PEDAGOGY

A Comparison of Traditional Instructional Methods and Accelerated Learning Methods in Leadership Education

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This study examined the effectiveness of a variety of instructional methods as they relate to the maximization of learning. The importance of instructional delivery methods and the effect of leadership education's relation to organizational outcomes were considered. The model draws on the pedagogical work of Ostrander and Schroeder (1997), who reported on the work of Georgi Lozanov and other researchers and practitioners. Based on the literature review, it was expected that there would be a difference in learning effectiveness between traditional instructional methods and accelerated learning methods. The Solomon four-group research design methodology was used to test the hypothesis with the results being favorable.

Key words: accelerated learning methods, instructional design, leadership education

To state that people in recent years think that effective leadership is lacking in the world is an understatement, yet its significance cannot be understated. As one group of international management researchers aptly put it, "leadership is vital for effective organizational and societal function" (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004, 5). Tellingly, leadership education has increasingly become a main goal among business practitioners. The quality of leadership influences the business. Educational improvement through optimization of time and energy expended by leadership instructors and learners demonstrates sound judgment. Arguably, leadership development fosters management development, which are both tantamount to professional development (and perhaps personal development, too). Good leadership can be a strategic advantage and provide unambiguous professional direction. This, of course, assumes the acceptance of a model of leadership behavior as an example of what needs to be learned (Preziosi, 2009). The challenges inherent in the current business environment make such an endeavor imperative (i.e., the dearth of effective managers and leaders). Implementing accelerated learning principles is perfectly suited to make applied
leadership education time- and cost-effective in all the business disciplines. The minimalist, or optimizationalist, approach should be important to leadership educators for two reasons: the excess of leadership theories that do not translate well to industry actualities and the time compression experienced by the majority of today's students.

Learning initiatives throughout the world are continuously examined to determine the effect on or relationship to leadership education and, thusly, leadership performance. However, do accelerated learning environments actually cause learning to be amplified? Do they make a difference? As Williams and Lau (2004) reasoned, reformers always have a duty to provide evidence that their assertions are necessary, sound, practicable, and progressive. Under review in this study was the effectiveness of a variety of educational and training tools as they relate to increased learning. The factors taken into consideration were the importance of instructional delivery methods and the effect of leadership education, i.e., how it relates to organizational benefits and outcomes. The conceptual model for the study drew on the work of Ostrander and Schroeder (1997), who reported on the work of noted Bulgarian educator and psychologist Georgi Lozanov, who developed the learning/teaching theory suggestopedia.

Good teaching is a moot point if the learners are not learning much. Thus, it is important to add to our understanding of what makes for good learning results. Learning, which is usually the result of facilitating, was the core of this study. The outcomes orientation of this article is based on the assumption that the business industry is pragmatic and results-oriented in nature.

Traditional Versus Nontraditional Instruction
The traditional role of college instructors was that of content deliverers (Miller, 2007). They determined the subject matter. They set the expected standards for what was to be learned. What they thought was important information was lectured to a group of students in a classroom. Time was left at the end for students to ask questions. The material presented later appeared on an examination. Many professors gauged their instructional worth, often with pride, by the rigor of their class and testing instruments. Less thought was given to what students actually learned and could actually apply some day on their jobs. If the class was hard and most students were passing the tests at levels that
approximated a bell curve, it was assumed students were learning. It has been understood for decades that the straight lecture/tutorial modality is outdated spoon-feeding that stifles creative thinking and keeps the pupil inferior to the teacher (Williams & Lau, 2004). Still, the passive pattern is repeated worldwide nowadays in traditional institutions with large class sizes. Why? Because it has always been done that way, and old habits die hard. One can also argue that it is an inexpensive method of educating large numbers of people.

Few question that leadership education should involve rigorous coursework and pedagogical approaches that have been demonstrated to enhance student success for all students (Rhodes, 2007). However, progressive instructors have never accepted the idea that cramming students with information is an optimal way for them to learn. In the early 20th century, William Butler Yeats clarified this idea by using a metaphor, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." In short, the most optimal way for learners to learn is not through a surfeit of facts and an emphasis on rote memory that unsurprisingly results in a bloated curriculum and less learning.

Identifying the correct level of academic difficulty should be one of the means (albeit a very essential one), and learning should be the major end. Teaching is a complex task, and an expert facilitator has a repertoire of strategies (Hmelo-Silver & Barrows, 2006). Education unquestionably has more to do with learning than teaching. Learning is enhanced by giving students just the right amount (i.e., the optimal level) of information and assignments. If the amount and depth of learning is unjustifiably too demanding, learners become discouraged. If it is too unchallenging, the learners become uninterested. Either way, the result is certainly not accelerated learning.

Facilitation is a subtle skill that is aided by assessing and understanding the levels of students' cognitive abilities and prior experiences. The appropriate amount of class work, homework, and overall rigor can be gauged if the scholastic, demographic, and psychographic data of the students are known. Instructors concerned with accelerating learning in classroom often collect this data from the very beginning of the first class, using comprehensive pre-tests, icebreaker exercises, and informal questioning (e.g., What do you think about the new CEO's leadership so far?) to the extent possible. Through these inquiring techniques and others, conscientious instructors continually collect information
about the classroom profile until the very end of the course. They fully understand
the main rule in presenting information: know your audience.

Conscientious instructors ensure that their presentation style and classroom
activities are conducive to learning, as opposed to making it hard just for the sake
of making it a difficult class. They use methods and techniques that further
accelerate learning. They create circumstances through a multitude of large and
small actions that make learning more likely to occur. These may include moving
the clock to the back of the classroom so as to be out of students’ sight or hosting
a portion of the course from an interactive online educational platform to
supplement learning material. Like scholarly interchange among business
educators, facilitating classroom instruction often means allowing students to do
more of the talking than they would in the traditional setting. It means being warm
and kind to students collectively and each student individually.

Outstanding instructors tend to be flexible. They are continually adapting by
assimilating new subject matter and pedagogical methods. Of late, technology
has provided a multitude of opportunities to do just that. For instance, the idea
that technology-based learning environments will cause students to be learners
who are more active corresponds to the results of recent research conducted by
Douglas, Miller, Kwansa, and Cummings (2008). Their study indicated that the
student-subjects were stimulated by the simulation experience and perceived it
as useful.

When progressive instructors facilitate learning to the best of their ability, it
results in intensified learning. The role of learning style must be understood and
applied (Gooden, Preziosi, & Barnes, 2009). The authors address which
instructional method fits which learning style. Many of the methods discussed in
this article are accelerated methods of learning that provide new ways of
improving leadership education and have implications for leadership practice.

**Accelerated Learning**

Meier (2000) declared that “Accelerated Learning is the most advanced learning
approach in use today . . . . It is based on the latest research on the brain and
learning. It can use a wide variety of methods and media. It is open and flexible”
(9). Trainers and educators, then, are no longer information *shovelers*, but
*orchestrators* of a total environment where learners happily do most of the work.
The replacement of didactic teaching with an enhanced minimalist approach does not mean that lectures and tutorials must be eliminated from business curricula. Rather, it views them as two options within a host of pedagogical methods that can be considered toward the objective of optimization. There exist myriad ways to shorten the time in which students will learn a given topic, concept, etcetera. Tafoya (2004) outlined an integrative model that draws on transactional analysis and accelerated learning systems with the purpose of improving teaching and learning methods, teacher-student relationships, and the empowerment of learners. However, strengthening the quantity and quality of learning can be accomplished by modifying three main factors: aspects about the student, variables related to the instructor, and temporal factors.

Miller (2007) called for teachers to become instructional designers who create courses and learning managers who deliver them. In his estimation, the core competence of both of these new education professions is the combination of a broad understanding of educational technology with a deep knowledge of learning. Hostetler (2007) found that something as simple as introducing practices that create a safe place to learn constitutes accelerated learning. She also emphasized, "Learning is critical for leaders, especially those in complex, fast-moving industries. . . . but the kind of learning necessary to develop strong leaders is the kind that requires introspection, a notion that is counterintuitive in fast-paced organizations" (63). Problem-based learning is an ever more popular accelerated instructional method in which students learn through facilitated problem solving (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Problem-based learning is directed by the students themselves. Students often work in collaborative groups to identify what they need to learn to solve a problem. They engage in self-directed learning and then apply their new knowledge to the problem and reflect on what they learned and the effectiveness of the strategies employed. The teacher acts as a facilitator or the learning process rather than a provider of knowledge. The evidence suggests that problem-based learning is an instructional approach that offers the potential to help students develop flexible understanding and lifelong learning skills (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Classroom applications aside, learning theory is continually evolving, but the information that actually works in practice often does not enter the mainstream in most countries. For instance, appealing to various learning styles is important.
One student processes information different from the next student. Understanding how the brain learns is just one area that can be instructive in strengthening facilitation. Bradley (2004) described that the left brain is the logical hemisphere, which recognizes words, letters, and numbers. It thus processes speech, analysis, time, and sequence. The right brain is the intuitive hemisphere, which gathers information more for images than words. It looks for patterns. It processes many kinds of information simultaneously. It interprets language through context—body language and tone of voice—rather than through literal meaning. It specializes in spatial perception and is capable of fantasy and creativity. It recognizes places, faces, and objects. Consistent with Bradley’s findings, Tesone (2004) suggested that a holistic learning model might be useful for training both experienced and inexperienced managers in terms of leadership development.

Effective instructional design means looking beyond the mainstream content and pedagogical literature. Current theorists and practitioners are beginning to distinguish what are essentially the two types of leadership thinking in existence today: mainstream and multistream. Multistream leaders are more aware of the multiple tensions facing them (Dyck & Neubert, 2010). The multistream approach “is being increasingly advocated by management professors and becoming more evident among vanguard practitioners” (Dyck & Neubert, 2010, 21). Amplified learning occurs when teachers have broad knowledge, constitutes the focal point of excellent facilitation, and is thus the driver of the study at hand.

Hypothesis
This study examined the difference between traditional instructional methods and accelerated learning methods. Based on the literature review, it is expected that there would be a difference in learning effectiveness between traditional instructional methods and accelerated learning methods. Therefore, the research examined the following single hypothesis: There will be meaningful or significant differences in learning outcomes in leadership education as measured by test scores between adult students taught using traditional methods and those using accelerated learning methods.
Method

Design and Sample
Survey research constituted the research methodology. The Solomon four-group research design model was the methodology for the study. The research design, shown in Table 1, was used to remove the influence of pre-testing.

<table>
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<th>Table 1: Solomon Four-Group Research Design</th>
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The participants in the study were 135 graduate management students (nontraditional students). They were taking their final course, Leadership Seminar, before being awarded master’s degrees in business administration, healthcare administration, or human resource management. A significant characteristic of the students was that they were gainfully employed in full-time professional or managerial positions in private sectors. The average age was 31 years. The sample size for each of the four groups is shown in Table 2.

<table>
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<th>Table 2: Sample Size for the Experimental and Control Groups</th>
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<td>Group</td>
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<td>Control I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control II</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experimental I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experimental II</td>
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Procedures
Group membership was self-selected, as students were permitted to register for any of the four groups (selections) of the course. Experimental Group I and Control Group I were given pre-tests to determine whether there were any pre-existing differences in productivity between the management knowledge groups.
The mean scores of 4.5 for the Experimental Group and 5.02 for the control group indicate no statistically meaningful difference between groups. Thus, self-selection did not contaminate the treatment effects.

The control groups were taught using traditional instructional methods. Accelerated learning methods were used with the two experimental groups. Traditional instructional methods were defined as those that included (a) lecture by the instructor, (b) one-to-one question-and-answer interactivity between the instructor and a single student, and (c) little, if any, interaction between/among students during classroom learning activity. Accelerated learning methods were those characterized by (a) the instructor performing the role of learning facilitator, (b) interaction between/among students during classroom learning activity, (c) collaborative classroom activities, and (d) the students using somatic learning while engaged in classroom activity. Somatic learning incorporates physical activity as part of the learning process. These accelerated learning methods include any kind of physical activity, games, peer learning, self-assessment questionnaires, and behavior incident analysis.

The leadership course was delivered in a one-week intensive format. An instructor-developed test was administered as a post-test to the two control groups and the two experimental groups for the purposes of comparative analysis. The test was both factual and applied. The test was objective in nature to eliminate any potential bias by the instructor. The tests were scored by the instructor. The instructor was one of the authors of this research paper.

Findings and Discussion
Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the post-test scores for the four groups.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Experimental I</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control I</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental II</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control II</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
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Summary
The procedures outlined were followed closely to assure that the data collection and analyses were done in a manner that is both statistically correct and confidential. The research supports the hypothesis that nontraditional instructional methods lead to significantly better learning than traditional instructional methods.

In the past, it was sufficient to simply teach or train business management students about the various relevant subjects. Not so anymore. The expectation is quickly becoming that student time will be efficiently used in education and training. Over-challenging and under-challenging classes are not optimally effective. The literature indicates a new direction in pedagogy throughout the world, which increasingly compels the instructor to become a facilitator of accelerated learning. The learner methodologies employed in the above study are examples that can be immediately implemented by those in academic and nonacademic settings.

Future Research
Accelerated learning methods are preferred by business management students with long work schedules who desire interactivity. It is no surprise then that the majority of senior-level students in business programs are more likely to prefer active, sensing, visual, and sequential learning styles as compared to reflective, intuitive, verbal, and global learning styles. A comparison of a cohort of business students akin to the adult students in the this study would likely produce similar outcomes to the results presented above.

A model to describe a learning process that may be applied to the development of leadership practices of managers who are current practitioners in business establishments globally would benefit all stakeholders. The cutting-edge prototype would perhaps be called a Holistic Leadership Development Model for managers in the business disciplines.

References


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