

## **PROMOTING LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

(Paper at the DEHEMS Conference. Vienna, September 2011)

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### **Abstract (Based on introduction)**

So far, research on leadership development has been based on two assumptions: first, that more effective leadership can be achieved through the development of individual leaders; and, second, that leadership can be brought into organizations to improve their operational effectiveness (Spendlove, 2007). A major line of research in leadership development has focused on identifying the leaders and the competencies possessed by individuals that exert leadership functions in working environments. Within this line, competencies are defined as the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that favour effective leadership behavior at work. Competency models offer the means to identify the abilities, attitudes and experiences of actual leaders in their current work environments. The competencies of those who lead can be used in turn to infer what equipment of competencies is required to become an effective leader. Additionally, competency development models aim at clarifying what are the best ways to enhance the acquisition by individuals of those competencies required for effective leadership (Hollenbeck et al., 2006). Broadly speaking, education and experience are the main sources for individual competency development; however, it should be noticed that not all competencies are equally suitable to be learned at educational institutions nor equally suitable to be acquired through work experience. The analysis of competency development for leadership treats competency profiles as outcomes generated by diverse types of actions explicitly oriented to the development of leadership capacity by individuals (McDaniel, 2002; Turnbull and Edwards, 2005). The varied nature of human abilities suggest that some of competencies for leadership can be more effectively developed in an educational environment while other leadership capacities should be developed by means of learning-by-doing and on-the-job training. Research about the particular competencies related to leadership behaviour, on the one hand, and about the best ways to foster its acquisition by individuals, on the other hand, would provide valuable evidence to guide the decision making processes at individual and corporate levels towards improved individual and corporate performance.

The purpose of this paper is to gain insight on the relevance of teaching and learning modes used in higher education regarding later leadership behavior of graduates at the workplace. Professional competencies related to leadership are considered here as a transmission mechanisms for higher education contribution to work performance regarding leadership development. Consequently, the profile of leadership competencies of graduates shall be evaluated twice: first, at the time of graduation from higher education institutions (retrospective evaluation); second, five years later once the graduate is working (contemporary evaluation).

Structural equation models (SEM) are used to estimate the effects of higher education modes and initial work experiences after graduation on the development of professional competencies related to leadership behavior at work on a sample of recent graduates from Spanish universities. The results show that individual leadership capacity depends on the development of specific professional competencies. Those competencies related to leadership are partially provided by means of higher education and developed further through later work experience. The analysis also identifies what teaching and learning modes used in higher education have stronger effects on the development of leadership competencies. The main implication is that the promotion of adequate learning

environments in higher education may foster the level of graduates regarding leadership skills at the time of graduation, which in turn would improve their chances of further development of leadership competencies in earlier career stages, thus increasing the propensity of graduates to work as leaders for the organizations that employ them.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section two establishes the conceptual framework and provides the research hypotheses. Section three describes the data and the models used in the empirical analysis. Section four discusses the results including the goodness-of-fit measures corresponding to the accepted model. Finally, section five concludes.