

LEADERSHIP SKILL ASSESSMENT: STUDENT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY APPLICATION IN A SPANISH MARKETING COURSE

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Abstract

In this research, we analysed the data collected when assessing the “leadership ability” in our University in Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration (BBA) as it is becoming a strategic skill in all organizations. The objective was to measure this generic skill in students and help them to develop it. For that, we used the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) scale. This scale is based on Five Exemplary Leadership Practices: i) Model the way; ii) Inspire a shared vision; iii) Challenge the process; iv) Enable others to act; and v) Encourage the heart. Six items measure every practice or dimension. In total, there are thirty items. We analysed 132 students who assessed themselves according to this scale, obtaining a score for every item and dimension. To determine the profile of every student, the different variables considered were “Group”, “Gender”, “Erasmus students” and “Working or having worked”. After collecting the data, we calculated the average, standard deviation and range for every item and dimension. We also conducted a cluster analysis and obtained two different segments. Based on the results, we can propose to each student a different development plan of this soft skill depending on the segment they belong. Therefore, we do not only get general conclusions from the whole group but we can also help our students to develop the “leadership ability” in a personalized way.

Keywords: Generic skills, assessment, business administration, leadership practices, development plan, gender, Erasmus, marketing management.

1 INTRODUCTION

The “leadership ability” is becoming a strategic issue in all organizations [1] [2]. For this reason, this soft skill should begin to be worked on from university or even earlier. In this research, we analysed the data collected when assessing the “leadership ability” in our University in Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration (BBA). The objective was to measure this generic skill in students and help them to develop it. For that, we used the scale created by [3] in the “Marketing Management” course. [3] believe that leadership can be learned, it is not something one is born with. Thus, students can still learn to be leaders if they are given the right guidelines and steps.

These authors focused on individual leadership skills and found that there are Five Exemplary Leadership Practices: i) Model the way: leaders should behave in the same way that they encourage others to behave; ii) Inspire a shared vision: enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations; iii) Challenge the process: search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve; iv) Enable others to act: based on trust, leaders must create a safe environment for people to collaborate, experiment and engage; v) Encourage the heart: celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community. These five practices are also called dimensions. Six items measure every dimension. In total, there are thirty items. The response scale for every item runs from 1–Rarely or Seldom to 5–Very Frequently.

We chose this scale as it has been validated by over three million survey respondents around the globe and it is known as Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI). Moreover, it is consistent with further research ([4], [5], [6], [7]).

2 METHODOLOGY

We analyzed the students who were taking the “Marketing Management” course in BBA of our University. There were four different groups: morning sessions, afternoon sessions, English group and the group who was obtaining the double degree of Business Administration and Telecommunications Engineering. We asked the students to prepare a Marketing Plan for a new product or service for a

supermarket as part of their final assessment of the course. For this reason, we formed different groups around 3-5 people.

In the middle of the course, the students assessed themselves according to the SLPI scale, obtaining a score for every item and dimension. To determine the profile of every student, the different variables considered were “Group” (mornings, afternoons, English and double degree), “Gender” (male or female), “Erasmus students” (if the students were Erasmus or not) and “Working or having worked” (if the students were working or had worked in the last two years).

After collecting the data, we calculated the average, standard deviation and range for every item and dimension. We also conducted a cluster analysis to check if there were differences among students and, therefore, we could obtain different segments. To analyze if there were significant differences between the self-assessment of each of the five dimensions of the SLPI scale in relation to the segments obtained, an ANOVA was performed. As a statistical test, the Snedecor F test was used ([8]). To compare the different items of every dimension, we drew spider graphs.

3 RESULTS

In this Section, we describe the sample analyzed and provide a summary of the outcomes of the questionnaires. We also show the results of the statistical analysis performed and the spider graphs.

3.1 Sample description

The sample consisted of 132 students. The largest group was that of mornings (36.36%). By gender, the distribution was almost equal, with 51.52% of men and 48.48% of women. Only 15.15% of the students were Erasmus. Finally, 43.94% were working or had worked in the last 2 years (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample description.

<i>Variable</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Proportion (%)</i>
Group	Mornings	48	36.36
	Afternoons	33	25.00
	English	33	25.00
	Double Degree	18	13.64
Gender	Male	68	51.52
	Female	64	48.48
Erasmus students	Erasmus	20	15.15
	Not Erasmus	112	84.85
Working or having worked	Working	58	43.94
	Not working	74	56.06

3.2 Assessment of the “leadership ability” in the total of the sample

3.2.1 Analysis of the Student Leadership Practices Inventory dimensions

On one hand, the dimension with the greatest average was “Enable others to act” (3.70) and the dimension with the lowest average was “Challenge the process” (3.21). On the other hand, the dimension with the greatest standard deviation was “Encourage the heart” (0.74) and the dimension with the lowest standard deviation was “Enable others to act” (0.60). Finally, the range was three or four in all the dimensions (Table 2).

Table 2. Results for the SLPI dimensions.

	<i>Average</i>	<i>St. Deviation</i>	<i>Range</i>
Model the way	3.34	0.66	3
Inspire a shared vision	3.32	0.72	4
Challenge the process	3.21	0.71	4
Enable others to act	3.70	0.60	3
Encourage the heart	3.53	0.74	4

3.2.2 Analysis of the Student Leadership Practices Inventory items

The item with the greatest average was “I treat others with dignity and respect (V14)” (4.75) and the item with lowest average was “I talk about my values and the principles that guide my actions (V26)” (3.26). The first item (“I treat others with dignity and respect (V14)”) belongs to the dimension “Enable others to act”, while the second item (“I talk about my values and the principles that guide my actions (V26)”) belongs to the dimension “Model the way”. When analysing the standard deviations, the item with the greatest one is “I find ways for us to celebrate accomplishments (V25)” (1.10) and the item with lowest one is “I treat others with dignity and respect (V14)” (0.59). Again, the range was three or four in all cases (Table 3).

Table 3. Results for the SLPI items.

	<i>Average</i>	<i>St. Deviation</i>	<i>Range</i>
I set a personal example of what I expect from other people (V1)	3.33	0.97	4
I look ahead and communicate about what I believe will affect us in the future (V2)	3.98	0.78	3
I look for ways to develop and challenge my skills and abilities (V3)	3.90	0.79	4
I foster cooperative rather than competitive relationships among people I work with (V4)	4.12	0.79	3
I praise people for a job well done (V5)	4.28	0.91	4
I spend time making sure that people behave consistently with the principles and standards we have agreed upon (V6)	3.53	0.90	4
I describe to others in our organization what we should be capable of accomplishing (V7)	3.57	0.91	4
I look for ways that others can try out new ideas and methods (V8)	3.43	0.96	4
I actively listen to diverse points of view (V9)	4.29	0.78	3
I encourage others as they work on activities and programs (V10)	3.73	1.02	4
I follow through on the promises and commitments I make (V11)	4.36	0.74	3
I talk with others about a vision of how we could be even better in the future (V12)	3.84	0.92	4
I search for innovative ways to improve what we are doing (V13)	3.53	0.96	4
I treat others with dignity and respect (V14)	4.75	0.59	3
I express appreciation for the contributions that people make (V15)	4.31	0.71	3
I seek to understand how my actions affect other people’s performance (V16)	4.00	0.84	3
I talk with others about how their own interests can be met by working toward a common goal (V17)	3.44	1.05	4
When things do not go as we expected, I ask, “What can we learn from this experience?” (V18)	3.37	1.03	4
I support the decisions that other people make on their own (V19)	3.59	0.93	4
I make it a point to publicly recognize people who show commitment to shared values (V20)	3.98	0.87	4

I make sure that people support the values we have agreed upon (V21)	3.73	0.78	3
I am upbeat and positive when talking about what we can accomplish (V22)	4.00	0.85	4
I make sure that big projects we undertake are broken down into smaller and do-able parts (V23)	3.76	0.89	3
I give others a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work (V24)	4.01	0.84	3
I find ways for us to celebrate accomplishments (V25)	3.54	1.10	4
I talk about my values and the principles that guide my actions (V26)	3.26	1.07	4
I speak with passion about the higher purpose and meaning of what we are doing (V27)	3.48	0.94	4
I take initiative in experimenting with the way things can be done (V28)	3.68	0.89	4
I provide opportunities for others to take on leadership responsibilities (V29)	3.79	0.87	4
I make sure that people are creatively recognized for their contributions (V30)	3.77	0.88	4

3.3 Assessment of the “leadership ability” depending on the segment

3.3.1 Analysis of the Student Leadership Practices Inventory dimensions

For the cluster analysis, we conducted the K-means algorithm to perform a division in two segments (explained variance = 41,95%). The first one (73 students) had a lower average for every dimension and the second one (59 students) had a higher average. Analysing these averages, the biggest difference between segments was for “Inspire a shared vision” (1.08) and the lowest difference was for “Enable others to act” (0.49) (Table 4).

Table 4. ANOVA between segments and SLPI dimensions.

		Total sample (n = 132)	Segment 1 (n = 73)	Segment 2 (n = 59)	Snedecor F test (p)	Diff.
Model the way	Av.	3.34	2.92	3.86	133.73	-0.94
	St. Dev.	0.66	0.46	0.47	(0.00)	-0.01
Inspire a shared vision	Av.	3.32	2.84	3.92	161.56	-1.08
	St. Dev.	0.72	0.50	0.46	(0.00)	0.04
Challenge the process	Av.	3.21	2.79	3.73	98.10	-0.94
	St. Dev.	0.71	0.50	0.58	(0.00)	-0.08
Enable others to act	Av.	3.70	3.48	3.97	26.37	-0.49
	St. Dev.	0.60	0.55	0.54	(0.00)	0.01
Encourage the heart	Av.	3.53	3.12	4.04	78.71	-0.92
	St. Dev.	0.74	0.62	0.54	(0.00)	0.08

3.3.2 Analysis of the Student Leadership Practices Inventory items

For every dimension, we also analysed the differences between these two segments in relation with the items that compose them. Fig. 1 shows the spider graph of the “Model the way” dimension. The biggest difference between segments is for “I talk about my values and the principles that guide my actions (V26)” (1.27) and the lowest difference is for “I follow through on the promises and commitments I make (V11)” (0.26).

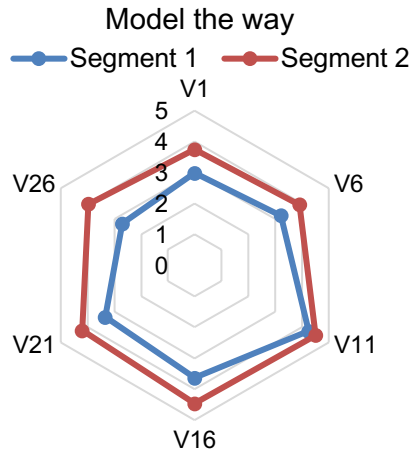


Figure 1. Differences for the items of the “Model the way” dimension between segments.

Fig. 2 shows the spider graph of the “Inspire a shared vision” dimension. The biggest difference between segments is for “I talk with others about how their own interests can be met by working toward a common goal (V17)” (1.2) and the lowest difference is for “I look ahead and communicate about what I believe will affect us in the future (V2)” (0.61).

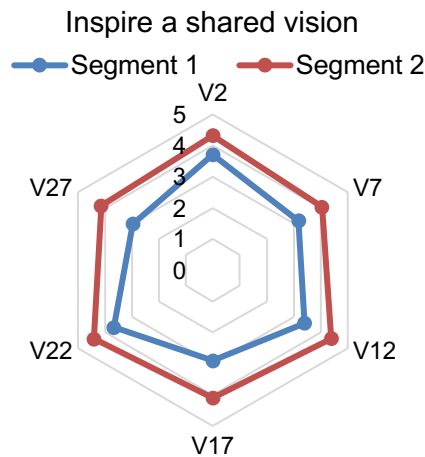


Figure 2. Differences for the items of the “Inspire a shared vision” dimension between segments.

Fig. 3 shows the spider graph of the “Challenge the process” dimension. The biggest difference between segments is for “I look for ways that others can try out new ideas and methods (V8)” (1.03) and the lowest difference is for “I look for ways to develop and challenge my skills and abilities (V3)” (0.61).

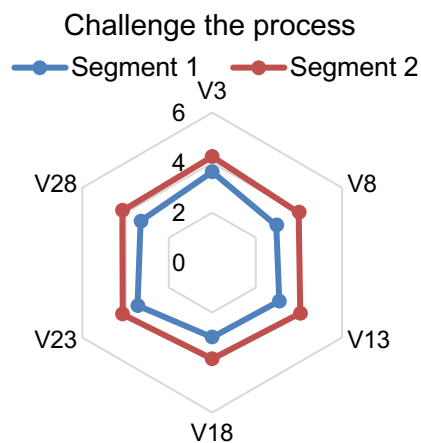


Figure 3. Differences for the items of the “Challenge the process” dimension between segments.

Fig. 4 shows the spider graph of the “Enable others to act” dimension. The biggest difference between segments is for “I support the decisions that other people make on their own (V19)” (0.65) and the lowest difference is for “I treat others with dignity and respect (V14)” (0.27).

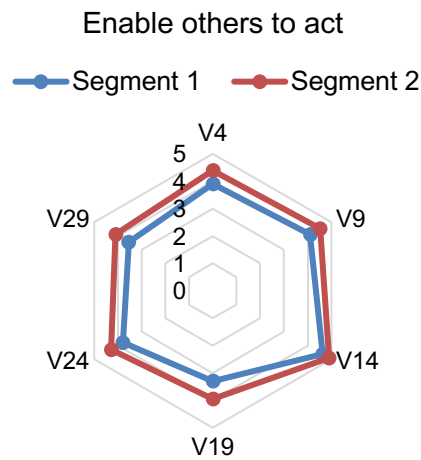


Figure 4. Differences for the items of the “Enable others to act” dimension between segments.

Fig. 5 shows the spider graph of the “Encourage the heart” dimension. The biggest difference between segments is for “I find ways for us to celebrate accomplishments (V25)” (1.27) and the lowest difference is for “I praise people for a job well done (V5)” (0.51).

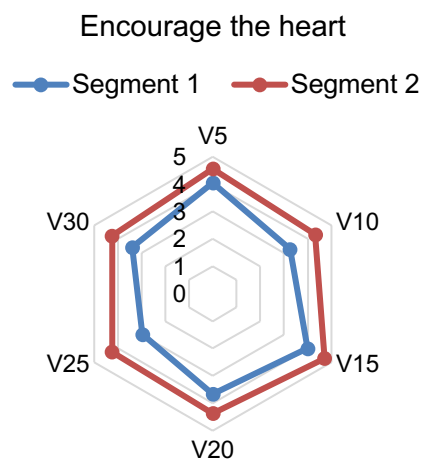


Figure 5. Differences for the items of the “Encourage the heart” dimension between segments.

4 CONCLUSIONS

After analysing all the information collected, we can draw a number of conclusions about the “leadership ability” of our students when carrying out the Marketing Plan in a group of 3-5 members. To draw these conclusions, we base on the SLPI scale.

The students have evaluated themselves with high scores on the "Enable others to act" dimension, as it is the dimension with the highest average (3.70), the lowest standard deviation (0.60) and the one that generates the lowest differences between segments (0.49). According to this dimension, leaders foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. Leaders also strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence. The most outstanding item is “I treat others with dignity and respect (V14)”. It seems that our students have the perception of treating others with respect and caring about relationships with the rest of the group.

The dimension with the lowest average in the total of the sample is “Challenge the process” (3.21). It is also the dimension with the lowest average for both segments (2.79 and 3.73, respectively). In this

dimension, leaders experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience. It seems that our students find it difficult to innovate and take risks when carrying out the proposed Marketing Plan.

The dimension with the biggest standard deviation in the total of the sample is "Encourage the heart" (0.74). Besides, this is the dimension with the greatest average in Segment 2 (4.04) and the second greatest average in Segment 1 (3.12). According to this dimension, leaders recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. It seems that our students have a positive self-perception in recognizing the good work of other group members.

The dimension "Inspire a shared vision" generates the biggest differences between segments (1.08). Segment 1 has an average of 2.84, while Segment 2 has an average of 3.92. The biggest difference between segments is for "I talk with others about how their own interests can be met by working toward a common goal (V17)". In the total of the sample, this dimension has a high standard deviation (0.72). In this dimension, leaders envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities. It seems that among our students there is a wide dispersion in their self-perception on how to envision the possibilities of the Marketing Plan and communicate them to the rest of the group members.

The dimension "Model the way" has the second lowest standard deviation in the total of the sample (0.66). The item with the lowest average was "I talk about my values and the principles that guide my actions (V26)" (3.26) and belongs to this dimension. The lowest difference between segments is for "I follow through on the promises and commitments I make (V11)" (0.26). According to this dimension, leaders set the example by aligning actions with shared values. It seems that our students strive to fulfil their commitments to the group but do not communicate the values and principles that guide their actions when preparing the Marketing Plan.

Based on the results, we can propose to each student a different development plan of this soft skill depending on the segment they belong. This development plan could help them in their professional future. Therefore, we do not only get general conclusions from the whole group but we can also help our students to develop the "leadership ability" in a personalized way.

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