Spreading Leader Knowledge:

of Knowledge Dissemination among Management Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we discuss the need for a practitioner–academic partnership in disseminating leader knowledge among undergraduate management students, and find that in order to cultivate actionable skill development, business and academic communities should collaborate to offer a participatory approach to leadership education. The core objective is to discover sources of actionable knowledge and to decipher its optimum dissemination among management students, encompassing technical, conceptual and human skill development, through interaction with both theory and practice, in order to prepare students for active participation, and potential leadership, in the business environment. Based on a comprehensive literature review, we propose a participatory leader knowledge dissemination model, where business leaders can stimulate the academic environment, and leadership skill development can be promoted through practitioners' active involvement in the education process. The article concludes with a perspective on the evolution of knowledge transfer among management students and the current trend towards dynamic collaboration between academics and corporate leaders.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, an important objective of management education was to 'prepare students for successful and socially useful careers in business' (Bossard and Dewhurst, 1931: 55), and fulfilling this goal was primarily the domain of business schools. The underlying expectation was for management education to encompass technical, conceptual and human skill development (Katz, 1985), through interaction with both theory and practice (adapted from Mingers, 2001), in order to prepare students for active participation, and potential leadership, in the business environment (Elmuti et al., 2005; Sandwith, 1993). Despite these objectives, existing pedagogical approaches have been criticised for having a rational (technical) emphasis to the detriment of conceptual and human skill development among pre-experience management students (Augier and March, 2007; Cunningham, 1999; Elmuti, 2004; Huff and Huff, 2001; Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2007; Starkey and Tempest, 2005), particularly in relation to leadership skill development (Atwater et al., 2008; Day et al., 2004; Doh, 2003; Gallos, 1997; Hess, 2007; Mello, 2003). Specifically, a classroom emphasis on task completion and the transfer of explicit knowledge can result in narrow skill development (Cianciolo et al., 2004; Elmuti, 2004; Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007; Kolb and Kolb, 2005). As companies depend, to some extent, on business schools to produce 'emerging leaders' who can ultimately step into leadership positions in their organisations (Murphy and Riggio, 2003: 2), undergraduates need to understand both the implicit and the explicit skills of business leadership (Eriksen, 2007). To do so, these students need to develop human leadership orientated capabilities through inter/intrapersonal and practical skill development (Elmuti, 2004; Tranfield et al., 2004; Watson, 1993, among others) as well as developing technical expertise. It is the authors' contention that the development of all three management skills can be enhanced through participatory leader knowledge dissemination in the classroom. Based on these insights, there is a benefit in exploring current higher educational practices in leadership skill development, and identifying means by which the knowledge gained from experience and that gained from scholarship

can be intertwined in a more participatory mode of leader knowledge dissemination, ultimately reducing the gap between education and practice.

The paper proposes a model of leader knowledge dissemination in higher education that enables actionable leadership skill development among pre-experience management students. Following a critical literature review, the leader knowledge dissemination model proffers a means of enhancing leadership skill development in undergraduate students through participatory modes of knowledge dissemination in the education process. The article concludes with a perspective on the evolution of knowledge transfer among management students and the current trend towards dynamic collaboration between academics and corporate leaders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From a management education perspective, individuals in college are in a learning mode, and therefore have more time and energy to devote to building their capabilities for leadership (Ayman et al., 2003). In context, leadership skill development can be seen as a complex model of self-awareness and adaptability (Day et al., 2004) as well as technical skill enhancement. This depth of learning is somewhat elusive in the pedagogical approach to management education (Fox, 1997; Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2007), which can restrict the behavioural component of business leadership due to an emphasis on cognition (Ayman et al., 2003; Cunningham, 1999; Doh, 2003; Murphy and Riggio, 2003). Specifically, as self-awareness is an intuitive skill, it is of benefit to students to be exposed to context-specific leadership challenges, which can be best described by business leaders themselves (Burgoyne et al., 2004; Clinebell and Clinebell, 2008; O'Connell et al., 2004). As articulated by Eriksen (2007: 265), 'leadership practice is a personal phenomenon that cannot be meaningfully understood without taking into account the uniqueness of the leader'. This would suggest that when direct business–leader interaction is not facilitated in and around the classroom, a knowledge dissemination gap occurs. This represents a significant challenge to be addressed by educators.

In order to appreciate the leader knowledge dissemination gap in the current approach to management education, it is of value to

Table 1: Review of Management Education Literature Relating to Leader Knowledge Dissemination

Academic Knowledge	Limits of Existing Pedagogical Approach	Call for Actionable Skill Development	Call for Participatory Modes of Knowledge Dissemination	Business Leader Knowledge	Sources
Classroom experience	Singular theoretical perspective with an emphasis on explicit knowledge and task completion may result in narrow skill development	*Critical reflection:* Develop human leadership orientated capabilities through inter/intrapersonal and practical/intuitive skill development	Stakeholder approach to skill development to aid the transfer of experiential knowledge, including complex interdisciplinary problem-based projects, with tradeoffs to engage personal learning levels	Life experience	Cianciolo et al., 2004; Day et al., 2004; Doh, 2003; Elmuti, 2004; Eriksen, 2007; Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007; Hess, 2007; Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Tranfield et al., 2004; Watson, 1993
Rational emphasis on leadership skill development	Cognitive component emphasised: concentrates on 'hard' (analytical) skill development through the transmission of encoded knowledge at the expense of integration and development wisdom	*Develop self-knowledge:* Rebalance curriculum to incorporate behavioural component in pursuit of emotional connectivity and the development of social awareness	Applied learning: business mentoring, class-based leader interventions, executive professorships, live case studies, company learning partnerships	Intuitive perspective	Ayman et al., 2003; Cunningham, 1999; Doh, 2003; Lorange, 1996; Murphy and Riggio, 2003; O'Connell et al., 2004; Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2007; Starkey and Tempest, 2005; Taggart and Robey, 1981; Turnbull James and Arroba, 2005
Generalised business view	Generalised view may sacrifice relevance to the esoteric of academic purity	*Skill integration:* Incorporate contextualised/ trans-disciplinary mode 2 production methods to aid both context and content understanding of specific problems	Need for deep practitioner—academic interaction to reflect both leaders' and educators' business view	Contextual business view	Atwater et al., 2008; Augier and March, 2007; Burgoyne et al., 2004; Clinebell and Clinebell, 2008; Huff and Huff, 2001; O'Connell et al., 2004

establish alternate views in this regard. Table 1 outlines a critical review of contemporary management education literature and how it relates to leader knowledge dissemination in this environment.

This table highlights the key literary findings relating to articulated experience in the classroom, leadership skill development and the projected business view in the dissemination of leader knowledge. Column 1 outlines academic knowledge dissemination under these criteria, while Column 5 offers criterion labels from a business leader perspective. Column 2 notes identified limits relating to existing pedagogical approaches in this milieu, while Column 3 identifies the need for actionable skill development among undergraduate business students, clustered under key conceptual and human skills (labelled critical reflection, self-knowledge and skill integration). Finally, the call for participatory modes of knowledge dissemination is summarised in Column 4, while Column 6 cites the literary sources which contribute to each of the highlighted concepts in Table 1. It is of benefit to discuss the literary perspectives in greater detail under each of these criteria, as they provide the basis for both leader knowledge gap analysis and the proposed model of participatory leader knowledge dissemination in undergraduate business education environments.
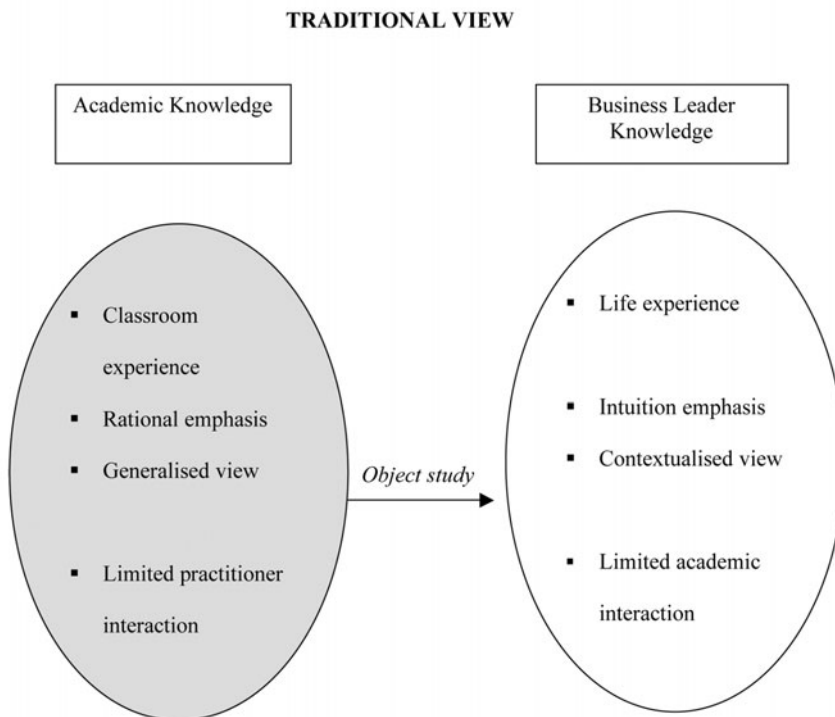
Traditional Views on Leader Knowledge Dissemination
The traditional format for management education takes its cues from the physical sciences, and places an emphasis on the foundational disciplines of economics, behavioural sciences and the quantitative disciplines (Augier and March, 2007). This process is largely a linear one in which new knowledge is generated by academic researchers who codify and store this knowledge in scholarly journals. This linearity continues in the classroom, where academic knowledge is passed on to students either through reading academic papers or by attending lectures (Hitt as quoted in Doh, 2003; Readings, 1996). Essentially, this approach assumes a tension between experiential and academic knowledge (March, 2004, as cited in Augier and March, 2007), wherein the direct dissemination of knowledge gained from experience by skilled business leaders is rarely applied in the academic realm. Figure 1 provides a visual insight into these tensions by highlighting the key literary findings (Table 1) in diagrammatic form.

Figure 1 exemplifies the existing pedagogical approach to leader knowledge dissemination, where such knowledge is primarily transferred to students by academics in the classroom. Rationality is emphasised in this approach, as is a generalised view of business operations. In this model, the collection of business leader knowledge and its dissemination is separated from the student, and the study of such individuals is normally through a process of object study by the academic.

Figure 1: Leader Knowledge Dissemination

TRADITIONAL VIEW

Academic Knowledge

Business Leader Knowledge

- Classroom experience
- Rational emphasis
- Generalised view
- Limited practitioner interaction

Object study

- Life experience
- Intuition emphasis
- Contextualised view
- Limited academic interaction

While this linear approach has practical benefits in the transmission of encoded knowledge, it loses the potential for the transfer of intuitive knowledge (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007; Tranfield et al., 2004) and, perhaps more seriously, it encourages in students a belief that

this is the primary means of learning and development. The resulting pedagogy is founded on the principles of externally directed learning, with prescribed learning outcomes, compartmentalised into levels and subjects by external bodies. This approach suggests an implicit assumption that leader action follows scholarly development of theory, thus the theory must be taught so that managers can act. In its simplest manifestation this can lead to a frustration for inexperienced students who, when presented with real world experience or even interactive case studies, struggle to understand why managers do not behave as they should (according to the theory) and exhibit a need to identify the *right* answer. At its most basic level this is a failure to recognise that the system of physical science, which provides the foundations for this template, is of a different ontological form to the social science of managerial research. It is different on several dimensions, including:

1. In the physical sciences knowledge is created in a laboratory setting where the influences of the world are screened out and experiments can be conducted in controlled settings. The world of management that researchers seek to explain is an open system, which defies the control and replication of its physical counterparts.
2. In the physical sciences the researcher is generally more intelligent and knowledgeable than the object being studied. In a social science study the 'object' of study may be the expert.
3. In the physical sciences the objective is to gather, codify and transmit new knowledge. In the study of leadership the inability to codify knowledge is of itself one of the most important factors of firm heterogeneity and sustainable competitive advantage. In other words, codifiable knowledge may have limited value in this context.
4. In the physical sciences the researcher is detached from the object of the research, whereas management research outside of the positivist perspective must take account of the researcher's relationship with the subject.

These dimensions highlight key differences between physical and social science research: management science is an open system,

where the study 'object' may also be the expert, who in turn may interact with the researcher, and whose own knowledge may not be codifiable. The differences in how we generate managerially oriented knowledge must therefore be reflected in the mechanisms we use for its dissemination (Table 1, Columns 3 and 4). There is little point accepting the open, interactive and intuitive ontological nature of leader knowledge and then going on to disseminate this knowledge through the forced application on students of a linear positivist-oriented epistemology. In other words, if it is incumbent on educators to know how they might access knowledge, then it is equally as important that these educators discover how their students might best access and interact with this rich tapestry of leader knowledge. In essence, as self-awareness is an intuitive skill, it is of benefit to students to be exposed to context-specific leadership challenges, which can be best described by business leaders themselves.

Actionable Leadership Skill Development

There is still considerable debate as to whether leadership can be taught (Allio, 2005; Doh, 2003; Elmuti et al., 2005). Some argue that it cannot be taught; although 'potential leaders can be educated' (Allio, 2005: 1073), while others offer insight into the balance between passion and discipline (Gallos, 1997) as elements of being a good teacher, as well as a good leader. What has been established is that understanding leadership as an abstract concept is no longer sufficient to deal with the complexity of today's organisational life (Eriksen, 2007), requiring 'a bridge between the more accessible and rational aspects of organization life and the hidden aspects of organizational dynamics' (Turnbull James and Arroba, 2005: 299). Business schools should be preparing students for both the intellectual and the emotional challenges that working with the deeper unconscious aspects of the organisational system can bring (Table 1, Column 3). Considering these perspectives, a move towards a more andragogical frame (while recognising the limits of inexperienced students) in management education, where the teacher acts as learning facilitator, and knowledge generation and dissemination is more participative (Atwater et al., 2008; Ayman et al., 2003; Cunningham, 1999; Knowles, 1980), may offer a greater opportunity to negotiate the learning needs of the management student (Table 1, Column 4).

A Call for Participatory Modes of Leader Knowledge Dissemination

There is strong evidence that an emphasis on theory in the absence of applied leader knowledge creates a learning void (Augier and March, 2007; Clinebell and Clinebell, 2008; Doh, 2003; Starkey and Tempest, 2005), ultimately limiting actionable leadership skill development on the part of the management student (Table 1, Column 3). As early as 1980, Hayes and Abernathy raised concerns about the 'preference for … analytic detachment rather than the insight that comes from "hands on" experience' (Hayes and Abernathy, 1980: 68), while Starkey and Tempest (2005: 63) lament 'an overemphasis on analysis at the expense of integration and development wisdom, as well as leadership and interpersonal skills'. As leadership skill development occurs over time in a continuous cycle of theoretical action and practical conceptualisation, management education should ideally incorporate both theory and practice to ensure the student's learning process is complete (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). As articulated by Cunningham (1999: 688), 'the challenge is to find a fruitful "praxis" – that fusing of theory and practice which enriches the learning opportunities for our students and enables them to perform in a professional manner'. Therefore, a participatory mode of knowledge dissemination (Table 1, Column 4) has the potential to enhance leadership skill development based on the integration of the knowledge gained from leader experience and that gained from scholarship (Augier and March, 2007; Day and O'Connor, 2003; Starkey and Tempest, 2005; Tranfield et al., 2004). Here, direct business leader interventions in the classroom and company/academic learning partnerships, offer direct interaction with both practice and practitioners promoting the balanced enhancement of core management skills among these students.

### PROPOSING AN ALTERNATE ROUTE TO LEADER KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION

The past decade has seen a move towards more participatory modes of knowledge dissemination both within and outside of the classroom (Ayman et al., 2003; O'Connell et al., 2004) where efforts have been made to promote learners who are active and are stimulated to handle confusion and complexity (Atwater et al., 2008; Mello, 2003; Hess,

2007). In consequence, a variety of different teaching methodologies are now being used in management education and leadership skill development (Burgoyne et al., 2004: 50), including simulations, case studies, experiential learning and outdoor adventure. There have also been attempts to replicate experience through the teaching of interactive cases (O'Connell et al., 2004) and the linking of course work with temporary employment (Starkey and Tempest, 2005). While relatively successful, these tools should not be considered a substitute for direct leader knowledge dissemination, which 'brings a novel stimulus into the classroom and provides the opportunity for new kinds of discussion through face-to-face interaction' (O'Connell et al., 2004: 299–300). Having a business leader come into the classroom to open themselves and their business up to ongoing student interaction and prolonged analysis is a compelling idea in leadership training, wherein the academic acts as co-facilitator, offering theoretical explanations to embed the leader perspective in the educational programme. This kind of exposure to actual experiences rather than simulated ones is gaining credence in the pursuit of undergraduate management capability development, as it offers a bridge between reflective action and critical theorising (Freire, 1973; Starkey and Tempest, 2005). This business leader–academic intersection brings simultaneous experiential and academic knowledge into the classroom, offering the elusive rational/intuitive balance in this environment. This participatory mode of classroom interaction is the focus of the proffered leader knowledge dissemination model (Figure 2).

In this model, the authors propose a participatory approach to leader knowledge dissemination in the classroom, whereby academic and business leader experience is coordinated in order to co-create leader knowledge for dissemination among undergraduate business students, through a continuous cycle of applied study and informed feedback facilitated by the practitioner–academic classroom partnership. Here, both the leader and the academic interact directly with the students, in pursuit of balanced skill development. The student's professional development (that is, the honing of critical reflection, skill integration and self-knowledge), are key criteria identified in Table 1, and central to the proposed model.

Figure 2: Leader Knowledge Dissemination

PARTICIPATORY MODE
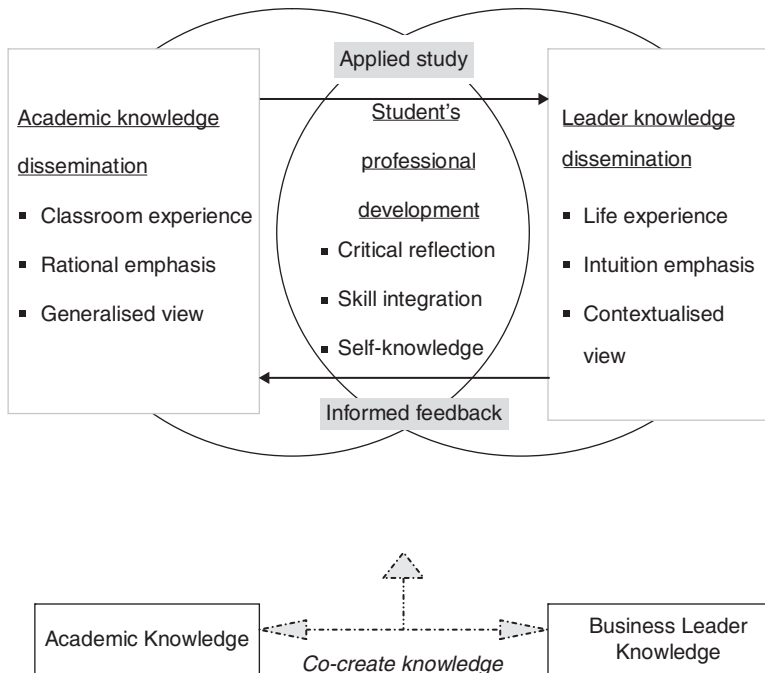
Business Schools as a Bridge in the Dissemination of Direct Business Leader Knowledge

Leader knowledge is by its very nature embedded in its context and this context is an open adaptive system. This provides a richness and relevance not accessible from the more detached knowledge dissemination approach detailed in Figure 1 and Table 1 (Column 2). Including business leaders in the educational process therefore facilitates the advancement of mode 2 applications[1] in management education (Huff and Huff, 2001), and fulfils the need for contextualised and trans-disciplinary knowledge production in leadership skill development (Burgoyne and Turnbull James, 2006). Here, the creation of leader knowledge is closely coupled with its dissemination by offering 'context surrounding the link between knowledge and action' (Huff and Huff, 2001: 52).

This is not to suggest that business leaders should replace academics in the classroom, or that they provide 'guest lectures' without the academic's involvement. In fact, this approach would create its own difficulties as the emphasis could move over to intuitive skill development to the detriment of rationality in these classes. Introducing business leaders as 'sole' educators also presents a risk of orienting the educational system too much towards practical utility rather than pure knowledge (Clinebell and Clinebell, 2008; Starkey and Tempest, 2005), as there may be issues of attribution and confirmatory biases when describing context-specific experiences. Furthermore, there is the attendant risk that 'findings' identified by practitioner educators may also be wrong by the rigorous standards of academia (Rosenzweig, 2007). Therefore, the goal is for a knowledge partnership, rather than disparate knowledge dissemination by the involved parties.

Based on the established limits of isolated academic or business leader knowledge, the challenge of developing relevant actionable knowledge that prepares and enthuses management students not just to observe, but to lead and drive business activity, must address the academic–leader interaction represented in Figure 2, wherein business leaders and academics coordinate their efforts in developing undergraduate leadership skills. Here, the limitations of each knowledge provider are addressed through the co-creation and co-delivery of knowledge.

Student Professional Development

Research has identified desirable leadership skills that should be pursued by educators and developed in students throughout their educational journey (Table 1). These capabilities can be categorised as: skill integration (Atwater et al., 2008; Burgoyne et al., 2004; Hess, 2007; Katz, 1985; Taggart and Robey, 1981; Watson, 1993), critical reflection (Augier and March, 2007; Elmuti, 2004; Eriksen, 2007; Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007; Huff and Huff, 2001; Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Starkey and Tempest, 2005; Turnbull James and Arroba, 2005) and self-knowledge (Day et al., 2004; Murphy and Riggio, 2003; Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2007; Tranfield et al., 2004). Pursuit of these skills is paramount in the leader dissemination model (Figure 2).

Skill Integration

It has been established that management education should encompass a more complete range of styles and strategies in order to compensate for the emphasis on rationality and analysis (for example, Atwater et al., 2008; Augier and March, 2007; Cunningham, 1999; Taggart and Robey, 1981) and prepare students more fully for future leadership roles. Watson (1993) reinforces this perspective by contending that management education should lead to three distinct characteristics: skills of intellectual analysis, interpersonal skills and a body of knowledge about organisations, a view supported by Katz (1985) earlier in this paper. Ayman et al. (2003: 220) go on to state that business schools need to 'stretch beyond traditional academic subjects to focus on leadership, personal growth and development, and even values' if they are to 'play a more pivotal role in the development of a leadership culture in our society'. These scholars argue that the need to infuse the management curricula with multidisciplinary, real world, practical and ethical ideas, questions and analyses reflects the complex and challenging world business leaders face. It is difficult to see how this infusion can take place in an education environment based solely on 'course-based acquisition knowledge' (Lorange, 1996: 11), even if interspersed with 'guest speakers' from industry or occasional site visits, particularly if these exposures to practice are not completely integrated into the curriculum. Therefore, academia can benefit from business leaders' active participation in the education process in order to discover what goes on managerially in the firm (a view supported by Augier and March, 2007; Clinebell and Clinebell, 2008; Doh, 2003; O'Connell et al., 2004; Starkey and Tempest, 2005) and to encourage skill integration on the part of the student. This is not to claim that the authors have identified this need as the ultimate answer to the question of what and how to educate future leaders, it is simply a need borne out of our context and time in the same way that Bach (1958) called for a more rigorous and analytical approach half a century ago.

Critical Reflection

There is a recognised need to develop intuitive awareness in management education (Katz, 1985; Sandwith, 1993) and to stimulate

conceptual skill enhancement in business school tuition through the use of reflective techniques (Coutu, 2004). Thus, while experience provides an important basis for education (Tranfield et al., 2004), it is the critical reflection among students who 'actively challenge our existing models of [business] management' (Starkey and Tempest, 2005: 75) that builds capability. Moreover, if one is to assume that for leaders to be effective they must be life-long learners (Eriksen, 2007), then reflective practice should be a key component in student skill development. The participatory leader knowledge dissemination model promotes a cycle of theoretical action and practical conceptualisation among students through their interaction with business leaders (applied study) and the interception of key underlying theoretical constructs on the part of the academic (informed feedback) for subsequent reflection on what was heard. Therefore, when the student interacts with the business leader, it is important that they not only listen to that individual's 'war stories', but follow up on the experience by researching the executive, his or her underlying ideas and management philosophies, and/or his or her company through class discussion or class assignment, thereby enacting the critical cycle.

Self-Knowledge

In their interaction with and extended exposure to business leaders students can gain insights into the dynamic process of business management and begin to synthesise and contextualise rather than continually deconstruct their knowledge, making management education a practice focused, theory founded exercise. Thus, engaged scholarship that exploits both practical and academic insight 'produces knowledge that is more penetrating and insightful than knowledge produced when scholars or practitioners work on a problem alone' (Van De Ven and Johnson, 2006: 815). This perspective suggests that students learn best through dialogue with and exposure to real world problems and opportunities (Elmuti, 2004; Eriksen, 2007), by honing both explicit and tacit knowledge in the pursuit of deep learning. The challenge is therefore to find methods of engaging those practitioners at the front line of business evolution within the system of academic knowledge dissemination (Clinebell and Clinebell, 2008; O'Connell et al., 2004) without sacrificing the rigor of the academic knowledge creation and dissemination process.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The principle of the leader knowledge dissemination model is to host collaborative learning and knowledge transfer clusters of linked enterprise leaders and academics through practitioner–academic partnership programmes. Here, the business leader becomes an affiliate member of the faculty for a set tenure, during which time he or she engages with students and interacts with faculty at a depth sufficient to facilitate co-creation and dissemination of leader knowledge among undergraduates. This approach contextualises dynamic collaboration between the business school and corporate leaders, wherein experiential knowledge and academic knowledge are intertwined. The engagement of academics and business leaders where the burden of knowledge creation is shared captures the relative expertise of all parties and offers greater dissemination of leader knowledge in management education. Here, students are able to benefit from synergies, by uniting academic and practitioner insight in the co-creation of knowledge. In this approach knowledge is co-created through the fusion of practice with reflective observation by academics and is evaluated not just on the basis of hierarchical peer review, but in tandem with its utility to its multidisciplinary audience. In such a world the involvement of practice in the generation of knowledge is essential, wherein business schools learn from and link exemplars, to facilitate 'in-process development of new understanding' and the pursuit of 'sense-making bridges' between education and practice (Huff and Huff, 2001: 51).

This approach offers an opportunity for the development of new student capability over time, specifically reflective practice, skill–theory integration and self-knowledge – skills which are underutilised and therefore remain underdeveloped in the traditional knowledge dissemination approach (Figure 1). Thus, assuming a student is 'someone who wants to think' (Readings, 1996: 46), the leader knowledge dissemination model (Figure 2) offers an environment where 'thinking' can happen in relation to leadership skill development. By developing this capacity to reflect, educators not only teach students but also help them to become adult learners with an awareness of the knowledge content and their own role as active participative learners. Thus begins the transformation of educators

from principles of pedagogy to principles of andragogy through application and informed feedback, relevance of content to the applied context and problem- as opposed to content-centred learning.

The authors are currently observing a practitioner–academic partnership scheme built on the ethos of the leader knowledge dissemination model in their own institute, and are recording the impact of this initiative on undergraduate actionable skill development.

ENDNOTES

[1] Mode 1 gives academic predominance in knowledge production, while Mode 2 is where knowledge is co-produced with practitioners in a rigorous yet actionable way.

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