

# THE ACTION BASED EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE FRAMEWORK: FROM PROGRAM TO FULL COURSE

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## Abstract

This paper will discuss the application of the action based effective leadership development and influence (ABELDI) framework as an undergraduate and graduate leadership development program and a learning practice in higher education. The psychology of leadership course was offered as a special topics elective course at an undergraduate institution of moderate size in the northeastern region of the United States for six semesters prior to receiving full course approval for Spring of 2022. An overview of the ABELDI framework is presented along with related literature, and student perceptions of the course from both semesters are analyzed. As a result of reading this paper, readers will have the opportunity to learn about and examine the impact and student perceptions of an effective leadership framework in a leadership course at a specialized institution of higher education.

## Introduction

Our world is in grave need of effective leaders (Halverson, Yeager, Menachemi, Fraser, & Freeman, 2021). There is a demand for those who have the capacity to act with integrity, and who also possess an ability to make ethically vetted decisions, especially during times of great tumult. As a result, organizations and institutions are requiring leaders to be held accountable for critical components of leadership development, such as personal leadership development or self-development (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004). Day and Lance (2004) define self-development as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in: diagnosing their learning needs; Formulating learning goals; Identifying human and material resources for learning; Choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies; and Evaluating learning outcomes. Self-development can incorporate not only learning activities focused on skill acquisition, but also activities and experiences directed toward expanding one's conceptual frame of meaning; the result of such self-development may not be specific skill acquisition but a more complex understanding of leadership (Lord & Hall, 2005). This kind of personal leadership has the potential to transform the very meaning of what an individual learns. Although the need exists for personal, self-development as a part of effective leadership training, this often has not been the case. The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership (Maxwell, 2007). Lord and Hall (2005) contend that the lack of research on how leaders actually develop is due to the fact that most leadership development approaches have addressed "surface structure skills" as opposed to "the deeper, principled aspects of leadership that may be especially important for understanding the long-term development of effective leaders" (p. 592). In higher education, this translates to instructors moving from surface learning to deep learning, where understanding is developed through active and constructive processes (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011). Roehl, Reddy and Shannon (2013) purport that deep learning affordances increase when learning practices shift from a teacher-centered paradigm to a learner-centered paradigm. This paper aims to answer the following questions: *How do students at a specialized institution perceive the psychology of leadership course?*; and *What are student perceptions of the effective leadership framework?* As a result of reading this paper, readers will have the opportunity to: 1.) Learn about a framework for effective leadership development and influence applied to a leadership course in higher education; 2.) Examine the impact and student perceptions of an effective leadership course at a specialized institution of higher education; and 3) Learn best practices of an effective leadership framework in its travels from a leadership development program to a full academic course.

## Review of Related Scholarship

The Action Based Effective Leadership Development and Influence (ABELDI) Framework is based on a leadership development program which ran for four years at a specialized institution of higher education (Payne, 2018, July). This work was refined through teaching previous iterations of a leadership course nationally and abroad (Payne, 2016, November; Payne, 2015, July). The ABELDI Framework focuses on four areas of effective leadership broken down by emphasizing taking *action* and demonstrating *potential* for *self* and *others*. The following sections will highlight the literature that contributed to the ABELDI Framework while also giving an overview of the Framework itself.

### Effective Leadership

Bass (1960) discussed how successful leadership has to do with a person setting and achieving their objectives, while *effective leadership*, on the other hand, has to do with helping others achieve some degree of success with their objectives. The more successful the others are, the more effective the leader. The ABELDI Framework refers to a leader as successful when they work to achieve something on their own, whereas a leader is considered effective when others whom they lead achieve some level of success. Specific to effective leadership, Bass (1960) notes that leaders are effective when the person being led acts as a reflection of their leader, in that they are inspired and aspire to become leaders themselves.

**ABELDI: Framework Assumptions.** In Aristotle's *Principles of a Dichotomy Potentiality and Actuality*, he defines these terms as follows: *Actuality* generally refers to anything which is currently happening, while *potentiality* refers to any "possibility" that a thing can be said to have (Sachs, 1999). *Actuality* refers to where a person is at present. In self-leadership, a person develops a need to get to a desired state, and this need translates to *taking action*. With this picture of a desired state in mind, the onus is on the person to take *action* and to thus demonstrate some form of *potential* to achieve their desired state. Therefore, *action* and *potential* represent the aspects requiring an active state of being in between Aristotle's actuality and potentiality (Sachs, 1999). This is how we arrive at the '*action-based*' emphasis for the ABELDI Framework.

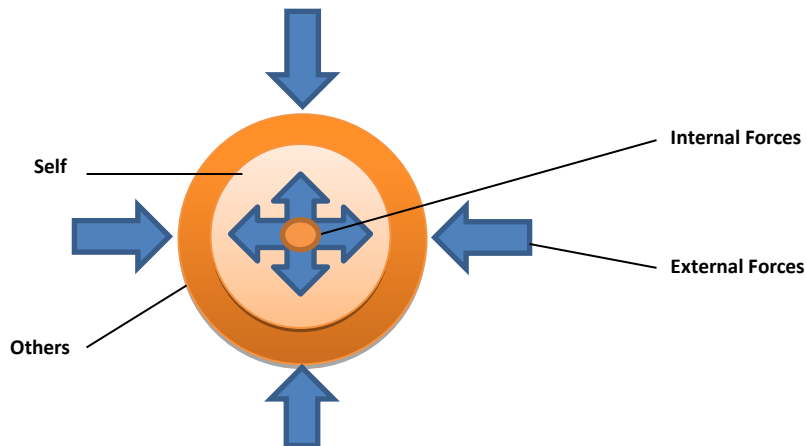
**Leadership begins with action.** The following quote by Donald H. McGannon is popular within the leadership development community: "Leadership is action, not position" (Peter, 1991, p. 71). This quote takes the rank, title, or position out of the idea of leadership, and instead focuses on the actions a person takes. The best way to accomplish a goal is to start working toward it (Kruse, 2012). *Action* represents effort and serves as the mindset of preparing for a given situation. For example, a person decides to run a marathon. *Action* would be represented by everything the person does to prepare for the marathon, including training, nutrition/diet, talking with someone who has run previous marathons, and more. Every effort expended from the decision to run until the starting gun goes off on the day of the marathon is *action*. This form of action is illustrative of the following: "I am confident, and I mean what I say." All practice runs, and any form of rehearsal in preparation for the marathon is considered *action*.

**Action begets a demonstration of potential.** Effective leadership is defined by results, not attributes (Kruse, 2012). *Potential* represents the performance, or the result of the effort put forth and the purpose it serves in demonstrating potential for what "can be" in the future. In essence, the ABELDI Framework assumes that a person will demonstrate a multitude of *potential* which builds incrementally with each official result (i.e., race, competition, etc.). The results of race demonstrate *potential* for the next time the person runs a marathon. To continue the marathon example, *potential* represents the results of the person running the actual marathon, or their performance (time, distance made, milestones, etc.). A person would begin to demonstrate *potential* as soon as the race starts. Ultimately, the results of the marathon (e.g., time) would measure to some degree the following: "I had the propensity and the follow-through." If a person performed extremely well in running the marathon, they have demonstrated *potential* to themselves and others for what is possible if the person decided to run in another

marathon. Here is a completely different example of how *potential* can be demonstrated: The Actor Chris Evans played the superhero The Human Torch in the first version of the *Fantastic Four* movie (Arad & Story, 2005). It could be argued that, while performing in this part, he demonstrated the necessary *potential* to be selected for the role of Captain America in subsequent Marvel Universe films (Whedon & Feige, 2012). Further, the movie *The Perfect Score* might have provided the opportunity for both Chris Evans as well as Scarlett Johansson (i.e., Black Widow) to demonstrate the kind of acting *potential* that launched both stars into long runs as superheroes (Robbins & Birnbaum, 2004). Ultimately, the interplay of taking *action* and demonstrating *potential* creates a virtuous circle and establishes momentum set toward the practice of *effective leadership* (Uslaner, 2000).

*Example of action and potential.* The interplay of *action* and *potential* connotes aspects of goal-setting theory (Locke, 1968). As a way to illustrate the interplay of *action* and *potential*, let's assume that Person G has set the objective to run in the Boston Marathon. A significant amount of effort, or *action* was put forth on the part of Person G to prepare to demonstrate *potential* (i.e., successfully running the 26.2 miles). The following serve as illustrations of possibilities regarding the outcome: 1) At some point leading up to the day of the Marathon, Person G sustains an injury which forces them to be unable to run the race. Thus, since Person G did not meet the objective of running in the race, no results were recorded. The effort Person G extended during this process will serve as experience that could be of benefit if they decide to set the objective of running the Marathon again, or to someone that Person G knows who sets the same objective. Thus, effort extended toward reaching an objective can be useful, but the objective needs to be reached before results are possible. Regardless of whether the person completes their objective or not, they will have gained significant experience of great challenge and reward for future pursuits; or 2) Person G successfully completes all training and preparation for the race and is fully healthy and prepared when the gun goes off on Marathon Monday. In achieving the objective of participating in the race, Person G then set the objective of finishing the race with a time of 3:30:00. As the race progressed, Person G was making great pace but suffered a painful hamstring cramp shortly after the 14-mile marker that impacted the achievement of the objective for time. The results were that Person G successfully finished the Marathon with a time of 4:12:27. Although Person G did not achieve their objective of 3:30:00, they achieved the overall objective of running the Boston Marathon. Person G could re-evaluate their experiences, both in preparing for the race as well as actually running the race, to put a more effective plan together for the next time. As another option, Person G could serve as a mentor to someone else who sets the same objective (i.e., running the Boston Marathon) in the future. It is in this final option during the second illustration of possibilities where we see the underpinnings of leadership, where Person G could help guide another person toward success.

**Both action and potential have a self and others dimension.** Bass (1960) did not discuss the importance of setting and achieving one's own goals while simultaneously helping others to set and achieve their goals. It is difficult to help others without being able to help oneself. With this in mind, the ABELDI Framework purports that *effective leadership* is representative of a person's capacity to take *action* and demonstrate *potential*, simultaneously for *self* and for *others*. The *self* refers to a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action (Staff, 2004). It has been said throughout history that it is silly to think a person should rule others if they cannot rule themselves (Kruse, 2012). The process for intentional change emphasizes a focus on *self* (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). *Others*, as defined by Staff (2004), refers to that which is distinct from, or opposite to oneself. For the purposes of the ABELDI Framework, *self* is the primary subject of leadership, while *others* refers to the object of leadership, or the person who is being led. Individual's sense of *self* connotes forces that are internal, while an individual's sense of *others* connotes forces that are external. Internal forces (e.g., the internal force of *self*), by nature, push outward (i.e., advance), while external forces (e.g., internal forces of *others* upon *self*) push inward. Please see Figure 1 for a graphical representation of the concept of *self* and *others*.

**Figure 1: Concept of Self and Others**

**The ABELDI Framework is comprised of four areas.** The ABELDI Assessment focuses on the following modalities, or areas, of leadership: *Aspire*, *inspire*, *model*, and *persuade*. The names of the four areas are action verbs, staying true to the sentiment of the Framework that *leadership begins with action*. Each of these four areas are explained below.

The ABELDI Framework relies on aspects of goal-setting theory, with emphasis on an individual's performance after goals have been established (Godwin, Neck, & Houghton, 1999). Additionally, the ABELDI Framework utilizes the following well-known quotation: "Give a person a fish and feed them for a day; Teach a person to fish and you feed them for a lifetime" (Qasim & Qasim, 2013). See Appendix section for ABELDI Framework as applied to the principles of goal-setting theory and to the "Give a person a fish..." quotation (Locke, 1968; Qasim & Qasim, 2013).

*Aspire*. To *aspire* is to direct one's hopes or ambitions towards achieving something (Dictionary, 1989). This cultivation of ambition implies an internal process, with a focus on *self*. If left dormant, this ambition will behave as such; much like a dream or a fantasy, it can become comfortably inactive. Thus, a person would need to first take *action* and then eventually demonstrate *potential* for themselves to create and sustain momentum toward success. Slash, the famous guitarist, once said, "I had no aspirations to be a musician, but I picked up a guitar for two seconds and haven't put it down since" (Marshall, 2004). This quotation is humorous but also implies a progression of mastery which began within the first couple seconds of picking up a guitar. A popular leadership quote by Lao Tsu places emphasis on *action*: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" (Dreher, 2002). With regard to the ABELDI Framework, the journey to *effective leadership* begins with *aspiring* (i.e., taking *action* and demonstrating *potential* for *self*). This area of the ABELDI Framework represents a time of dedication and training; of learning to fish and for working hard to achieve your personal goals. The primary focus of this area is on developing the self; the cultivation of skills as a player before becoming a coach (Lord & Hall, 2005). The working example for each of the four areas of the ABELDI Framework will focus on musicians. The *aspire* area represents the hours of intense commitment to learning and practicing and then performing and refining in order to reach a level of proficiency. Greene (2012) would refer to this period as a multitude of attempts at achieving mastery. Through the pursuit of mastery, aspiration can become actualized, and the first steps toward *effective leadership* are taken. A musician can become a more effective instructor by obtaining the knowledge and wisdom through their own experiences of *aspiring*, and this knowledge is transferrable and of value to people who *aspire* in different occupations and industries.

*Inspire*. This area focuses on becoming a champion for *others*. The following quote by Bill Bradley accurately reflects the nature of this area: "Leadership is unlocking people's potential to become better" (Kruse, 2012). The *inspire* area represents taking *action* and demonstrating *potential* for *others*. When others whom we inspire are

successful, the leadership provided qualifies as a collective (e.g., effective) achievement (Pearce & Conger, 2003). This area requires person A's dedication to person B's success, and the degree to which person B is successful is a reflection of person A's effectiveness (Bass, 1960). Therefore, the *inspire* area focuses on teaching others to fish and working hard to help others achieve their goals. It should be noted that there are myriad other factors which contribute to an individual's success, but the intent of this area is to focus on the exchange that is possible when a person attempts to help another person be successful. To continue the example of a musician, once they achieve a certain level of proficiency, the *inspire* area might consist of providing musical instruction for *others* through weekly lessons, being able to assist them in progressing toward achievement of their goals. The reality is that the musician instructor's students will have many other tasks that will require their time, such as schoolwork, community service, and the like. The musician can consistently instruct their student toward success amidst these other responsibilities with the hope of the student achieving mastery and gaining experience with music performance in general and also with their chosen instrument. Much in the same way that learning to play the piano can assist in learning to play other instruments, the aim of the *inspire* area of the ABELDI Framework is to encourage continuous and lifelong learning.

*Model.* To *model* is to set an example for *others* and to be utilized as an example to follow (Dictionary, 1989). The concept of modeling relies on Merton's (1973) work on role modeling, which asserts that a person's success can be emulated by *others*. Modeling behavior has been shown to be an influence on *others* with regard to goal setting and motivation (Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007; Bandura, 1997). The ABELDI Framework explains this as taking *action* for *self* and demonstrating *potential* for *others*. According to Gibson (2004), modeling can be differentiated from mentoring in that it does not require a close, personal relationship between models and observers. Thus, this area of the ABELDI Framework is more of a passive form of leadership, but a modality of *influence*, nonetheless. In the field of education, student instructors learn either directly or indirectly from supervising teachers. When their teacher educator models certain behavior, student teachers not only hear and read about teaching; they experience it (Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007). Use of celebrities as part of marketing communications strategy is a fairly common practice for major firms in supporting corporate or brand imagery (Erdogan, 1999). This endorsement aspect of the ABELDI Framework meant to encompass the "expert" form, since *modeling* involves setting an example for *others* (McCracken, 1989). Similar to the *aspire* area, *model* involves working hard to achieve your goals in order to help others achieve their goals. This is a time when your methods would be noticed by *others*, whether individuals or collective entities of some form, and they might want to buy your fish or learn your fishing method, so to speak. Continuing with our musician examples, let's say a musician is on stage playing a gig and there is an aspiring musician in the audience who, as a result of appreciating the precision and style of the musician's guitar-playing, now seeks out new styles of playing to incorporate into their own style of playing the guitar. Thus, the musician was able to *model* a level of musicianship indirectly to the aspiring musician, which served as the aspiring musician's inspiration to enhance their own skills.

*Persuade.* This area of the ABELDI Framework involves recruitment and promotion, and in general relies on behaviors associated with a more traditional definition of leadership, such as leading people toward a common goal (Bass, 1960). The common goal or vision is determined by the leader, and this can be a vision of their creation, or they can be acting on behalf of another's vision – similar to senior leadership at a company (Carroll & Flood, 2011; Landsberg, 2003). The ABELDI Framework refers to the *persuade* area as taking action for *others* and demonstrating *potential* for *self*. This involves convincing others to buy your fish or learn your fishing method and essentially involves getting others to work toward achieving your goals. The Reverend Theodore Hesburgh captures the importance of vision: "The very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision...It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion...You can't blow an uncertain trumpet" (Kruse, 2012). The ABELDI Framework highlights the importance of developing the three previously-mentioned areas in order to be effective in the *persuade* area. Once a musician has achieved a level of musical proficiency while *aspiring* toward their own goals while *inspiring* and modeling for others to achieve their own goals, they may wish to start their own band. The desired number of musicians, the styles of music the band will play, and similar decisions would encompass part of the musician's vision for their band, and they would then work to recruit members and prepare the band to begin to perform for the public. Though the vision in this example is being executed by one musician, the success of the band will be reflective of all members putting in the required effort. The level of success of the band will determine the degree to which the musician who created the band (e.g., the band leader) is effective, and this is all scoped by the musician through their expectations, goals, and ambitions that are integrated into their overall

vision for the band. The band leader will continue to take *action* for the band by seeking lucrative performance opportunities and by promoting the music that the band creates and performs, and results of these efforts will serve as the *potential* demonstrated by the project as a whole. Band promotion involves a great deal of advocacy on the part of the leader, and advocacy is an important aspect of leadership (Sosin & Caulum, 1983). When a band sells all tickets to fill a venue, the band is demonstrating *potential* for being *effective* in their practice of being a band. To expand the example, perhaps the band leader assembles other bands, and forms a record label. The original vision that the band leader had is now augmented to include the collection of bands who produce music for the record label and for the record label as a whole. The band leader could help other musicians and bands to be successful by relaying their experiences and helping to guide them toward success, whether these other musicians are members of their record label or not. Regardless, the band leader represents someone in a position to *persuade* others to assist in actualizing their vision or a vision for which they serve as an agent.

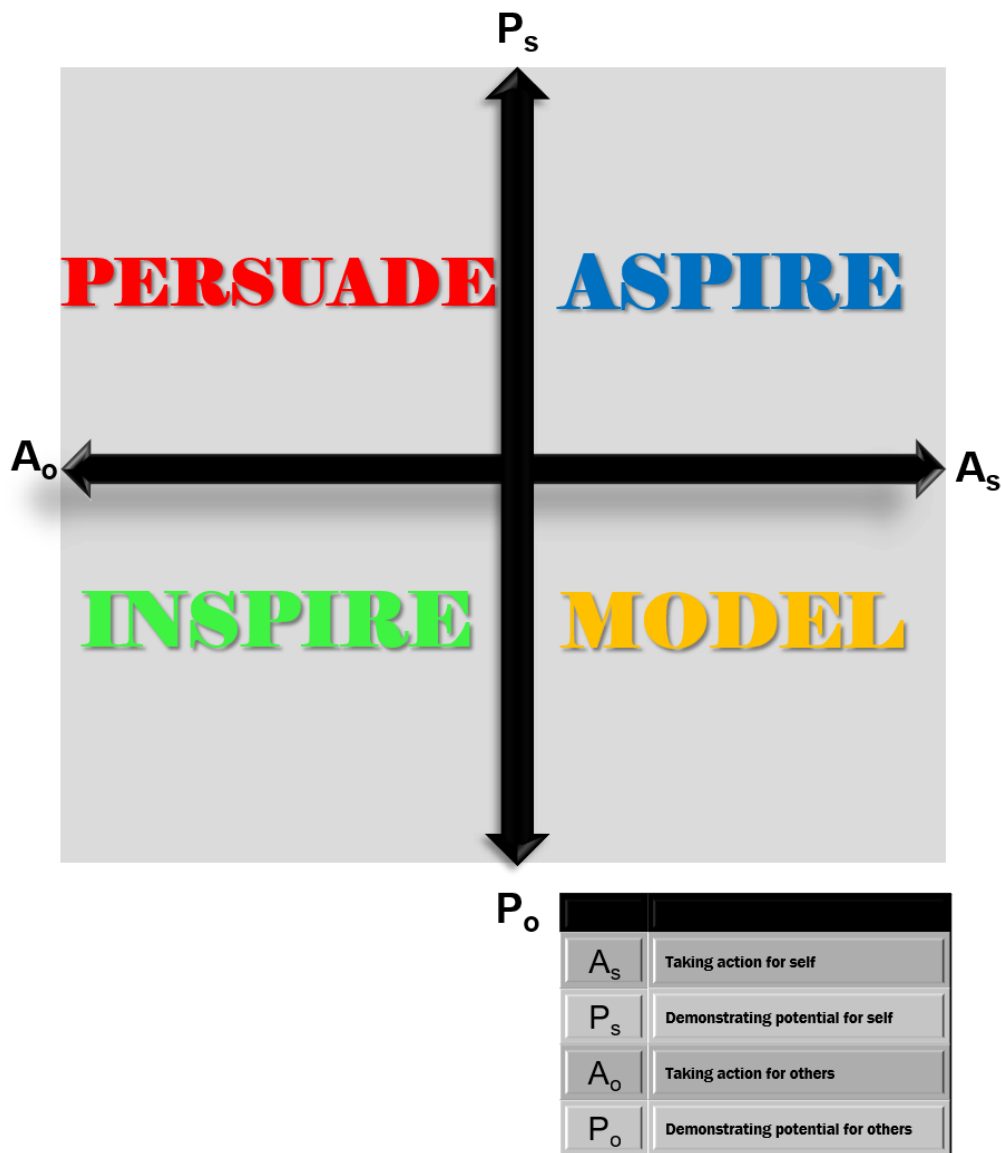
Please see Figure 2 for a graphical representation of the ABELDI Framework which includes x- and y- axes to represent *action* and *potential* respectively, and the subsequent four areas of *aspire*, *inspire*, *model*, and *persuade*.

**ABELDI framework: Effective leadership development and influence.** Since we have established a conceptual understanding of the ABELDI Framework and *effective leadership*, the following represent the two aspects of *effective leadership* highlighted among the four areas.

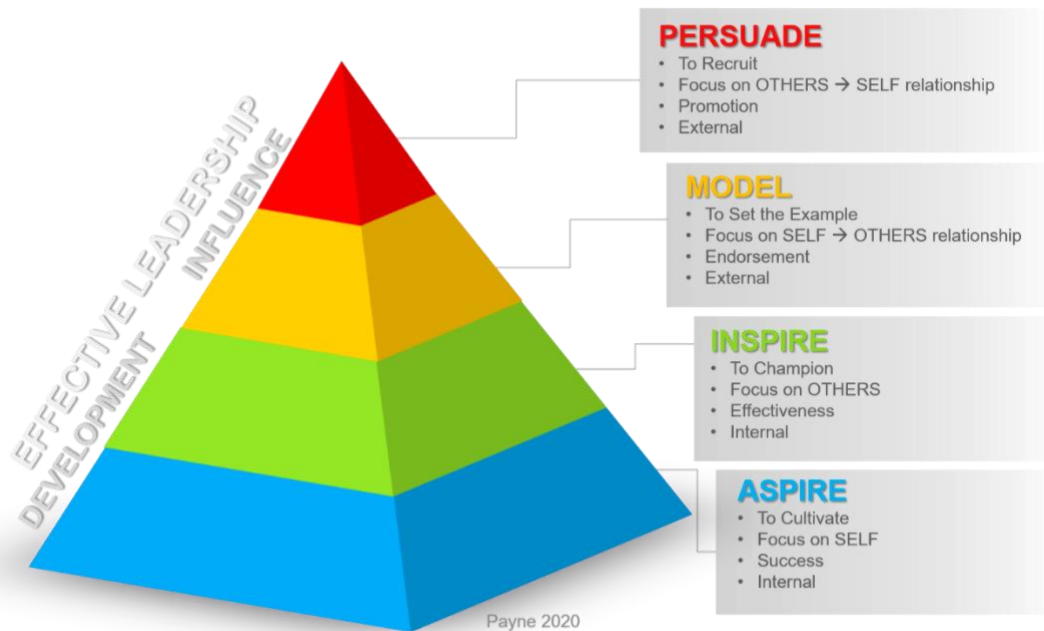
*Effective Leadership Development.* Effective leadership development is a process in which leaders take personal responsibility for initiating, sustaining, and evaluating growth in their own leadership capacities and in their conceptual frames about the conduct of leading of others (Day & Lance, 2004). The ABELDI Framework incorporates these aspects into the operational definition of Effective Leadership Development, encapsulated by the *Aspire* and *Inspire* areas.

*Effective Leadership Influence.* By their very nature, leaders are vehicles of influence, thus demonstrating influence and leadership are connected both phenomenologically and conceptually (Maxwell, 2007; Hogg, 2010). Effective Leadership Influence under the ABELDI Framework is represented by the *Modeling* and *Persuading* areas.

Figure 2: ABELDI Framework: Four Areas with Action &amp; Potential



It should also be noted that the four areas of the ABELDI Framework are likely to occur simultaneously. For example, if a person is *aspiring* at a level where *others* were there to witness it, they could also be *modeling* in some form (e.g., play this brand of guitar) or even *persuading* (i.e., come audition for my band). Please see Figure 3 for the ABELDI Framework Pyramid, which is a reflection of its intended progression (*aspire* to *persuade*). This order has been selected to offer balance at each focus of *effective leadership*. For example, *aspire* and *inspire* are essentially polar opposites but together represent a healthy view of *effective leadership development*.

**Figure 3: ABELDI Framework Pyramid**

**Elements of Learning.** As Wendell Willkie once said, “Education is the mother of leadership” (Kruse, 2012). This quote epitomizes the purpose of the psychology of leadership course, which makes use of learning elements to help encourage effective leadership practices via course design and course delivery. The ABELDI Framework incorporates notions of the constructivist and cognitivist focus of leadership development and influence (Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1997; Wortham, 2003). The psychology of leadership course provides opportunities for students to engage in self-development, and these concepts along with the ABELDI Framework and selected course topics have helped to reinforce this intention.

Constructive developmental theory takes as its subject the growth and elaboration of a person's ways of understanding oneself and the world, resulting in an exploration of just how much can be understood about a person by understanding their meaning system (Kegan, 1994; Piaget, 1954). Wortham (2003) presents characteristics of the cognitivist approach to learning, including the idea that the learner is seeking to refine and augment his/her existing mental models. An integral component of cognitivist learning purports that the learner must want to learn and cannot be forced to do so (Wortham, 2003). The psychology of leadership course nudges students toward a process of augmenting meaning systems through cognitivist-focused elements of learning. Transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference, which are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. Mezirow (1997) goes on to report that frames of reference selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. The ABELDI Framework aspires to initiate reflection on these concepts within the current learning practice of the psychology of leadership course.

Delivery of the psychology of leadership course content relies primarily on principles of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). According to Schank, Berman and Macpherson's (1999) instructional theory, experiential learning is based on the belief that people learn best by doing. The psychology of leadership course is designed to create an environment where the instructor steps back to allow the experiential learning to take place (Payne, 2019). Students have substantial opportunities to engage in experiential learning while also allowing those who wish to rise to the



challenge the stretch goal of sharing what they learned with the rest of the students in the course to encourage social learning (Bandura, 1969). The learning process is a continuous cycle of experiencing and exploring (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The next section will outline the psychology of leadership course in greater detail.

### Description of Practice

Specialized institutions of higher education, in particular those with a STEM focus, are typically highly-structured, with little to no room for self-expression due to the need for forming a basic understanding of the fundamentals of their specific major (Xie, Fang, & Shauman, 2015). The psychology of leadership course, however, operates from a philosophy of allowing students to think for themselves regarding how to interpret course material and apply it toward their personal leadership journey. Kozulin and Presseisen (1995) make a case for the vital importance of independent thinking skills, which can be developed by providing access to the appropriate tools (i.e., human, psychological, and/or material resources) made available by the teacher to support the learner in accomplishing tasks. The instructor introduced curated versions of each topic supported by multimedia with the ability to make real-time changes to available content.

Learning outcomes for the psychology of leadership course state that students who complete the course will be able to: 1) Identify and apply theories, approaches, and styles of leadership; 2) Develop and analyze effective leadership development plans; and 3) Apply course content to various sources through the lens of their own experiences.

**ABELDI Framework Development Timeline.** The psychology of leadership course was designed with elements from an inclusive leadership development program and also from previous leadership courses taught at different institutions of higher education both nationally and internationally (Payne, 2018, July; Payne, 2019). The course was taught as a special topics course for six semesters (Spring 2020, Summer 2020, Fall 2020, Spring 2021, Summer 2021, and Fall 2021), and has been approved as a full course beginning in the Spring 2022 semester. Please see Table 1 for the ABELDI Framework Timeline. An overview of the timeline is presented below.

**Table 1: ABELDI Framework Development Timeline**

| PROGRAM (P) / COURSE (C)           | LENGTH OF TIME                                       | AUDIENCE  | SIGNIFICANCE  |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| COMMUNITY OF EFFECTIVE LEADERS (P) | 2011-2014  | UNDERGRADUATE<br>GRADUATE<br>BUSINESS<br>(U.S.) | ASPIRE & INSPIRE<br>(EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP)<br>"Leadership = ACTION" |
| LEADERSHIP, POWER, & POLITICS (C)  | 2012-2016  | UNDERGRADUATE<br>BUSINESS<br>(U.S.)             | EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP<br>DEVELOPMENT (ABELD)                         |
| THE MORAL LEADER (C)               | 2014-2016  | GRADUATE/MBA<br>(BELGIUM)                       | <b>+ INFLUENCE</b> (ABELDI)<br>(MODEL & PERSUADE)                   |
| LEADERSHIP FOR ESL SPEAKERS (C)    | 2018   | UNDERGRADUATE<br>FEMALE EXCHANGE<br>(JAPAN)     | CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES<br>SHARED LEADERSHIP<br>APPLICATION     |
| THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP (C)   | 2020-2021<br>(SPECIAL TOPICS)<br>2022- (FULL COURSE) | UNDERGRADUATE<br>STEM<br>(U.S.)                 | APPLICATION TO WIDE RANGE OF<br>CAREERS/ASPIRATIONS                 |

**Community of effective leaders.** The CEL program provided an opportunity for undergraduate and graduate business students at a specialized institution to learn about the intricacies of leadership through involvement in seminars, workshops, and other leadership-centered activities. Membership was based upon completion of requirements, not on previous leadership experience, making an effort to address socioeconomic differences in access and exposure to leadership opportunities (Payne, 2018, July). The program was inspired by the Donald H.

McGannon quote “Leadership is action, not position” (Peter, 1991, p. 71). The program consisted of two levels of effective leadership: *Aspire*, or taking action to meet the requirements for becoming a member; and *Inspire*, or working as a member to help those who are working to become members of the program.

**Leadership, power, and politics.** This course was created by a faculty member at an institution specializing in business for undergraduate business students. The instructor had the freedom to get to a deeper level of conception of effective leadership through the focus on the process of taking personal accountability for their personal growth and development (Day & Lance, 2004; Bass, 1960). Much of what was being explored to teach the course was incorporated into the aforementioned CEL program with emphasis on the aspects related to effective leadership development.

**The moral leader.** This course was taught in Belgium to graduate students, many of whom were MBA students (Payne, 2016, November). Though many of the leadership concepts were borrowed from the course on leadership, power, and politics, the focus centered on leaders as vehicles of influence (Maxwell, 2007). Students were expected to better understand the connection of influence to leadership (Hogg, 2010). The areas of the ABELDI Framework that encompass influence, *Model and Persuade*, were created during the delivery of this course. , thus demonstrating influence and leadership are connected both phenomenologically and conceptually (Maxwell, 2007; Hogg, 2010).

**Leadership for ESL speakers.** The lecture of economic principles, designed and delivered for female ESL (English as a Second Language) students participating in an international exchange program between Japan and the U.S., allowed students the opportunity to understand economics through different cultural and societal lenses (Payne, 2020; Tran 2015). The course centered on the application of economic concepts toward other areas of business including social sciences and leadership-related decision-making via the use of progressive principles of learning for course material delivery (Wortham, 2003). The course made use of more shared and distributive forms of leadership and learning in a positive and challenging environment where the focus was kept on students and not the instructor (Bass, 1999; Yukl, 1998; Pearce, Perry, & Sims, 2001; Payne, 2019).

**The psychology of leadership.** The purpose of the psychology of leadership course is to introduce students to the theories, concepts, and application of leadership, with the ethical implications of these concepts woven throughout the course. Psychology focuses on the individual (Magnusson, 2015). The aim of the course is for students to apply course material directly to their personal experiences which will culminate into a personal leadership action plan, similar to those used commonly by executive coaches (Bartlett, Boylan, & Hale, 2014). A personalized approach was chosen for this course, requiring students to reflect and apply theoretical concepts such as ethical leadership toward their personal leadership journey, with discussions and team-based assignments aimed at emphasizing course concepts in place to encourage retention of the course material. The result is a course design and delivery that focuses on the psychological theories and overall foundation of how we as humans think about leadership and provides affordances for students to explore ways to incorporate the leadership material discussed into their personal aspirations. Selected topics from Northouse (2018) and other leadership-related topics such as works by Greene (2012; 2000) are integrated into the course.

### Discussion of Outcomes

The psychology of leadership course has been offered as a special topics course from Spring 2020 to Fall 2021 semesters at a STEM-focused specialized institution and is being offered as a full course for the first time during the Spring 2022 semester. The special topics iteration of the course (six semesters) offered many opportunities for improving the course via reduction of course topics, the addition of guest speakers, and a continued effort to establish the best flow of course content. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the course evaluation feedback from the previous semesters (Clark, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). Highlights are presented below by emergent themes of informal student course evaluation responses.

**Spring 2020 – Summer 2021 Semesters.** Student feedback from the first five semesters was analyzed and the following thematic areas emerged: *ABELDI Framework*; *Leadership Lessons*; and *Leadership Action Plan*. It should be noted that the course enrollment for all five semesters was at full capacity.

**ABELDI framework.** Resnick and Rosenbaum (2013) characterize *tinkering* as an experimental and iterative form of engagement that offers a multitude of opportunities to reassess goals, explore new paths, and imagine new possibilities. If the invitation to creativity is accompanied by intentional structure and guidance, tinkering can be channeled to support deep student learning (Bevan, Petrich, & Wilkinson, 2014). Students offered deep reflection in reaction to course material. This student quotation offers an honest reflection and assessment of personal performance by making use of aspects of the ABELDI Framework to convey progression:

I have progressed a lot in aspire since the beginning of the semester. At the beginning I didn't really have any aspirations besides just getting a degree and was just kind of "floating around" doing the bare minimum for things and not taking any action to grow myself. I also didn't plan on looking for an internship for the summer but after a couple weeks of this class I started to become motivated to do things and get on top of everything. I started to gain aspirations and in doing so I'm taking the beginning steps to becoming an effective leader in the future. (Personal communication, 3 May 2020)

Further relaying honest student reflection and self-assessment is the following student comment: "I wouldn't say I put the same kind of energy in [myself] than I do for others. In this class it was kind of a wakeup call, that if I want to succeed I need to get better at doing things for me and of course still do things for others, but with more of a balance" (Personal communication, 4 May 2020). As previously noted by Maxwell (2007), growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership, and the following student comment demonstrates this with precision: "I think in a lot of ways my leadership has progressed more towards actions and potential for self. Finding that balance between the myself and others and moving towards the leader I want to be. Which I think is most reflected in the aspire phase as I am almost starting over and remaking myself again" (Personal communication, 3 May 2020).

The psychology of leadership course and the ABELDI Framework operated under a learner-centered paradigm, with myriad experiences baked into the course design aimed at encouraging deep learning (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013; Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011). The following student comment reflects this sentiment: "The Abeldi frame forced me to look within and dig deeper into what it actually means and how it relates to me" (Personal communication, 12 December 2020). Here is an additional representation of student acknowledgement of deep learning: "Honestly, the Abeldi frame will probably be the thing I remember the most. We put so much emphasis on it throughout the semester that it made me dive deep into the real meaning of it all and interpret it on a deeper level" (Personal communication, 12 December 2020).

Comments from students concerning the ABELDI Framework suggest that it is an effective tool for helping students to understand leadership on a deeper, more complex level.

**Leadership lessons.** Self-development can offer for the learner an opportunity to form a more complex understanding of leadership (Lord & Hall, 2005). The following student comment reflects this notion: "The class definitely helped me realize how diverse the topic of being a leader was, and the fact that being a leader is not just a straight shot from A to B. I must actually experiment and figure out which type of leadership traits are best for me" (Personal communication, 9 August 2021). For many students at a STEM-focused institution, a course like the psychology of leadership might be their sole experience with psychology, placing more importance on the course to provide an overview of the psychological perspective: "This is my first psychology class...it's like opening a new door to another dimension" (Personal communication, 13 December 2020).

Halverson et al. (2021) noted that our world needs effective leaders. The practice of *effective leadership* has affordances during difficult times as noted by this student comment: "The knowledge and skill I learn from this class is crucial for surviving in the society" (Personal communication, 13 December 2020). Mezriow (1997) noted how

transformative learning yields changes to one's frame of reference, and this is highlighted by the following quote: "This course has been very insightful. Leadership has always just been a concept to me...the specifics, styles, success and failure, was more of an afterthought or never a concept to focus on" (Personal communication, 7 August 2021). Finally, student comments reflected how the psychology of leadership course helped them to find a path to effective leadership in lieu of personal struggles through renewal of hope:

"This course was helpful regarding my personal leadership journey since it taught me that even though I have anxiety and other stuff that I personally thought would stop me from becoming a good leader, it taught me that I still can become a good leader and how to help me get there with helping others with theirs." (Personal communication, 13 December 2020)

Overall, the student comments suggest that the psychology of leadership course is finding ways to help students learn lessons about leadership, particularly as it relates to personal leadership journeys.

**Leadership action plan.** Constructive developmental theory takes as its subject the growth and elaboration of a person's ways of understanding oneself and the world, resulting in an exploration of just how much can be understood about a person by understanding their meaning system (Kegan, 1994; Piaget, 1954). Student comments regarding the action plan highlight its utility as a potential point of reflection. The following student comment illustrates this idea: "I think the leadership action plan will be interesting to look back and introspect with over time and see how I change as a leader and reflect on what is working and what is not" (Personal communication, 4 May 2020). This student comment uses the action plan as a potential reflection point from a career perspective:

"My leadership action plan can help me identify where I am and where I need to be in life. In the future if I am stuck in a job for a long time which I find isn't helping me progress though my action plan I can use what I've learned to look for something new to set myself back on the right path" (Personal communication, 4 May 2020).

In continuing with the same theme, a student commented on how the Framework can help with setting and achieving goals while also noting how the action plan can be referenced at a time in the future: "This action plan will help me to set achievable goals and give me a way to achieve them. This action plan is the foundation of my leadership journey and is something I will reference in my next steps down my path" (Personal communication, 7 August 2021).

This student comments on how the ABELDI Framework can serve as a conversation-starter for more core leadership ideas: "I was initially skeptical of the leadership action plan. However, it ended up exceeding my expectations, since it merely served as a foundation for us to discuss good leadership traits, and how we can apply those to our everyday life" (Personal communication, 8 August 2021). Xie et. al (2015) noted that students studying at a STEM-focused institution are typically used to high structure. Although the psychology of leadership course did not offer the same style of structure as seen in STEM, course artifacts such as the leadership action plan helped to provide structure more in this style: "I am the kind of person who needs direct, clear goals to work towards, and this action plan has done a very good job at providing that" (Personal communication, 4 May 2020). Overall, student comments about the leadership action plan were positive and connote the usefulness of the tool in the course.

**Fall 2021 Semester.** Students during the Fall 2021 semester were asked to provide course feedback via submission of a short video. Videographic observation allows for a more personal and in-depth analysis by capturing more elements in real-time (Collier & Collier, 1986). Course enrollment was at full capacity, and the following thematic areas emerged during analysis of the student videos: *Course Assignments and Deadlines*; *Course Activities*; and *Course Application*.

**Course deadlines and assignments.** During this semester, there was a focus on ensuring a rich experience of independent thinking for students by providing fewer deadlines for assignments while ensuring that class

assignments emphasized independent thinking Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995). Student comments on deadlines and assignments were contradictory on occasion. The following comment represents the appreciation for fewer deadlines: “I liked that there were less deadlines for the class assignments. It made it easier to balance the demands of my major classes” (Personal communication, 3 December 2021). This comment demonstrates the opposing student view in favor of more deadlines: “It might be better if we had to hand in assignments more frequently throughout the semester so that we don’t get too far behind” (Personal communication, 4 December 2021). Student comments on course assignments were positive overall, noting consistency: “Assignments were great and everything related to what we discussed during class” (Personal communication, 29 November 2021). Other comments noted the assignments as being too long at times, with the provided course resources lacking depth: “The assignments were a good review of what we did for each class, but some were very long and maybe too in-depth –also the slides provided as a resource for the class could be more detailed” (Personal communication, 4 December 2021). Students also commented favorably on not having exams: “I appreciated learning the material through assignments and not having to memorize material for exams” (Personal communication, 29 November 2021). Another comment on not having exams: “Not having tests allowed me to focus on the material to learn in a long-term way” (Personal communication, 29 November 2021). Overall, student comments were mixed regarding the frequency of deadlines, and student perceptions of the assignments were positive while noting some opportunities for improvement.

**Course activities.** The psychology of leadership course incorporates learning activities centered on skill acquisition and the expansion of each student’s respective conceptual frame of meaning to make possible the opportunities to understand more complex forms of leadership (Lord & Hall, 2005). Many student comments focused on some of the general activities used in class, and the need for more: “Would be great to be able to do more leadership activities during class. More interactive things to do versus the lecture and discussion” (Personal communication, 2 December 2021). One student recalled a specific activity from the course: “The activity we did with self-efficacy was really effective. Should do more of those” (Personal communication, 29 November 2021). The comments suggest the need for more interactive leadership activities.

Several students commented on the classroom environment: “Thank you for creating a safe and trusting environment. I was able to open up and I got a lot more out of class as a result” (Personal communication, 3 December 2021). Other student commented noted a positive affect with the class format: “I enjoyed the discussion-based format – no one judged anyone else’s opinions, and we could just listen to each other’s ideas” (Personal communication, 2 December 2021). Similarly: “The discussion format helped students to bounce ideas off each other in an easy-going environment” (Personal communication, 3 December 2021). Students responded positively to the class dynamics: “I liked the class dynamics. Especially how we were able to get to know people in the class through teamwork and class discussions” (Personal communication, 29 November 2021). Comments in this subsection connote a safe class environment with some positive response to the discussion-based format.

Student comments on course activities centered on the guest speakers. The following comment is representative of the guest speakers relaying real-life experiences: “The guest speakers were great to hear about real-life experiences...” (Personal communication, 3 December 2021). As noted in Table 2, the breakdown of speakers by semester varied slightly, with there being three males and zero females featured during the Fall 2021 semester. This comment is demonstrative of this insight: “More female guest speakers would be great. As a woman, it would be easier to connect to a woman’s experience” (Personal communication, 29 November 2021). Lastly, there were student comments in favor of increasing the number of guest speakers per semester: “More guest speakers!” (Personal communication, 2 December 2021). Overall, students appreciated the course activities, while noting some room for improvement.

**Table 2: Guest Speaker Breakdown**

| Semester      | # Female | # Male   | Totals    |
|---------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Spring 2020*  | 1        | 1        | 2         |
| Summer 2020** | 0        | 0        | 0         |
| Fall 2020**   | 0        | 3        | 3         |
| Spring 2021** | 3        | 0        | 3         |
| Summer 2021*  | 2        | 2        | 4         |
| Fall 2021*    | 0        | 3        | 3         |
| <b>Totals</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>15</b> |

*Please note: \* = course was taught in-person; \*\* = course was taught remotely.*

**Course application.** The course utilized aspects of experiential learning, with the instructor making room for students to apply the material to their own experiences while allowing for moments of social learning (Schank, Berman, & Macpherson, 1999; Payne, 2019; Bandura, 1969). Much of the course framed the material on personal experiences as a way to reflect on and apply the material toward these personal experiences, which is represented by this student comment: “This class provided a good structure to organize leadership topics as they fit into my personal experiences” (Personal communication, 2 December 2021). Student comments highlighted the use of alternatives to the course text and related materials, which seemed to help with the application of course concepts: “The use of movies and other pop-culture references made it easier to understand how leadership can be applied to my personal experiences” (Personal communication, 2 December 2021). The specialized institution where the psychology of leadership is taught emphasizes the first-hand experience students are able to get through participation in the internship, or Co-Op program. Student comments delineated the affordance of reflecting on previous Co-Op experiences: “I was able to apply a lot of our class discussions to my first co-op, where I did not have an effective leader as a supervisor” (Personal communication, 29 November 2021). On the other hand, a few students mentioned wanting more opportunities to apply course material to Co-Op experiences: “It would have been better to apply the material to my co-op experiences more often during the course” (Personal communication, 3 December 2021). Lastly, comments noted a positive response to the ABELDI Framework and its ability to help unlock aspects of effective leadership: “I gained insight into being an effective leader, and ABELDI helped to understand things in a better way with my thoughts and what I’ve done in my life so far” (Personal communication, 29 November 2021). In all, the psychology of leadership class, as suggested by student comments, seems to offer students various approaches and opportunities by which to apply the ABELDI Framework and the course material.

The Fall 2021 semester of the psychology of leadership course generated mostly positive student feedback, with some very useful opportunities to improve upon the existing course framework.

### Reflections

The following key learnings are suggested based on analysis of student evaluation feedback: 1.) The ABELDI Framework, through the psychology of leadership course, helps students to form a more complex understanding of effective leadership, particularly as it applies to their personal leadership journey and experiences. This one is especially important, as it highlights the framework and the potential that it has to help people learn about effective leadership. 2.) The leadership action plan is an effective tool to actionize the concepts of the ABELDI Framework

and course material with the potential for long-term reflection; 3.) The psychology of leadership course is progressively finding ways to provide lessons in leadership and new experiences for students overall.

There is consistency in student response to the psychology of leadership course, demonstrating to some degree that students were able to understand and make use of the ABELDI Framework and other course topics as applied to their personal leadership journey. It should be noted that more extensive research on the course and the Framework is needed.

### Recommendations and Suggestions for Improvement

Based on the outcomes associated the delivery of the psychology of leadership course, four recommendations are extended: 1) Course deadlines should be flexible; 2) Course assignments should be focused; 3) There should be more leadership-related activities; and 4) Guest speakers should continue to be featured each semester.

In addition, three final suggestions for improvement are made for the psychology of leadership course as it begins life as a former special topics course and now full course. First, continue to come up with ways to do as Davis et al. (1994) suggest and find ways to teach less material better. Allowing more time to spend on fewer topics seems like the best move. Second, work to frame the course in the most effective way possible. Fairhurst (2005) defines framing as the ability to shape meaning of a subject and goes on to note that sharing our frames with others (i.e., framing) helps to manage meaning via prioritization of interpretations. Third and finally, it is suggested that personal definitions of leadership be captured at the beginning and end of each semester to examine aspects of course impact. Tracking leadership definitions was utilized during the leadership development program which inspired the ABELDI Framework (Payne, 2018, July). It is hoped that the ABELDI Framework can serve as a useful model for leadership educators who are intent on helping students to form a deep understanding of the practice effective leadership through exploration of self-leadership development.

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