

# Developing Leadership Character in Business Programs

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*Our objective is to encourage and enable leadership character development in business education. Building on a model of character strengths and their link to virtues, values, and ethical decision making, we describe an approach to develop leadership character at the individual, group, and organizational levels. We contrast this approach to existing practices that have focused on teaching functional content over character and address how business educators can enable leadership character development through their own behaviors, relationships, and structures. Most important, we provide concrete suggestions on how to integrate a focus on character development into existing business programs, both in terms of individual courses as well as the overall curriculum. We highlight that the development of leadership character must extend beyond student engagement in a course since “it takes a village” to develop character.*

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Corporate scandals that recount greed and rampant materialism have led to an increased distrust, if not disdain, for business leaders. The crisis of confidence in leadership has manifested itself not only in business, but also in public administrations, the sports arena, cultural organizations, and religious institutions. In all of this, the role of character resurfaces time and again as a contributing culprit in the apparent decline of ethical leadership, particularly in the business sphere. More troubling is that the responsibility for this morass is increasingly being assigned to the business schools' pumping out a staggering number of so-

called leaders, to populate not only corporate America, but also multinationals worldwide. At the height of the financial crisis, the *Economist* voiced this scathing sentiment:

Most of the people at the heart of the crisis—from Dick Fuld at Lehman Brothers to John Thain at Merrill Lynch to Andy Hornby at HBOS—had MBAs after their name . . . In recent years about 40% of the graduates of America's best business schools ended up on Wall Street, where they assiduously applied the techniques that they had spent a small fortune learning. You cannot both claim that your mission is “to educate leaders who make a difference in the world”. . . and then wash your hands of your alumni when the difference they make is malign (*Economist*, September 24, 2009: on-line edition).

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The recent financial crisis has provided another opportunity for business schools to re-evaluate their role in teaching leadership and in developing leaders. Many schools have responded, producing conferences, summits, opinion pieces, and books either justifying their ways or proposing a new way forward. These incremental and radical changes to the curriculum point to the same fundamental question: How are we changing the way we educate leaders today to ensure that they make a more positive difference in the world tomorrow?

We seek to present the case for refocusing on character development in business education as a necessary counterpoint to more functional perspectives that focus primarily on teaching leadership skills and competencies. To do this, we deconstruct what we mean by character and review how this concept has traditionally been dealt with in leadership research and teaching, in particular highlighting the neglect of a virtue-based ethics orientation. We provide concrete suggestions on how to integrate a focus on character development into existing business programs, both in terms of curriculum development and classroom techniques. Our aim is to inspire educators to embrace a role beyond that of mere purveyors of management knowledge, toward one of catalyst for virtuous leadership development.

## WHY CHARACTER?

Our commitment to understanding and developing leadership character arose from a project we had undertaken to investigate the role of leadership and business education in the current financial crisis. As part of this project, we held a series of roundtable discussions with over 300 senior leaders, human resource and organizational development specialists between September 2009 and May 2010 in Canada, China, England and the United States. The content of the conversations was wide ranging. One theme that executives raised and discussed extensively was character.

In presenting the voice of the practitioner in this essay, we do not intend to suggest that today's business leaders have the right answers to pressing business problems, but rather to reveal that they are thinking about character, have trouble understanding what it is, and are looking to business schools to help them figure it out. For example, while character was raised frequently in our discussions, there was no consistent understanding about what it meant, despite a concurrence

that it was important. The following are two examples of quotes taken from our conversations illustrating the importance that today's business leaders' place on the role of values and character:

- It appears to me that, you know, without sort of condemning society as a whole, we seem to lack a moral compass to sort of make the right decision when the reward system is suggesting that we should trade the future for the present. I think as a leadership group we lack the moral vigor to make the intelligent tradeoffs . . . And, so, I just think as a society we're becoming increasingly agnostic about what we believe in and what we stand for.
- If you have a sense of what your values are, it becomes a little bit easier for you to figure out what is right or wrong. It becomes a little bit easier for you to be courageous and say, "I don't like it" or "I can live with it" or "Here is how I am going to deal with it," but it all comes from a sense of knowing what's important to you firstly.

In almost every discussion the question—"can character be taught?" came up. The executives we talked to expressed strong views about this and the challenge the development of character would present to business programs. This practical business concern motivated us to take a deeper look at character and how we could develop it within a business school context.

## DECONSTRUCTING CHARACTER

Peterson and Seligman (2004) have done some very heavy lifting in their 800-page book devoted to the classification and description of virtues and character strengths, and we adopt their definitions here. While future research may debate their conclusions, they provide a sound starting point for our approach. Having identified six universal virtues that are common across a broad sample of cultures, religions, and moral philosophers—wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence—character strengths are then the chosen or voluntary processes or mechanisms by which these virtues are expressed (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The definitions of the six virtues and their associated character strengths are as follows:

**Wisdom**—Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, perspective)

**Courage**—Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal (bravery, perseverance, honesty, zest)

**Humanity**—Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others (love, kindness, social intelligence)

**Justice**—Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life (teamwork, fairness, leadership)

**Temperance**—strengths that protect against excess (forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation)

**Transcendence**—Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality)

Virtues represent somewhat abstract exemplars of good character, and character strengths are the measurable group of related traits that reflect the universal virtues (Sosik & Cameron, 2010). If a person possesses a particular virtue, then the implication is that individuals can explain a particular behavior with reference to that person's character strengths and predict what that person will do under particular circumstances based on past behaviors (Alzola, 2012; McKinnon, 1999).

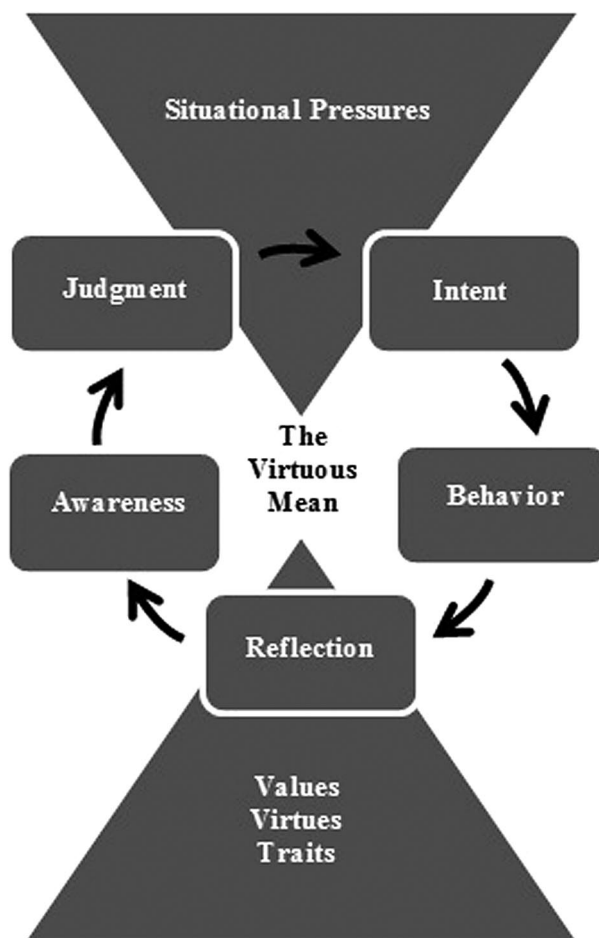
An individual's character consists of both habitual qualities or character strengths and a second, more motivational component (Audi, 2012; Wright & Goodstein, 2007). Here we introduce values as motivational drivers that may lead or constrain an individual to desire a particular end goal (Schwartz, 1996). For example, Rokeach (1973:5) defined values as "enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state." As such, values can be prioritized so that one may favor a particular course of action over another—for example, conformity values such as self-discipline (e.g., self-restraint and resistance to temptation) can serve as a guiding principle in one's life over stimulation (e.g., excitement and novelty) values (Schwartz, 1996). Values are therefore the core from which we operate and hence they help cultivate particular character strengths. The behaviors associated with character strengths, in turn, forge the evolution of the values that people hold.

Personality traits lie somewhere in between habitual character strengths (or weaknesses) and motivational values in that these are not universally

admired qualities, nor do they necessarily motivate the pursuit of personal or societal good, or of human flourishing (Alzola, 2012). Personality traits are endogenous basic tendencies that give rise to distinct patterns of thought, feelings, and actions (McCrae & Costa, 2008). Personality traits such as the Big Five are relevant to the discussion of character in that some traits (e.g., openness to experience) reflect certain values (e.g., stimulation and self-direction values) that can motivate behavioral dispositions (e.g., curiosity, love of learning) that are expressions of virtues such as wisdom. The difficulty with personality traits is that these are often assumed to be relatively fixed individual features defined by genetics or evolutionary selection process (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009; McCrae et al., 2000) as opposed to values and character strengths that can be developed through life events and experiences (Sosik & Cameron, 2010).

The above deconstruction of character is from the relatively recent academic domains of psychology and the social sciences. Philosophers, on the other hand, have debated the role of virtue and character in pursuit of the good life for millennia, with early work rooted in Plato and Aristotle and more recent revivals attributable to Anscombe (1958); MacIntyre (1981); Solomon (1992); Kupperman (1995); and Hursthouse (1999), among others. However, it has been well established that we can only understand virtues by bridging philosophy and psychology (Anscombe, 1958), and thus, we need a way to integrate the broad literature on virtues, character strengths, values, and personality traits across these academic fields. To this end, we introduce a virtue-based orientation (VBO) model that places character development at the core of ethical decision making (EDM) in business (Crossan, Mazutis, & Seijts, 2013; see Figure 1). The VBO model is a conceptualization that enables us to organize these core elements. It is not our intent to suggest that this conceptualization is the only way to do so. Indeed, there are other conceptualizations such as Treviño's (1986) interactionist model that demonstrates the effect of the interaction of individual differences and situational pressures on ethical decisions. However, the interactionist model does not focus specifically on virtues, character strengths, and values and so the utility of the VBO model is as an organizing framework for the concepts we discuss.

Building on Rest's (1986) four-stage process of awareness, judgment, intent, and behavior, our VBO model adds the critical component of reflec-



**FIGURE 1**  
A Virtue Based Model (VBO) of Ethical Decision Making (EDM)

tion as a mediator in a re-conceptualized circular model of EDM that highlights the important role of continuous learning in character development. This circularity suggests that individuals have the capacity to deepen character strengths around the virtuous mean as they avoid vices of deficiency or excess. By virtuous mean, we propose a set of character strengths that are a reflection of individual behavioral dispositions associated with the universal virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and it is these character strengths that can be deepened through reflection and reason (Alzola, 2012; McKinnon, 1999; Sadler-Smith, 2012) as detailed in Table 1. For example, individuals can develop the character strength of bravery, associated with the virtue of courage, but a VBO suggests that it is only through this cycle of experience and reflection that individuals can do so while also avoiding the vice of recklessness (that represents the excess of bravery) or the vice of cowardice (that indicates a defi-

ciency in bravery). It is in this capacity for reflection, which can be done individually, but often involves dialogue/dialectic and engagement with others (Aristotle, 1999; Schon, 1987), that individuals develop a VBO to EDM. This VBO to EDM, in turn, can serve as a buffer to situational pressures that may negatively influence one's natural tendencies or dispositions to act in accordance to one's virtuous character strengths. Both situational pressures and components of an individual's character will, therefore, determine how the EDM process is engaged.

The VBO model of EDM is meant as an intentional counterpoint and corollary to more consequentialist perspectives that focus on weighing the costs and benefits associated with the strategic choices for the various stakeholders, most often prioritizing shareholders in this ethical calculus (Whetstone, 2001). By contrast, a VBO focuses not only on the outcomes of ethical decisions as learn-

**TABLE 1**  
**Deepening Character Strengths Within the Virtuous Mean vs. Deficiency/Excess**

Virtue	Deficiency	Virtuous mean	Excess
Wisdom	Unoriginality	<b>Creativity</b>	Impracticality
	Closed to experience	<b>Curiosity</b>	Unfocused interest
	Closed minded	<b>Open mindedness</b>	Lack of judgment
Courage	Apathy	<b>Love of learning</b>	Obsessive
	Cowardice	<b>Bravery</b>	Recklessness
	Laziness	<b>Persistence</b>	Zealot
Humanity	Inauthenticity	<b>Integrity</b>	Righteousness
	Harsh/Cruel	<b>Kindness</b>	Obsequious
	Unfeeling	<b>Compassion</b>	Indulgent
Justice	Stinginess	<b>Generosity</b>	Profligacy
	Socially awkward	<b>Social intelligence</b>	Manipulative
	Treachery	<b>Citizenship</b>	Blind obedience
Temperance	Unjust	<b>Fairness</b>	Undiscerning
	Lack of confidence	<b>Leadership</b>	Dictatorship
	Unmerciful	<b>Forgiveness</b>	Pushover
Transcendence	Boastfulness	<b>Humility</b>	Self-deprecation
	Rash	<b>Prudence</b>	Overly cautious
	Sloth	<b>Self-regulation</b>	Inflexible
	Ungrateful	<b>Gratitude</b>	Suppliant behavior
	Hopeless	<b>Hope</b>	Foolishness
	Spiritlessness	<b>Spirituality</b>	Fundamentalism

Note. Adapted from Aristotle (1999) and Peterson and Seligman (2004).

ing opportunities for future ethical decisions, but also on developing the character strengths of the individual making decisions (de Colle & Werhane, 2008). This is not meant to imply that situational pressures do not have an important effect on EDM processes, but rather that, all other things being equal, a stronger VBO, or capacity to deepen character strengths, can serve as a buffer against these situational pressures and thus lead to better decisions.

Also important to note is that we see this model applying to decision making more generally since many stimuli are often not presented as either ethical or nonethical decisions (Provis, 2010). Rather, individuals engage in a social process of sense-making, and it is often in hindsight that we recognize that our conversations or actions result in decisions that have ethical dimensions (Sonen-shein, 2007). Thus, if developing character strengths such as open mindedness, compassion, and humility through reflection can strengthen not only ethical decision making but also decision making in general, the question then becomes "can character be taught?" We turn to this question next, taking into account both a broad historical perspective, as well as the insights heard from practitioners described in the previous section.

### Can Character Be Taught?

In response to our discussions about character, one executive commented:

The issue, based on my observations, is the character of MBA students, is already deeply formed before [entering the business school] and then burnished by [the business school]. The MBA students are driven—that's how they earned the qualifications for acceptance. They are driven further by a hyper intense environment. When they graduate, they continue to be driven. Driven people are unlikely to be reflective and morally aware, perhaps until a life altering event occurs. I would also add that I saw clear lies and pandering during MBA class discussions about ethics: people said what would get them the marks. So . . . I am less hopeful about MBA students and their moral awakening.

This sentiment is not unusual and is illustrative of the challenges inherent when broaching the topic of character development in business schools. Yet, the debate about whether character can be taught is not a new one and is, in fact, as

old as philosophical thought itself. While a full exposition of the philosophical arguments as to whether character can be taught is beyond our scope, the next section briefly describes both the yes and no sides of this question.

### **The Yes Side**

For many of the ancient Greeks, including Plato and Aristotle, it was not so much that character could be taught, but rather, that character is something that is habituated—that is, acquired through the consistent application of the virtues over the course of one's lifetime (Aristotle, 1999; Arjoon, 2000). Thus, similar to learning any other new skill, it is only through practicing virtuous acts that we develop character.

Furthermore, Aristotle saw character as something that is not formed on one's own, but rather that requires relationships and community—it is only through sharing our interests and goals with others that the bonds of kinship allow us to develop social virtues such as temperance, generosity, and friendliness (Horvath, 1995; Solomon, 1992). Individuals similarly learn what is right and good by observing good people doing the right thing and then aspiring to become of similar character (Hill & Stewart, 1999). One could therefore say that not only is character something that can be learned, but also it is the responsibility of social institutions—including educational institutions—to teach character by providing an environment that fosters virtuous behavior and where virtuous behaviors can be observed and discovered (Sadler-Smith, 2012).

Deliberate teaching interventions such as role-plays, collaborative learning techniques, service-learning opportunities, and self-reflection exercises in the classroom appear to affect character development through increased moral awareness and moral reasoning (Comer & Vega, 2008; Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Schmidt, McAdams, & Foster, 2009). However, there is also evidence that elements of character can be learned through direct experience of the environment alone. For example, Krishnan (2008) found that after 2 years of MBA education, students showed an increase in the importance of self-oriented values, such as living a comfortable life and pleasure while other-oriented values, such as being helpful and polite became less important. Wang, Malhotra, and Murnighan (2011) demonstrated that increased exposure to economics courses was posi-

tively related to attitudes toward greed and attitudes toward one's own greedy behavior. In a review of studies in this area, Ferraro, Pfeffer, and Sutton (2005: 14) concluded that "one effect of economics training is to strengthen beliefs in the pervasiveness, appropriateness, and desirability of self-interested behaviour, which, in turn, should lead to exhibiting more self-interested behaviour." Therefore, regardless of the intentionality of the development of character in business education, it nonetheless appears to be happening, with both desirable and perhaps undesirable results (Ghoshal, 2005).

### **The No Side**

Although evidence seems to suggest that character can be taught, learned, and habituated, critics argue that even if this is true, the practical implications are limited (Doris, 2002; Harman, 2003). This is because even good people are willing to commit bad acts under particular circumstances, and one simply cannot change people's core dispositions (e.g., you cannot make a narcissistic person humble). We present and rebut each criticism in turn.

The first criticism focuses on observations that character strengths cannot be understood as stable and consistent, but rather that they will bend to the particular demands of the situation (Zimbardo, 2008). The extreme of this argument is that character does not even exist since situational determinants override it (Doris, 2002; Harman, 2003). For example, despite being caring, kind, and compassionate, individuals still administered what they considered to be excruciating electrical shocks to innocent participants if so instructed by a person of authority (e.g., Milgram's obedience studies) or failed to help someone in need if they were personally late for another appointment (e.g., Darley and Batson's Good Samaritan lecture and intervention).

Situationalists thus suggest that teaching character is futile as it cannot explain why even virtuous people might behave in an uncharacteristically unvirtuous manner and that strong character alone cannot prevent unethical behavior (Doris, 2002). However, recent research has demonstrated that the situationalist argument rests on empirical evidence that is largely misconstrued. For example, Alzola (2008) argued that replication studies of both the Obedience to Authority and Good Samaritan experiments have resulted in widely divergent findings. Also important is that many of these

studies rely on “extreme situations far removed from everyday life” (Alzola, 2008: 349) and one-shot measurements, which by definition cannot capture a person’s habitual qualities and motivational drivers over time—conditions that would be necessary in the attribution of character. Furthermore, because virtue requires a lifelong effort, including reflecting on ethical decisions that may have gone wrong, cross-sectional studies of particular interventions cannot adequately capture virtue as manifest by learning from mistakes (Kupperman, 2001). Finally, although highly disputed, Alzola (2008) claims that situational effects account for only a small portion of the variance in behavior.

The second criticism of teaching character in business education centers on the belief that not everyone is equally teachable. In spite of the promise Hartman (2006: 69) holds for teaching character in a business school context, even he conceded that:

No ethics course will much affect a student who, after careful consideration, believes that the one who dies with the most toys wins in the zero sum game that is business and that s/he wants to be such a person. Nor can we do a great deal for people incapable of developing any skill in dealing with complex situations, or those incapable of doing anything other than what nearly everyone else is doing.

Yet, there is no empirical evidence to support this “unteachable” hypothesis. If we believe that our students are largely incapable of developing the skills to deal with complex situations, we would also stop teaching strategy, finance, operations management, and marketing. Arguably, undergraduate and MBA students may be in a very impressionable phase of their learning development, while executives may find themselves skeptical, jaded, and cynical. Both extremes present opportunities inasmuch as individuals have a measure of indirect control over their wants and beliefs, they also have indirect control over the development of character strengths and mitigation of character weaknesses (Audi, 2012).

In this section, we presented support for the importance of leadership character and argued that it can be influenced, in a business school context. We now turn our focus to how character development occurs in business school settings, using a levels-of-analysis perspective to illustrate areas

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where a more deliberate approach to character development may be beneficial.

### **LEADERSHIP CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS PROGRAMS**

We present our arguments regarding character building as these relate to leadership development in business programs. However, our view of leadership is not focused on power or position, but rather on the capacity of individuals to bring the best of themselves to support and enable others, ensure the organizations they work with achieve at the highest level, and in doing so, contribute to society. Although our view of leadership is not bound by position, we acknowledge that the canvas on which individuals exercise leadership becomes larger as they rise in the organization hierarchy.

Crossan, Vera, and Nanjad (2008) provide a useful framework with which to gauge an individual’s ability to master essential leadership processes at various levels: self, others, and the organization. *Leadership of self* refers specifically to developing positive character strengths such as humility and open-mindedness, as well as the capability of self-awareness as a mechanism for continual learning. *Leadership of others* speaks to the responsibility of positive interpersonal relationships that leaders must cultivate with followers and peers in order to lead effectively, while *leadership of the organization* refers to a leader’s critical role of aligning the nonhuman parts of the organization—strategy, structure, systems, and environment—to deliver competitive advantage. Leadership at all three levels is required to ensure sustained firm performance (Crossan et al., 2008).

We see character playing out at all three levels, both in what we do with our students at the course level, and also for ourselves, as educators, in the context of our own organizations. We also need to consider the teaching of character in the context of the portfolio of courses taught at business schools

in addition to teaching character in a course or courses exclusively dedicated to doing so. Although these points are interrelated, we unpack them by examining several salient elements: infusing character development in all courses taught in business schools, character development in dedicated courses, and implications for faculty and business school culture and capability.

### **Infusing Character Development in All Courses**

Leaders need character, competencies, and commitment to do the challenging and rewarding work of leadership (Gandz, Crossan, Seijts, & Stephenson, 2010; Thompson, Grahek, Phillips, & Fay, 2008). We believe that most business schools have focused time, energy, and resources in only on one of these three leadership domains—developing leadership competencies. Much of what we do in the classroom, for example, focuses on imparting core knowledge, largely in a functional paradigm: finance, marketing, operations management, and so forth. Furthermore, many schools have acknowledged that it is not only “what” we teach but “how” we teach it that develops important competencies such as teamwork and communication. Regardless of whether we teach accounting, finance, or organizational behavior, we also have the opportunity to develop a student’s character.

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For example, there are times where character development may be in the backdrop of the session content and other times where it may be the essence of the discussion. An accounting course could include a role-playing module where students practice voicing their discomfort with ambiguous auditing practices to help develop character strengths of honesty and integrity (Gentile, 2010; Melé, 2005). A marketing course could add a service-learning exercise, such as developing a marketing plan for a local charitable organization to hone students’ course content skills while simultaneously developing character strengths of generosity and benevolence (Hartman & Beck-Dudley,

1999). A strategy course could incorporate reaction papers to heated case debates intended to increase character strengths of perspective and self-regulation (e.g., The Function of the Firm; and whether the focus should be on creating shareholder value or stakeholder value) where students reflect on how their personal values, beliefs, or attitudes affected the way they approached the ethical issues surfaced in the classroom discussion.

The challenge, however, is that character development occurs at a very personal level; it is not something that one simply “knows” or acquires from reading about it. Rather, character strengths such as courage or humility can be learned while in the process of learning about functional competencies through how the student engages the learning experience. For example, we have countless examples of students who engage the learning process in a less than humble or honest manner, or with great fear, and it is these specific instances that present an opportunity to focus on the development of character.

However, many faculty would not consider it their role or responsibility to contribute to the development of character, and those that do see it as their responsibility are often not sure how to go about it. It is safe to say that there is still plenty of skepticism around whether character can be taught, and if it were to be taught that it should remain in the domain of faculty in business ethics or organizational behavior. We will return to this theme later.

We conclude by suggesting that three things are required for faculty to embed character development within current functional competency courses. First, it takes awareness that when we consider the process of learning, there is tremendous opportunity to develop character in all courses. Second, it requires ownership among faculty that it is both their role and responsibility to develop character while also delivering core knowledge. Third, it requires character development of the faculty members themselves to engage this process. We discuss this point in more detail in the final section.

### **Character Development in Dedicated Courses**

In spite of the promise held forth in developing character across all courses, there is also the opportunity for dedicated courses that focus on the role of leadership character and its development.



However, leadership courses within business schools often focus on developing leadership skills at one particular level rather than tackling the importance of leadership as a skill required across levels. For example, many programs include courses on managing people (level of others and group) or leading change (level of the organization), but do not necessarily offer courses addressing leadership of self.

However, an intentional focus on leadership of self—especially the capabilities of self-awareness and reflection—has been shown to have an important impact on group and organizational outcomes. For example, self-awareness has been identified as a critical component of authentic leadership theory (George, 2003; Luthans & Avolio, 2003), which in turn has been shown to be an important determinant of outcomes such as organizational commitment, the satisfaction employees have with their supervisor, and organizational citizenship behavior (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Assuming that the business curriculum already has courses that address leadership of others and of the organization, what can be done then, from a content perspective, to facilitate student learning regarding leadership of self?

We begin with the premise that when it comes to character development there are three primary gaps. First, many individuals are not aware of any models of virtues, character strengths, and values, and hence at a minimum, there is a need to expose students to learning opportunities that enable them to uncover these elements. Second, many individuals are unaware of where they stand relative to character development, particularly given that most have not spent time thinking or reflecting about their character. Hence, there is an important reflective diagnostic element to developing character. Last, closing the gap between knowing and doing is a lifelong journey, much of which must occur in context, and hence, experiencing character development is necessary.

Several researchers have suggested potential pedagogical approaches to teaching character, including increased training in ethical decision-making skills, experiential methods that challenge implicit cognitive biases, reflection exercises designed to surface dissonance between the type of person one is and the type of person one might wish to become, and mentoring. We review each in turn.

### ***Increased Training in Ethical Decision-Making Skills***

Increased training in ethical decision-making skills can positively impact students' level of moral development and thus lead to more ethical behaviors associated with positive character strengths. For example, Mintz (1996), Hartman (2006), and Falkenberg and Woiceshyn (2008) all advocate the use of the case method to help students think through the ethical decision-making process. This is because a well-taught case creates awareness of the ethical issue, allows for the critical judgment of alternatives, and encourages the formulation of an intention to act ethically (e.g., the Merck and the Mectizan decision, or The Parable of the Sadhu). Comer and Vega (2008) similarly promote the use of ethical decision-making scenarios to help surface individual differences in values and to condition students to apply ethical frameworks to decision making in general. Case studies can also illustrate how little help certain ethical theories are when one encounters a highly ambiguous context.

However, others have suggested that case studies, even in ethical decision making, are inadequate in promoting character development in that they prioritize critical thinking skills above all other abilities, and thus, do not adequately engage students' personal values or virtues (Hill & Stewart, 1999; Melé, 2005). Rather, students learn the importance of knowing the various ethical frameworks and being able to employ these as decision-making criteria, but this does not subsequently guarantee ethical behavior in ambiguous contexts (Gentile, 2010). Numerous studies have shown that increased levels of moral reasoning and intentions to act do not necessarily lead to action (Blasi, 1980; Geva, 2000). As such, we agree with Aristotle that character is not something that can be learned from a textbook or through lecture format. Just as reading a company's code of ethics or attending a mandatory corporate conduct session is unlikely to influence employee ethical behavior, simply learning about the different ethical frameworks in a rote manner will be insufficient to shape character. For example, as Hill and Stewart (1999: 183) argued: "Teaching ethics, while an important starting point, falls short of the ultimate goal—developing virtuous people." There must be a stronger focus on ethics implementation in the new case studies we develop. This would bring cases closer to the experiential methods described below.

### **Experiential Methods**

Many authors have suggested the use of more experiential methods to help students move from knowing what is good to actually doing good (Hannah & Avolio, 2010; Hill & Stewart, 1999). For example, role-playing—where students are put into character-stretching situations—can serve to highlight existing cognitive biases or dominant behavioral preferences and act as interventions in positive character development (Schmidt et al., 2009). *Role-plays* allow students to try on another's feelings, thoughts, or behaviors by acting out the actions of real or imaginary characters in the relative safety of a learning environment (Mintz, 1996).

Although usually employed in ethical judgment exercises, role-plays—when combined with feedback and goal setting—can also be used effectively to train students in carrying through with the implementation of ethical decisions. For example, in the *Giving Voice to Values* curriculum, role-playing modules are designed to develop students' character strengths that can be used to help students learn what to say and do if they were going to act on their values in various ethically challenging business scenarios (Gentile, 2010). The use of simulations or experiential exercises is common in numerous professions—medicine, policing, fire-fighting, management of nuclear power facilities, airlines and so forth—to train and develop individuals. These simulations require decisions and a set of specific actions to be initiated in ambiguous yet realistic situations. These exercises often address the intangibles of the interpersonal and emotional responses that are associated with decision making and subsequent actions. Thus these simulations—of which the role-play is just one example—provide powerful teaching moments and opportunities for students to reflect and learn.

For example, we teamed-up with local firefighters who took senior executives through a series of mock rapid rescue intervention drills at their training facilities, including rescuing dummies from a smoke-filled building. This simulation embedded traditional lessons around leadership, communication, and teamwork, as well as highlighted the importance of character in successfully completing the exercises. In feedback sessions with the firefighters, executives talked openly about how the drills raised their appreciation and understanding of the role of virtues and character strengths such as humility, perseverance, courage, gratitude, prudence, and humor—linking these easily and read-

ily to character strengths required in organizational success.

Service-learning opportunities, where students are engaged in different community outreach programs, have similarly been shown to improve ethical decision-making abilities, and hence, to develop character strengths such as compassion, understanding, and tolerance (Hill & Stewart, 1999). These experiential methods can range from volunteering in not-for-profit organizations, to preparing business plans for charities, to assisting in building a house for Habitat for Humanity. Several recent articles in this journal have demonstrated the positive impact of service-learning programs on raising student awareness of ethical issues, developing a responsible mind-set, and engaging moral values (Brower, 2011; Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011). Service-learning methods are also particularly effective in combination with reflection exercises (Brower, 2011), which we discuss next.

### **Reflection**

Leadership researchers have long suggested that effective leaders need to develop self-awareness and reflection capabilities. However, the necessity of these strengths for leading in a turbulent environment have only recently regained popularity in leadership theories, such as transcendent, authentic, primal, and level-5 leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Collins, 2001; Crossan et al., 2008; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Authentic leadership development, for example, stresses the importance of self-awareness through reflection in assessing the congruency of one's personal values, beliefs, feelings, and actions with how these play out in organizational settings (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). Gardner and his colleagues argued that authentic leadership has four key components: awareness, or knowledge and trust in one's thoughts, feelings, motives, and values; unbiased processing, or objectivity, about and acceptance of one's positive and negative attributes; behavior, or acting based on one's true preferences, values, and needs rather than merely acting to please others, secure rewards, or avoid punishments; and relational orientation, or achieving and valuing truthfulness and openness in one's close relationships (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). They also concluded that there is "disagreement within the AL literature about the inclusion of ethics as a core component" (1129). Nevertheless, there appears to be a strong sentiment that there is

a moral element to authentic leadership, suggesting an opportunity to inject a virtues and character-based perspective to authentic leadership exercises designed to deepen self-reflection.

For pedagogy, the role of reflection as a component of an undergraduate business ethics course, both as a guided and as an individual activity, has been shown to increase cognitive moral development in business students (Schmidt et al., 2009), which in turn has been linked to enhanced ethical decision making (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). Through journaling, reaction, or reflection paper activities, students engage in a form of inductive reasoning where abstract concepts are connected to real-life examples (Hill & Stewart, 1999). Petriglieri, Wood, and Petriglieri (2011) demonstrate how dedicated reflective engagement through professional counseling can increase participant self-awareness. Stuebs (2011) advocates the use of character journals to advance character development through self-reflection. Novels, texts, plays, poetry, and other literature can also be used to enhance student reflection on ethical situations (von Weltzien Hoivik, 2009). These techniques allow one to move from the question "What is the right course of action in this situation?" to a more character-based framing, such as "What kind of person do I want to be?" (Audi, 2012).

### **Mentoring**

Last, mentors can supplement the learning or insights gained from these reflections. Mentors share their experiences—both good and bad—and impart personal knowledge in areas that are challenging for students, including business situations that involve ethical dilemmas. Students can learn from such real-world experiences and also receive hands-on support and coaching to practice and develop the requisite skills to do the right thing in challenging situations. Numerous studies have shown that developing strong mentoring relationships is an effective approach in the development of leaders (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; O'Brien, Biga, Kessler, & Allen, 2010).

The above techniques—skills training, experiential methods, reflection exercises, and mentoring—represent but some of many possible approaches to character development. When considering the use of these approaches with various audiences (undergraduate, graduate, and executive), we have found as much variance in reception and applica-

tion of the concepts and approaches within an audience as there is between audiences. Goleman et al. (2002) reported that an explicit focus on developing students' leadership of self-skills, regardless of age, has a demonstrated impact on individual self-awareness capabilities. The implication is that leadership character development is a very personal process, and each individual engages the material in a different way. Regardless of age and work experience, individuals differ on important elements such as their capacity for self-reflection, life-changing experiences, and their openness to change.

One of the primary impediments to implementation may be faculty unease in teaching some of these more micro psychological methods. Not having advanced degrees in psychology, or being certified in the use of assessment tools, faculty may be hesitant to apply a battery of diagnostic tests to students lest they open a hornet's nest of issues they feel ill-equipped to address. However, leadership of self, and in particular, character development are essential to effective leadership, and hence, we cannot turn our backs on this critical element of leadership development.

Thus we now turn our attention to the implications for faculty and business schools as we consider implementing this agenda. Ensuring adequate coverage of the content of leadership processes addresses only part of the problem in character development. While one might objectively discuss what content and what pedagogical techniques should be included in the business curriculum, what is less often considered is how issues of character are implicitly addressed in leadership development in business curricula. Here we turn the leadership lens on ourselves to assess how we are implicitly teaching character to students at the level of self, others, and the organization.

### **Implications for Faculty—Leadership of Self**

Just as we advocate leadership of self to our students, so must we believe in its importance as applied to ourselves as business school faculty. What values, beliefs, or attitudes do we unconsciously hold that may be biasing our pedagogical approach to leadership development?

Building on the work of Peterson and Seligman (2004), McGovern and Miller (2008) propose a set of virtues and character strengths as applied to teaching and learning that can serve as an en-

lightening self-reflection exercise for leadership educators. For example, when teaching, do we evaluate all the perspectives and intellectual contributions, even if some may be contrary to our personal beliefs, thus displaying the character strengths of open-mindedness and critical thinking reflective of the virtue of wisdom? Do we truthfully declare our values and model how this quality is necessary for building trusting relationships, thus displaying the character strengths of integrity and authenticity associated with the virtue of courage? Do we communicate our personal limitations and acknowledge our weaknesses, thus displaying the character strength of humility associated with the virtue of temperance?

According to Aristotle, one key to developing virtuous character strengths is observing and then modeling the virtuous behavior of others (Aristotle, 1999). In emulating this goodness in others and through the practice of the virtues, one trains oneself to act in accordance to the virtues (Mintz, 1996). Given our authority-imbued role as professors, business educators naturally serve as professional role models, and therefore, serve as character models by default as well (Hill & Stewart, 1999). Whether we claim to use a value-neutral pedagogical approach, we nonetheless implicitly set an example of good/bad or right/wrong behavior for our students by our behavior, both in and outside of class. If we wish to develop leaders with integrity, we must act with integrity ourselves. If we wish to develop leaders with courage, we must act courageously ourselves. When we fail to act in ways that demonstrate these character strengths—by pandering to students to get good teaching evaluations or by being unfair in our marking schema, as examples—then we are reinforcing experiences that contribute to developing character weaknesses both in ourselves as well as in our students.

Reflection as a method for developing leadership of self is thus not limited to students. Educators as well can use reflection techniques to evaluate our reactions to critical teaching moments, either individually or through guided discussions with other faculty members. Recalling specific classroom incidents, evaluating our pedagogical options in response to the experience, and interpreting our actions in light of the character strengths we wish to embody can create learning opportunities. For example, if one has caught a student plagiarizing the work of others on a take-home exam, yet does nothing immediate in re-

sponse, there is an opportunity to reflect on this decision, evaluate the alternative options, and interpret this behavior in light of the virtues or character strengths one would like to have modeled and developed by students. Sharing reflection stories with other faculty members creates additional leadership of self learning opportunities (McGovern & Miller, 2008). Our inclination is that this type of self-evaluation among business educators is uncommon.

### Implications for Faculty—Leadership of Others

As faculty members, we are also responsible for developing positive relationships with others, within the classroom, the department, and the business school as a whole. Within the classroom, we are accountable for setting rules of engagement and norms of appropriate behavior. If we encourage collaborative learning groups as a pedagogical tool, then we are also responsible for establishing proper guidelines for acceptable conduct within these groups, and we cannot abdicate this responsibility when issues of character surface. For example, how we choose to deal with the oft-heard complaint of the free-riding group member leaves a lasting impression on students about what the professor values. If we do nothing, cheating behaviors become known as acceptable, and this is amplified when repeated offenses go without deterrent. If, on the other hand, the free-rider is confronted and reprimanded, students learn that this is not acceptable conduct and that the professor values honesty, integrity, and fairness as desirable character strengths.

Leadership of others also includes how we manage our relationships with other business school faculty. Business schools seem to be notorious for creating or at least tolerating fiefdoms and silos between groups, something that we would admonish in other organizations. In many instances it appears faculty are more aligned with their particular functional discipline than they are with their organization. Unfortunately, similar to the debate around business ethics in general, these fissures erode the collective capability of the organization to foster a coherent approach to the teaching of character (Evans, Treviño, & Weaver, 2006). This lack of coherence makes attempts to deal with breaches of character particularly problematic for the organization.

### **Implications for Faculty—Leadership of the Organization**

As educational institutions, we teach character by providing an environment that either fosters, or does not foster, virtuous behavior and where virtuous behaviors either can, or cannot, be observed and discovered. Perhaps the best-known example of institutionalized character development is at West Point, the oldest military academy in the United States. A research project into the processes by which West Point delivers on their mission of character formation revealed that the institution uses both traditional human resource management functions (e.g., recruitment, selection, job rotation and training) and more progressive processes (e.g., organizational learning, organizational design, and culture shaping) to instill positive character strengths in its cadets (Offstein & Dufresne, 2007). The crux of the character development program is West Point's Honor Code, which reads "A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those that do." However, the spirit of the code is taught such that a more positive framing is also emphasized, namely, that the cadet will not lie, but also that the cadet will be truthful.

The teaching of character strengths at West Point permeates the organization's strategies, structures, rules, and procedures. For example, admissions officers place a significant emphasis on evidence of selfless activities in their recruitment process, rather than relying exclusively on GPA and SAT scores. The organizational design of character development includes socialization processes that begin prior to arrival (e.g., communication materials regarding the Honor Code), dissemination of values and ethics guides, and an intensive 9-week basic training on values upon arrival (e.g., including classes on what lying, stealing, and nontolerance mean) as well as specific classes throughout cadets' tenure, including courses on honor, ethical living, and respect for diversity. The Honor Code is then modeled both formally and informally not only by faculty and staff, but also by senior cadets who are entrusted with training new recruits. Ethical breaches are used as learning opportunities that include extensive mentoring and reflection exercises, and the effectiveness of the honor system is tested in experiential exercises (Offstein & Dufresne, 2007). In short, character development is embedded in the very heart of the organization's strategies, structures, and processes. It is important to note that

even with this kind of focus on character, organizations like West Point are vulnerable, as seen in the recent rape lawsuit filed against West Point replete with allegations of a cover-up.

In leading at the organizational level in business programs then, we need to assess how our strategies, structures, and processes serve to develop (or not develop) character in our business recruits. Whether conscious or not, we impart what we value by whom we admit, by the criteria we use, by how we socialize them to the school's culture and norms of appropriate behavior, by the criteria we use in allocating student awards, in how we deal with ethical transgressions, among other structural influences and career management practices. We first signal what gets valued in our recruitment materials, which may emphasize starting salaries over honor, integrity, and valor. Further, the very design of our curriculum itself—from the selection of a guiding mission or vision to the selection or exclusion of various topics for instruction to the cases or teaching materials we use—also indicates what gets valued. Similarly, when we have systems that allow cheating to go unaddressed, we, in our role as leadership educators, are complicit in demonstrating that honesty and integrity are not valued as character strengths. In contrast to West Point then, a deemphasis on character development suggests a real gap in business education leadership.

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***We first signal what gets valued in our recruitment materials, which may emphasize starting salaries over honor, integrity, and valor.***

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While we have articulated the implications for faculty, we acknowledge that the points we have raised represent a very tall order. The magnitude of the changes we have outlined are significant, and to expect easy and widespread adoption of our recommendations is unrealistic. For example, some faculty members may not have much interest in the virtue approach to business ethics; instead espousing the view of Milton Friedman which is, roughly, to aim at the bottom line, that's what shareholders have a right to demand, and that's what contributes to the well-being of society in the long run. Our experience has been a more evolutionary process whereby faculty members are

drawn to the potential that exists to develop leadership character within themselves and their students. Their desire is not bounded by discipline but rather by their personal experience and readiness to embrace the possibilities. We do not see this as something that could be mandated in business schools. Such an approach would likely backfire. Rather, we recommend a process that encourages and enables interested faculty. Adoption of what we are proposing is not dependent on others, although as we discuss in the next section, it is not a solitary endeavor.

### IMPLEMENTATION AND APPLICATION

Although it has been our intent to provide ideas for implementation and application throughout this essay, here we share our experience and experimentation with developing leadership character in a course we specifically designed for that purpose. The course is offered as an MBA elective that runs over 5 weeks with 10 sessions of 3 hours. The first session is largely an exploration of the core concepts (virtues, character strengths, values, and so forth) as well as an invitation to the students to engage in the learning and discovery process. Pivotal to the learning experience is setting the tone that this will be a different kind of course. Students are invited to introduce themselves using a symbol or object that signifies who they are. Successful executives from the business community are assigned as mentors to the students (Allen et al., 2004), such that each mentor has two or three students. Mentors are invited to the first class to greet the students, share their experience, and begin to develop a rapport with their mentees that continues throughout the course and often beyond. We have some provocative videos, poems, and perspectives designed to ignite the interest and curiosity of the students in what at first appear to be very abstract concepts. Students also keep reflective journals (Stuebs, 2011) throughout the course. After the first 3-hour class, one of the students wrote:

Today's class was a great help in defining in greater detail my goals for the class and the impact it will have on my personal and professional life. It was extremely insightful and humbling to listen to classmates introduce themselves on a deeper level than I have related to many of them and to hear the lifelong journeys that the mentors for the course are

on. I see this course more now as a way to help me become comfortable with the lifelong self-reflection journey I will take over my life and a course that will provide me the resources both tactical tools and support network to successfully complete this journey. I am very excited over the course of this week to better define my personal philosophy of life. I find that for the most part I have a set of core values that help guide the decision[s] I make in life, but struggle to articulate these values in a genuine and thoughtful manner. My hope for the remaining classes this week is that I will start this process and through more self-reflection define at a much deeper level the core values that govern my life and have an understanding how they will impact my leadership style.

Another student wrote:

Throughout this course I'm excited to learn about myself so I can be an effective leader, and not just in the workplace but within my community. Before reading the article on transcendent leadership, I never recognized in its entirety, how important having an understanding and awareness of self is. It obviously makes sense, a leader who does not align their values with the values of the organization or strategic direction will not be able to effectively gain trust or respect of his/her team. Only by having a more thorough and in-depth understanding of self can a leader then effectively be able to deliver. This entire concept is obviously very new to me. In my past experience, employees were ordinarily promoted and put into a leadership position as a result of their technical competencies. While this is definitely important, sometimes a greater emphasis on technical aptitude can facilitate the promotion of ineffective leaders.

I'm excited to participate in the journey that I believe this course will take me on. I am still a little hesitant to delve deep into myself as I've never put myself in a situation that would call for me to do that, and I'm a little anxious to acknowledge my weaknesses and be vulnerable. I am quite shy and reserved and therefore am looking forward to pushing my boundaries and leaving my comfort zone and ultimately growing.

We use the values in action (VIA) diagnostic tool to help the students unpack their virtues and character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and the Schwarz value survey to help them self-assess their values (Schwartz, 1996). The movie *Invictus* has proven extremely valuable as a means for the students to identify character strengths and virtues in Nelson Mandela and Francois Pienaar, the captain of the South African rugby team. For example, consider the power of the movie to help students grasp the depth of forgiveness Mandela exhibited as he worked to unite a country even though he had been incarcerated for almost 30 years. The movie also illustrates many other elements such as humility, courage, perseverance, judgment, and empathy.

Personal life stories are used to help students reflect on who they are and why they have become the persons they are today (George, 2003; Petriglieri et al., 2011; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Case studies are also used to identify these attributes in others (Hartman, 2006; Sadler-Smith, 2012). For example, the Craig Kielburger six-part video case series, which was created for the course, was profound, as students had the chance to wrestle with the issues Craig (an activist for the rights of children) faced in the strategic evolution of his not-for-profit and for-profit organizations (Free the Children; and Me to We). They could see the exercise of character and its impact on choices made, as many of the choices were rooted in courage, justice, wisdom, temperance, humanity, and transcendence. There were many journal entries about Craig, and the inspiration he provided was evident as revealed in the following entry:

Upon reflection of Craig's visit, I find myself energized and re-motivated to continue on the path that I've chosen. I'm humbled by the fact that individuals, like Craig, can lead their life and make their choices with such conviction at a similar age as me. It's possible! Potential can be realized and put toward the social good. All it takes is a willingness to act, conviction in one's beliefs, and a spark to light the fire.

We also rely on Gentile's (2010) *Giving Voice to Values* (GVV) materials to help students bridge intent and behaviors as depicted in Figure 1. Similar to the findings of a recent survey of MBA students (Aspen Institute, 2008), the majority of our students also recognized that they are ill-equipped

to face ambiguous ethical issues at work, particularly as they anticipate entering into situations that are in conflict with their values. The GVV scripting and role-playing exercises helped students prepare for these difficult conversations. Courage and candor were embedded in the exercises we used.

The highlight of the course was the student-led workshops in which groups select one of the six virtues and prepare a 1-hour workshop for the class designed to help their peers understand the character strengths associated with that virtue and engage them in developmental exercises to deepen them. For example, to examine the virtue of transcendence, we engaged a near-death visualization experience in order to help students come to terms with their sense of purpose.

The following journal entry by one student provides a good overview of the entire course experience:

I must admit that when I first signed up for this course I really did not know what I was getting myself into. I have always been a reflective individual who took the time to write in a journal growing up. However, in university that reflection piece got put on the back shelf as school work, labs, extracurricular activities and job searches took over. This course has given me the opportunity to reignite my reflective side and discuss concepts and ideas that I have never had the opportunity to do in a classroom setting.

I found the reflection component and the ability to discover myself and my values to be the most precious part of taking this course. While many in the MBA class speculated that this would be a so-called fluff course, I can now confidently say that it was not. The speakers that were brought in to discuss value systems and leadership styles were phenomenal and have contributed to my learning in a way that textbooks and casebooks could not.

Furthermore, one of the most valuable components that I found to this course was the incorporation of mentors . . . I feel that the mentors really offered some real world advice from their many experiences and enriched my learning.

During the first couple of classes I did struggle a little bit as I found the discussion to be somewhat abstract. The concepts that

were discussed seemed to be overly philosophical and I was not sure where it would go. However, [name instructor] clearly had a vision for this course and as we progressed and did our own values analysis the whole course gradually came together for me. I really liked the idea of starting off with abstract concepts, focusing in on what those concepts meant for me as an individual given my value system and ultimately how I would apply those concepts in my life moving forward.

Since taking this course I have spoken to a number of people about it including alumni and many wish that they would have had the opportunity to experience this course for themselves. I feel that it was a pivotal component for me in this MBA program because at the end of the day I can learn skills but values must be discovered and nurtured. This course did that for me.

And another journal entry provides further insight into the impact of the course:

This course was unlike any other I have taken. I have never felt so at ease with others in the classroom as I became. Seeing grown men cry and realizing that age came with fewer answers than I had previously thought made me realize how young my parents probably feel sometimes. I think this insight into the human experience is a powerful tool. It has given me the resolve to never stop setting new goals. To question people who think they have all the answers and figure out the world for yourself without being afraid of the information we don't have. We'll never have perfect knowledge.

I think this course made me make peace with myself. I think I've wanted to conform more than I should have. It's a survival mechanism that leads you to compromise values and virtues. Through the work of Mary Gentile, I have a better script for taking a stand and the VIA diagnostic has given me the lexicon to describe who I am—in words.

## CONCLUSION—IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Our objective herein was to argue for an increased attention to leadership character development in business education. By focusing on character and how this is developed at the individual, group, and

organizational levels, we highlighted how existing practices have privileged the teaching of functional content over character and how we, as faculty, within disciplines, and within business schools, either do or do not support virtuous leadership development through our own behaviors, relationships, and structures. Most important, we provided concrete suggestions on how to integrate a focus on character development into existing business programs, both in terms of individual courses as well as the overall curriculum—providing the implementation of an MBA elective on leadership character at our school as an example of these ideas in application. The program director for the undergraduate program has since requested that we deliver the same course in that program.

We were motivated to pursue this agenda through our conversations with executives who expressed the view that there are shortcomings in the development of leadership character in both business schools and organizations. These executives were looking to business schools to provide leadership in this area. The challenge for business schools to deliver on character development is substantial.

While the efforts on the part of one or two inspired faculty acting alone may foster character development in some individuals, the magnitude of the need for leadership character development requires a broad coalition to make substantial progress (Sadler-Smith, 2012). The ancient proverb attributed to the Igbo and Yoruba regions of Nigeria—"It takes a village to raise a child"—implies that raising a child is a communal effort. That is, the parents, the extended family, and the broader community, all share in the responsibility of raising a child. Aristotle also implied that virtues and character strengths can only be learned by individuals living in strong and virtuous communities. We see this proverb as a metaphor for the development of leadership character in business schools.

The business school village encompasses a number of important individuals beyond the faculty from the various functional disciplines. It includes the program directors—those that are responsible for leading the undergraduate, graduate, and executive education programs. These individuals, alongside the dean of the business school, provide the context for the educational experience and, through their decisions and actions, signal in subtle or not-so-subtle ways their



level of support for the focus on character development. If there is a true commitment to developing leaders that will have a positive impact on the world, we would expect the dean to communicate the importance of the role of character in business to the various audiences of the school. In addition, we would expect the program directors to support the development of specific course materials for the development of character and to signal that this focus is a pillar of the program. Both the dean and the program directors are in positions to provide the resources to the faculty to encourage them to develop their knowledge and skills required to deliver on the building of character. Also important is that those in leadership positions at the business school act on inappropriate behavior and signal behavioral examples of virtuous character strengths. We are privileged that our dean has taken a leading role in advocating for the importance of leadership character development in the business school. She has done so through numerous internal and external activities including a visible presence at the practitioner roundtable discussions, presentations at faculty and alumni events, coauthorship on leadership character publications, speaking opportunities to executive audiences, and consistent messaging on the topic within the popular business press.

Alumni can also play an important role, as members of the business school village and can be called upon to assist in the development of character by serving as mentors, as they did in our leadership character course. Furthermore, alumni could offer their assistance in developing learning experiences that foster character development, such as case studies—either written or live ones. Alumni are in a unique position where they can provide concrete examples and advice to the students on how to transfer their knowledge and skills from an educational institution to the actual workplace. We need positive examples of leadership, especially cases where individuals were called upon to demonstrate character strengths such as bravery, integrity, or persistence. Students should be exposed to examples of business leaders who chose to do the right thing and whose decisions led to significant positive outcomes. Such leaders could articulate their motivations and how they overcame the challenges in implementing their decisions. By providing students models of good behavior, we encourage the development of the character strengths associated with that behavior.

Recruiters and the companies that employ busi-

ness school graduates also play a crucial role in leadership character development. Students frequently remark that they see little on the recruiting agenda that signals the importance of character. When recruiters focus on student marks or how clever the students are at solving problems, they send clear signals to students on what the company values, and this is reflected in what students' desire from their business education. Many business schools have a dedicated group of staff who are the linchpin between the students and recruiters. In our school these individuals are in a key position to guide recruiters on the protocol of the business school, including student expectations about character, since they coach organizations to be clear in their recruiting messages and convey what they value and how they live it. As a practical matter, this essay could be provided to recruiters so that they understand their role and the expectation of students. As one of the executives we talked to stated: "If you're in an interview talking to somebody and they do not communicate to you that values and integrity are enormously important, I'd be out of there faster than you can count to three because the reality is that first class leaders, corporate or otherwise, who don't put integrity and those values at the very top are not people in my view that you should associate with (personal communication)." Our work on leadership character has led to several invitations to work with companies on how they can move the leadership character agenda forward. A focus on character development thus has the potential to significantly affect personal success in the transition from student to employee and eventually, to business leaders.

Last, the admissions department also plays a crucial role in the business school village as the first point of contact in terms of students' understanding of what gets valued at the institution. A common question raised by the executives we spoke to was "Are you selecting the right students into the program?" Intrinsic in the definition of virtuous character is that an individual "not only acts courageously, temperately, justly and so on but also has good reason and a genuine desire for doing it. That is, the moral agent acts from the right motive—to be virtuous" (Mintz, 1996: 833). Are we selecting students into our business programs that have a genuine desire to act virtuously? Bergman, Westerman, and Daly (2010) suggested that a large percentage of business students are in fact fundamentally narcissistic and motivated primarily by the desire to become rich. Lan, Gowing, McMahon,

Rieger, and King (2008) found that the primary motivational value of business majors is hedonism. If this is the case, how do we get them to be motivated to act more virtuously or encourage them to engage in reflective learning? Most schools look beyond grades to understand the profile of the student with respect to leadership and extracurricular activities. There are many ways in which admission departments could expand their criteria for recruitment and selection. For example, the admissions department at our school looks for specific values, traits, and motives in the interview process, through probing questions. While not perfect, the interview process tries to identify characteristics such as personal accountability, openness to different opinions, and temperance. Questions are based on critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954).

The village extends to other faculties on campus that could support the business school in shaping the character of its students. For example, experts in psychological assessments and counseling psychologists may help faculty during a particular course. Education faculty too may have critical insights that help to develop character. Our assertion is that if we want to make a meaningful, if not significant leap forward, in the development of leadership character then we must, in addition to looking at the philosophy and business literatures, integrate findings from others fields such as psychology, education, social work, the field of sports, and so forth. Extraordinary outcomes may be achieved when an integrative approach is taken, such as has been demonstrated in the area of sustainability (Kurland et al., 2010).

Similar to the debate around the responsibility for business ethics education in general, it will no doubt be a challenge to have the various departments come together and tackle character from an interdisciplinary angle (Evans et al., 2006). We have found that our work in this area has prompted greater collaboration between disciplines and seeded joint research projects with colleagues in finance (e.g., the role of character in value investing) and marketing (e.g., leadership character and influence tactics). Some academic institutions have been successful in implementing promising new ways to foster such collaborations, for example by forming scholarly communities around common interests and "big" questions, or by adjusting promotion-and-tenure guidelines to recognize that interdisciplinary work is important, and looking favorably upon individuals who have demonstrated a track record of working with colleagues

from different departments. Some institutions—including our own university, through funding interdisciplinary development initiatives—have gone as far as financially supporting collaboration by providing funding that encourages the interdisciplinary research required to tackle increasingly sophisticated research issues.

Our focus on leadership character development and the view that "it takes a village" is entirely consistent with Ghoshal's (2005) impassioned message to members of the village that we need to rethink management theory, education, and practice. He argued that "by propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories, business schools have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility" (2005: 76) and to reinstate ethical or moral concerns into the practice of management, "an alternative theory can only emerge from the collective efforts of many" (88). Because business schools have been critiqued for focusing only on developing managers' technical competencies (Moore, 2008), our aim here was to offer an approach that supplements that technical competence with leadership character.

The ideas in this essay are not just a possibility. They are a reality that exists. Building on the findings from our conversations with executives, we designed an MBA course that integrates many of the recommendations we make herein (e.g., skills training, experiential methods, reflection exercises, and mentoring) with the explicit goal of introducing self-reflection and a focus on virtues, values, and character strengths into the business curriculum. Our personal experience is that exposing both our students and ourselves as faculty to this process has been not only possible, but also profound for all involved as the comments from the students' reflective journals illustrate. We acknowledge the difficulty in determining whether any program makes students behave more virtuously or ethically as opposed to making them more fluent in discussing ethics. Our approach and ideas for developing leadership character are a starting point for discussion and subsequent initiatives. Validation of these ideas, of course, is required, and this process too offers exciting opportunities.

We therefore end on the optimistic note that this focus on leadership character development has not only been extremely well received by the students in our leadership character course, but that it has also been embraced by our dean, program directors, faculty from disciplines other than business

ethics and organizational behavior, our alumni, and recruiting organizations. In presenting this essay, we hope therefore to have at a minimum inspired educators to reflect on their role in developing leaders of character that can make a positive difference in the world by providing practical recommendations that can be implemented in both stand-alone courses as well as in general curriculum redesign. Given the multitude of recent crises and the subsequent calls for business schools to reconsider not only their course content but also the character of the students they graduate, we feel the time is right to engage in a deeper conversation about the role of character development as the responsibility of the broader business school village.

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