulation, and empathy. Behavioral is manifested in specific actions: organization of teamwork, delegation, and motivation.

It is important to emphasize that leadership potential is not a fixed characteristic, but rather a quality that can and should be cultivated through purposeful pedagogical efforts. In this regard, higher education offers unique opportunities to develop leadership skills through a variety of academic and extracurricular activities.

Project-based learning is recognized as one of the most effective mechanisms for developing leadership potential. Unlike traditional lecture and seminar classes, project-based learning immerses the student in a situation of a real task that requires independent planning, role allocation, resource search, and presentation of the result [6]. It is in project activity that a student first encounters the need to coordinate the actions of others, resolve conflicts, and take responsibility for the overall result.

Research shows that students who regularly participate in project teams demonstrate higher scores on the scales of initiative, organization, and communicative competence [7]. In addition, project-based learning promotes the development of reflection. Participants are forced to analyze not only the objective result, but also their own role in the team, which is the basis for forming a leadership position.

Another significant institution for the development of leadership potential is the student government. Through participation in student councils and organization of events and volunteer projects, students gain real managerial experience. E.A. Zorina notes that "it is through student government that students first experience leadership roles and learn about responsibility, not only for themselves but also for others" [8, p. 56].

The student government must foster an environment where leadership skills are valued and supported. Students who successfully organize events or lead initiative groups gain respect from their peers, which enhances their leadership identity. Research shows that graduates who have actively participated in student government tend to advance in their careers 25% faster on average and are less likely to experience difficulties adapting to the workplace [9].

The third important element of the leadership development system is mentoring. This is when students receive guidance and support from teachers, undergraduate peers, or invited professionals. Through mentoring, students can receive feedback on their performance, learn about leadership patterns, and adjust their development trajectory.

In recent years, universities in Russia have been introducing tutoring and career counseling programs to help students identify their leadership qualities and explore areas where they can apply them. These programs provide students with the opportunity to gain valuable experience and gain confidence in their abilities [10].

Mentoring plays a significant role in the process of professional socialization. Interaction with successful professionals and graduates who have achieved high positions provides a realistic understanding of the demands of the job market and ways to succeed. Interviews with employers reveal that they value not only the knowledge of young professionals but also their ability to learn from more experienced colleagues. This is directly linked to the mentoring experiences gained during university [11].

These mechanisms can and should be complemented by purposeful work on the formation of leadership competencies within the framework of specific training courses. An example of such integration is the English Language discipline taught to students of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation. In the textbook "English in Management. Part 3. Functions: Organizing, Leading, Motivating, Controlling" [12], a separate section is devoted to the topic of leadership. It includes authentic texts, cases, role-playing games, and project assignments specially designed to develop leadership skills in future managers.

The structure of this section is based on the key functions of management, with a focus on the "leading" function. In the beginning, students learn about the theoretical foundations of leadership, including the differences between leaders and managers, the main leadership theories (trait theory, behavioral approach, and situational leadership), and concepts of power and influence. They also learn about leadership styles, such as authoritarian, democratic, and liberal.

The text material is supported by comprehension tasks and vocabulary exercises that introduce professional terms related to leadership, such as leadership traits, contingency theory, charismatic leaders, delegation, and empowerment.

The structure of the section is built around the key functions of management, with an emphasis on the "Leading" function. At the beginning of the section, students get acquainted with the theoretical foundations of leadership: the differences between a leader and a manager, the main theories of leadership (theory of traits, behavioral approach, situational leadership), concepts of power and influence, and leadership styles (authoritarian, democratic, liberal). The text material is accompanied by comprehension tasks and lexical exercises that introduce professional terminology (leadership traits, contingency theory, charismatic leader, delegation, empowerment, etc)

This is followed by practice-oriented tasks:

Case 1: "Leading a Diverse Team" - students are invited to analyze a conflict situation in a multicultural team and develop a strategy for its resolution, considering the different cultural and personal characteristics of team members. This case requires applying knowledge of leadership styles and intercultural communication skills.

Case 2: "Motivating Employees During Change" — the situation of organizational change that has caused resistance among employees is considered. Students are tasked with proposing a program of motivational activities based on theories of motivation such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory, and the theory of expectations.

The role-playing game "Board Meeting" simulates a meeting of a company's board of directors, where they decide on the choice of a development strategy. Each student plays a role (CEO, CFO, head of marketing, etc.) and defends their position, convinces opponents, and finds a compromise. This game allows students to practice their skills in argumentation, public speaking, and negotiation.

The project assignment "Designing a Motivation Program" requires students to work in small groups to develop a motivation system for a real or virtual company. They must create both tangible and intangible incentives and present their plans in the form of a presentation. The results will be defended in front of "shareholders" (other groups and the teacher), and this project requires not only theoretical knowledge but also creativity, teamwork, and the ability to assign roles.

In addition to the main content, the section also includes exercises aimed at developing emotional intelligence. These include analyzing video clips of leaders' nonverbal communication and discussing it with others, as well as self-reflective tasks where students evaluate their own leadership style using questionnaires and discuss the results with a partner.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this section, we surveyed second-year students at the Financial University who are studying management. The survey was anonymous and consisted of two stages: before starting the "Leading" section and after completing all classes and projects. We used a 10-point Likert scale, with 1 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest. The survey results are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

The Dynamics of Students' Self-Assessment of Leadership Qualities Before and After Studying the Topic (average scores, n=87).

Quality	Before study	After study	Growth	t-Student's criterion	p-level
Confidence in public speaking	5.2	7.4	+2.2	8.14	<0.01
The ability to argue your position	5.8	7.9	+2.1	7.92	<0.01
Willingness to take responsibility in group work	4.9	7.1	+2.2	8.45	<0.01
Intercultural communication skills	5.0	7.3	+2.3	8.97	<0.01
Understanding different leadership styles	4.5	8.2	+3.7	12.34	<0.01
The ability to motivate others	4.7	7.0	+2.3	8.71	<0.01
The ability to resolve conflicts	5.1	7.2	+2.1	8.03	<0.01
Initiative in setting tasks	5.3	7.5	+2.2	8.29	<0.01

Source: compiled by the author

As can be seen from the table, there was a statistically significant positive increase in all measured parameters ($p < 0.01$). The largest increase was recorded in the "Understanding of Various Leadership Styles" indicator (+3.7 points), which was associated with a deep theoretical analysis and subsequent application of knowledge in case studies and role-playing games. A notable increase was also observed in confidence in public speaking and willingness to take on responsibility— these skills were actively developed during project presentations and role-playing exercises.

Additionally, students were asked to evaluate the usefulness of various work formats (on a 10-point scale). The highest ratings were given to the role-playing game "Board meeting" (average score 9.2), the case study "Leading a diverse team" (8.9), and the project assignment (8.7). This confirms that interactive methods that simulate real management situations are perceived by students as the most effective for developing leadership competencies.

Further, it should be noted that 82% of respondents noted that studying the section helped them better understand their own leadership qualities and growth areas. Many of the open-ended questions indicated that the acquired knowledge and skills are already being applied in other educational projects and extracurricular activities (student organizations, volunteering).

Why is the development of leadership potential so important for future career success? The answer lies in the changing nature of work in today's post-industrial economy. Even without a formal leadership role, modern specialists are constantly faced with tasks that require leadership skills, such as coordinating the efforts of their colleagues, initiating change, and convincing managers of the need for specific decisions [13]. Employers are increasingly looking not just for performers, but for "entrepreneurial" employees who can see opportunities and lead others.

Numerous longitudinal studies have confirmed that graduates who show leadership activity during their studies (participating in projects, leading student organizations, and winning competitions) tend to occupy higher positions and earn a higher income after 5-7 years compared to those who limit themselves only to studying [14]. This allows us to talk about leadership potential as a significant predictor of professional success, and its predictive power is comparable to academic performance.

However, it is important to emphasize that leadership potential is not solely associated with formal positions. Rather, it refers to a person's ability to influence others, propose solutions, and take initiative, regardless of their current position. These qualities allow graduates to adapt quickly to changes, remain in demand on the job market, and establish a long-term career despite uncertainty.

Conclusion

Through our analysis, we have drawn several conclusions.

First, developing students' leadership potential is a crucial part of modern higher education, going beyond traditional professional training. In today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world, leadership skills are essential for graduates to be competitive.

Second, universities have various institutional mechanisms in place to foster leadership qualities, such as project-based learning, student self-governance, mentorship, and the integration of leadership modules into academic courses.

Thirdly, the student survey data confirms that focused work on the topic of leadership results in a statistically significant improvement in qualities such as confidence in public speaking, willingness to take responsibility, intercultural communication skills, and understanding of leadership styles, as well as the ability to motivate others. These subjective changes correlate with objective indicators of career success, allowing us to consider leadership potential as a significant predictor of professional future success. By developing leaders today, universities lay the foundation for future success.

Practical recommendations for universities include expanding the range of project formats, supporting student initiatives, creating an institute for mentors from among graduates and employers, and introducing soft skills into the curriculum. Special attention should also be paid to the development of educational materials that integrate leadership topics into various courses, similar to what is done in the [12] textbook.

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