

Leadership as a curriculum component: a case study of Uniminuto University

Jorge Cifuentes

Uniminuto Headquarters
Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios
Cll 81B #72B-70, Bogotá
Colombia
e-mail: jcfuentes@uniminuto.edu

Juan Prada

Uniminuto Headquarters
Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios
Cll 81B #72B-70, Bogotá
Colombia
e-mail: juan.prada@uniminuto.edu

Abstract This article reports the outcomes of the research project about leadership in students and graduates, conducted by the Business Administration Programme at Minuto de Dios University Corporation, Uniminuto main campus. The research is generated from a study prepared by a consulting company, in which only 9% of the of the programme graduates are recognised for having leadership skills. The objective is to identify the role of leadership as a curriculum pillar in the professional development of students, graduates, and programme teachers. In addition, institutional leadership and its contribution to the professional and employment development of students and graduates is investigated. The research methodology is a qualitative and descriptive analysis. The results show that students and graduates do not consider themselves leaders and the contribution of curriculum courses to strengthen this skill is not evident. A reform of the curriculum is recommended with themes and activities that inspire and motivate this complex task.

1 Introduction

In today's age of knowledge, within the framework of the fourth industrial revolution, the skills and abilities required by professionals in Business Administration are increasingly demanding. The world requires more leaders that strive to transform organisations, achieve sustainability, and contribute to the quality of life of their stakeholders.

In this sense, the professionals who lead organizations need to train in leadership, management skills, and professional skills that make them more agile and assertive when it comes to decision-making, sensitivity, and with proposals to solve social issues.

The Uniminuto main campus Business Administration programme was established in 1990. To date, it has achieved the third renewal of high-quality accreditation for a period of six years, according to Resolution No. 3987 of April 12, 2019, by the Ministry of Education of Colombia (2019). The main campus has 1,070 students and the Curriculum is comprised of 147 credits and 59 courses.

In 2017, the institution contracted an independent consultant called Target Insights, with the aim of studying and tracking programme graduates between 2011 and 2015. One of its conclusions was that only 9% of the programme graduates are recognised for their leadership skills (Target Insight 2017).

The result brought about this research. With the purpose of identifying the leadership role as core pillar for the curriculum in the professional development of teachers, students, and graduates of the business administration programme at the Uniminuto main campus. The methodology is a qualitative focus with a descriptive link. The results identified the importance of teachers in the training, leadership development, and management skill development of students, as well as their complacency with institutional leadership. Moreover, it was noted that some courses in the programme allow for the inclusion of leadership and the development of management skills. However, the need for strengthening the study plan with courses and activities that reinforce these subjects was also noticed. On the other

hand, graduates show a great deal of satisfaction in regard to the education received and skills developed during their studies.

2 Theoretical analysis

Figure 1 that follows below identifies the themes that make up the theoretical framework and its main indicators of leadership.

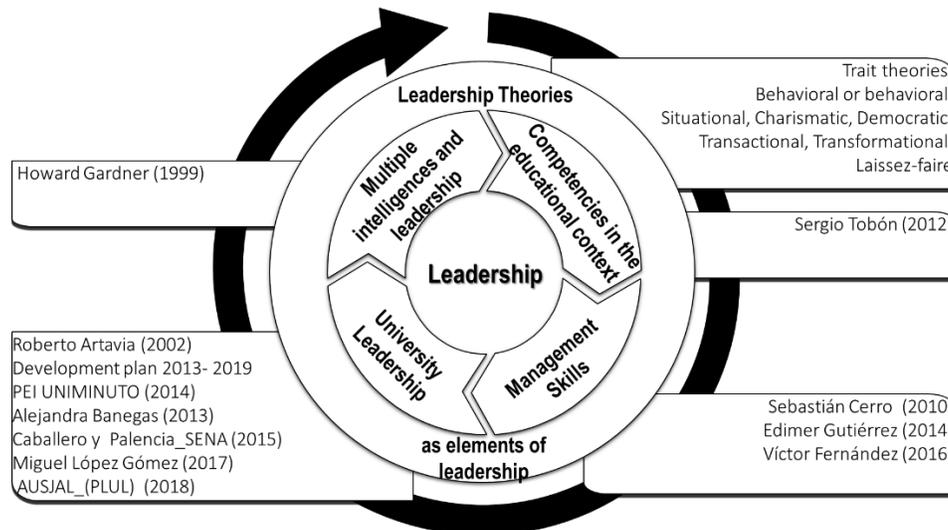


Fig.1. Theoretical framework
Source: own results

The theoretical framework in this figure highlights the elements that categorise leadership: the theory of multiple intelligences, educational and management skills, and institutional leadership. Some of them are exposed hereunder.

In 1999, Howard Gardner proposed the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, describing intelligence as a combination independent “intelligence” that are relatively interrelated (Gardner 1999).

In 2014, Mier et al. (2014) examined how the human mind develops, reasons, and identifies its learning style. These insights led to the reconsideration of the teaching-learning process and the improvement of student skills through the introduction of leadership as the core pillar. Moreover, Barrios et al. (2011) underlines how the development of student skills by way of leadership as the main theme of a programme, strengthens the purpose of developing student independence and their becoming the leader and social innovator a country need.

Additionally, in 2012, Sergio Tobon introduced the skill-based pedagogical model through a functionalist, behavioural-organisational, constructive, and socio-educational approach. In his theory, skills are the fundamental bases to guide a curriculum, teaching, learning, and evaluations from the angle of quality with principles, indicators, and tools (Tobón 2012).

Leadership has been present throughout human history, human evolution, and human conservation. It has come about because man has developed personality traits and characteristics that reflect in his actions. This evolution can be seen throughout the history of great leaders that have directed their efforts towards men and women in their places of performance (Estrada 2007). Other proposals on these themes have been leadership theories based on traits, behaviour, situation, charismatic leadership, and democratic leadership as is presented below (Jiménez et al. 2006).

In the theory of traits, leaders have certain innate characteristics that make them stand out in their performance, such as public speaking, creativity, innovation, and high learning capacity (Navarro 2016).

The behavioural theory developed by Kurt Lewin and his team at the University of Iowa in 1951, underlines participatory leadership by involving followers in decision making (Fierro and Villalba 2017).

In the situational leadership theory, the leader focuses their efforts in defining tasks. They establish what, when, and how the tasks are carried out and are introduced to their team, they encourage flexibility and adaptability (Sánchez 2000).

In 1947, Mark Webber put forth the charismatic leadership theory. Presented as an enthusiastic, self-confident person, helped by their personality and actions, that can influence other people. Charisma is part of the world of

emotions (Deusdad 2001). The charismatic leader transmits their distinctive empathy to people using their most outstanding personality traits, therefore securing their skill to influence others.

Another contribution began in 1999 by Robbins and Coulter, with democratic leadership. Characterised by delegating their authority to their team-members, sharing control, and collective decision making without seizing to supervise, control, and follow up (Fierro and Villalba 2017). Democratic leadership becomes a directional system in which the team members active participation in decision making is allowed.

Pareja et al. (2012) highlighted how leadership becomes a key skill that allows university students and future professionals to identify and develop their competitive advantage. It has an added value if a leader is seen as a creator of sense (Pareja et al. 2012).

For the question - what is the role of higher education in the preparation of the leaders of the future? Artavia (2002), establishes a practical proposal to equip students with a leadership vocation. They should be capable of moving a community and society towards a desired objective, keeping in mind that this community or society sometimes would not understand the vision the leader is putting forth. Here is precisely what the challenge of exerting leadership consists of, in the understanding of changing your own future and the future of those around you (Artavia 2002).

From this perspective, higher education institutions can teach students what leaders clearly do and identify if they are worthy of imitating and following. Studying and understanding what some leaders do can motivate people to take on similar roles in their community and society (Artavia 2002).

It is expected that higher education institutions educate and motivate social and political leadership, with a focus in critical, humanist, serving, and transformative leadership (López 2017).

At Minuto de Dios University Corporation (Uniminuto 2019), leadership is implemented in the Institutional Educational Project (IEP) as well as the Institutional Philosophy, which has become the strategic core in the education of students (Uniminuto 2014).

3 Methodology

This research was developed under a qualitative focus with a descriptive link in accordance with the following sample: 457 programme graduates (255 in 2016 and 232 in 2017). Additionally, 22 students and 3 full-time teachers enrolled in the first term of 2018 were interviewed.

Furthermore, the results from the 2017 independent study by Target Insights were analysed. Based on 150 graduates, their performance in their work environments, employment, and professional placement and the perception that graduates have on the quality of academic training in the programme.

In the data collection resources, the categories of Teacher Leadership, Leadership in the Curriculum, Image and Pride, Institutional Leadership, and Student Leadership were identified in accordance to the specific objectives of the research detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Categorisation

Specific goals	Categories	Resources
Examine the characteristics and strategies applied by teachers from the curriculum for the development of leadership in the students of the business administration programme	Teacher leadership Leadership in the curriculum	Semi-structured interview with teachers Student survey
Recognise aspects that impede the development of leadership of teachers, students, and graduates of the business administration program	Image and pride Institutional leadership Student leadership	Student survey Graduate surveys
Identify the leadership conceptions established in the program curriculum.	Leadership in the curriculum	Documentary review micro-curriculum
Propose a curriculum restructuring strategy that incorporates leadership and management skills	Leadership in the curriculum	Documentary review micro-curriculum

Source: own results

4 Results of the study

In order to answer the research question – In what way does leadership as a curriculum core pillar contribute to the professional development of teachers, students, and graduates of the Business Administration Programme at the Uniminuto main campus? The three studies were analysed like this:

4.1 Independent study performed by Target Insight consultation in 2017 of 150 graduates

This survey took into account 16 skillsets measured by the Likert scale, which helped identify the degree of satisfaction by the graduates in regard to the acquisition, development, and strengthening of their skills once their educational training had concluded. As is observed in Figure 2, only 9% of the graduates have been recognised by their leadership skills which brought about this research, as was previously mentioned.

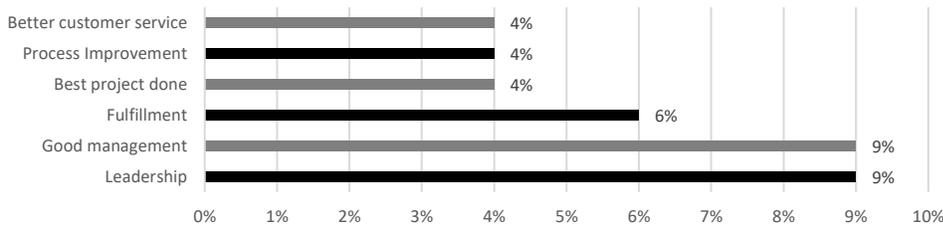


Fig.2. Reason for recognition
Source: Adapted results study follow-up to graduates by Target Insights

4.2 Survey of 457 graduates in 2016 and 2017

Figure 3 shows the results of the measurements of 457 graduates between 2016 and 2017 like this:

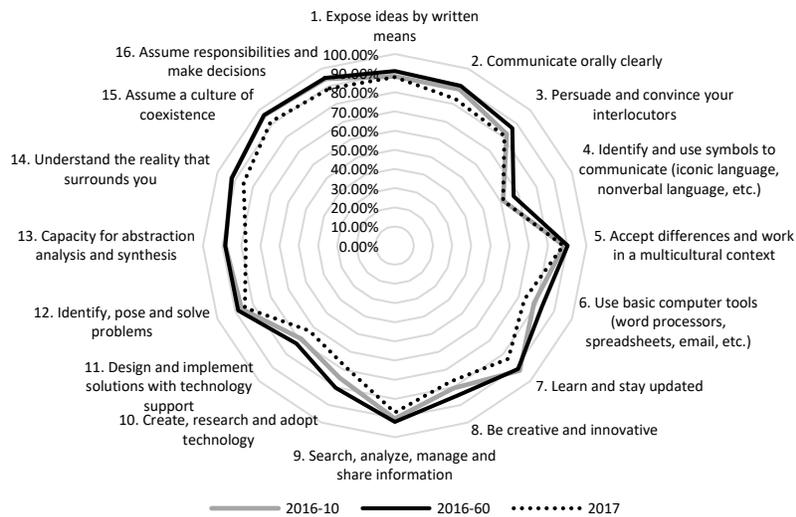


Fig.3. Graduate competencies Business Administration
Source: Adapted from the report results of the follow-up survey of graduates of the labour observatory for education of the Ministry of Education.

The skills with the highest registered percentage were:

- No. 15 Assume a culture of coexistence with 94,63%
- No. 16 Assume responsibilities and decision making 92,57%
- No. 14 Understand the reality that surrounds you 89,83%

On the other hand, the ones with the lowest percentage were:

- No. 4 Identify and use symbols to communicate (iconic language, nonverbal language, etc.) with 63,17%
- No. 6 Use basic computer tools (word processors, spreadsheets, email, etc.) with 78,33%
- No. 11 Design and implement solutions with technology with 68,07%

These results express the strengths demonstrated by professional from the programme in responsibility, decision making, understanding of reality and cohabitation. Proving the need to reinforce other skills like information technology, and communication.

4.3 Student and teacher survey from 2018

Both students and teachers were surveyed with questions grouped in the leadership categories mentioned in Table 1, this resource was submitted for validation by a group of experts. According to the results represented in Table 4, students class the leadership skills of a teacher at 78% which means they are coherent both in their actions and their discourse.

When questioned about the study plan, only 32% of students consider that teachers include activities for leadership development into their lessons. Consequently, they recommend covering subjects like leadership, social skills, management skills, finance, innovation, entrepreneurship, English, and business case studies in the courses they oversee.

Moreover, they gave institutional leadership a 74% because of teamwork by the administration, trust in their decision making, and their impact on the ecosystem in all of the different institutions directed by Uniminuto. In terms of image and pride of the institution, 59% of the students are willing to recommend the programme and 74% feel pride in belonging to the business administration programme.

Additionally, 73% of the students acknowledge the importance of leadership development in their education, personal, and professional lives. However, about 78% of them find it hard to identify their leadership style and only 23% participate in extracurricular activities that contribute this skill.

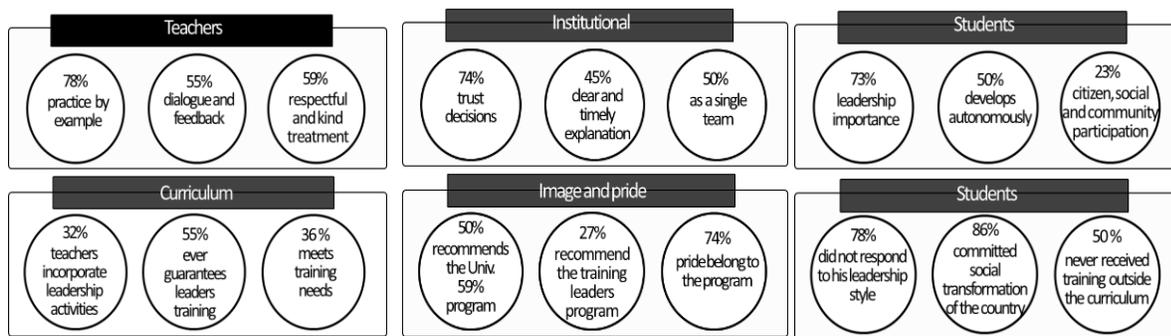


Fig.4. Student survey results
Source: Own results

Figure 4 shows the results for the teachers, highlighting their academic background, professional experience, and clearly identifiable leadership style. They recognise the importance of including themes related to leadership and management skills in the subjects they teach, they also accept their involvement in the accomplishment of the university mission. They recognise the teamwork and leadership from the institution administration and are aware of the need to undergo constant training on these subjects in order to properly train the students.

4.4 Curriculum analysis

A matrix was designed to analyse the study plan curriculum, this gave way to the identification relevant information in reference to the research theme. The results show that out of the 59 curricula that make up the study plan for the programme, only 5 include themes and activities explicitly related to leadership and management skills. For the survey, elements like the dimensions, contents, activities, competencies, and theoretical components were taken into consideration.

5 Conclusions

Supported by the results of student surveys and the independent study by Target Insight, this research proves the need to include leadership as a core pillar in the study plan of the business administration programme. In the survey, only 36% of students can identify leadership as a component in the subjects they have studied. From the independent study, only 9% of graduates are recognised for their leadership skills.

Moreover, 55% of students view teachers as a fundamental support in their educational training based on their knowledge and professional experience. However, improving measures must be taken for teachers to include activities and practices on these subjects in their classes, due to the fact that very few of them actually have them.

Leadership vocation is incorporated in the institutional educational project (IEP), the educational model, and the ecosystem of Uniminuto and all its institutions. In fact, the Minuto de Dios organisation has founded the Minuto de Dios University that currently has approximately 120,000 students, as well as the following institutions: Minuto de Dios Schools with over 50,000 students, Foundation for Counsel of the Rural Sector (FUNDASES 2019), Fundación Eudes (2019) that works in favour of children, women, and men affected by aids, and the Minuto de Dios Corporation (2019) that supports development in the country with spaces for participation and mutual help to improve quality of life through transformative social management projects. These organisations serve as a testimony and example of social leadership training in students.

Lastly, the authors recommend the following objectives: to update the study plan with courses, activities, and practices that include soft skills, teamwork, leadership, creativity, innovation, self-awareness, ability to express ideas, negotiation, and accomplishing goals. Leadership models necessary in the complex organisations of today, impacted by changes in information technology known as the fourth industrial revolution.

As a second objective, it is recommended to analyse the creation of a Leadership School that encompasses the different initiatives in these subjects, taking into consideration ethical issues and values that give way to the development of youths with happy life projects, committed to social transformation and sustainable development.

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