

Service leadership education in an era of service economy

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Introduction

In different parts of the world, economies have been changing from an industrial mode to a service mode (1-3). While industries such as computer and automobile manufacturing still exist in different parts of the world, there is a gradual integration of the traditional industrial production with service provision. Besides differences in production processes between the industrial and service economies (e.g., assembly line production versus production of reliable service), the desired leadership qualities of the two economies are also very different. While desired leadership in industrial economy is more top-down, it is more bottom-up in service economy (4).

In the “traditional” leadership models which closely related to industrial economies, leadership generally focuses on production outcomes and is commonly conceived in terms of leadership competencies, such as effective problem-solving and skills to make wise management decisions. While these attributes are important, their sole existence is not adequate for effective leadership in service economies. As service provision involves both the service provider and the service recipient(s), whether service providers have ethics and moral responsibilities is particularly important because quality control is commonly performed by the service providers (e.g., teachers and brokers). In addition, whether a leader cares about other people, including the service recipients and the followers, is an important leadership attribute in service economies. Basically, the mission of a service leader should not be just geared towards maximization of profit without caring about other people's benefits (5, 6).

Because of the changing requirements of effective leaders in service economies, there is a need to nurture leaders with leadership competence, ethics and caring attributes. The notion of “service leadership” was put forward by Po Chung, Co-

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Founder of DHL International. He argued that effective service leaders should have the attributes of generic leadership competence, moral character and caring disposition (3 Cs). Together with the support from the Victor and William Fung Foundation, Po Chung initiated the Service Leadership Education Initiative where eight Government-funded universities in Hong Kong were given grants to develop curriculum materials on service leadership. To mark the success of this initiative, two international conferences were held in 2014 and 2016, respectively (7, 8).

At The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), both credit-bearing subjects and non-credit-bearing programs have been developed since the inception of this initiative. For credit-bearing subjects, a 2-credit subject was developed under the old 3-year undergraduate program and a 3-credit subject entitled “Service Leadership” was developed under the new 4-year undergraduate program. Besides Hong Kong, we also offered the “Service Leadership” subject in Cambodia and Xian in the form of intensive summer course. To promote service leadership attributes among the students, we also designed a service-learning subject to nurture the service leadership qualities among students through serving others. For non-credit-bearing programs, we designed leadership training programs for Wofoo Leaders’ Network. We also included the intensive service leadership programs for students from PolyU, Peking University and Xian Jiaotong University.

To understand the impact of service leadership education on the development of students, we have conducted systematic evaluation for the education programs developed. Primarily, we have used objective outcome evaluation via the one-group pretest-posttest design to assess the changes of the students after they completed the subjects or programs. Basically, there are research findings showing that students had positive changes in terms of improved knowledge, attitude and behavior on service leadership and enhanced well-being. Second, we used subjective outcome evaluation to understand the views of students toward the subject or training program, instructor or trainer, and the perceived benefits. Finally, qualitative evaluation via personal reflection worksheets, individual interviews or focus groups has been conducted to understand students’

learning experiences and how they have benefited from the service leadership education. Taken as a whole, previous evaluation studies have demonstrated that service leadership subjects and programs are effective in promoting service leadership qualities and well-being among student participants (9-12).

This special issue

In this special issue, we report evaluation findings based on different service leadership subjects and programs. Generally speaking, the reported findings replicated the previous evaluation findings of the Service Leadership Education Initiatives. These findings consistently and strongly suggest that these initiatives can help to promote service leadership attributes in young people. To build up the academic and professional foundation of service leadership education, these evaluation initiatives are very important. When China is gradually evolving to service economy, we earnestly hope that young people can be nurtured to be effective service leaders who possess competence, character and care.

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