

# THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP EDUCATION RESEARCH AGENDA 2020–2025: ADVANCING THE STATE OF LEADERSHIP EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP

---

ANTHONY C. ANDENORO<sup>1</sup>, AND KRISTAN CILENTE SKENDALL<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute for Ethical Leadership, St. Thomas University, Miami, FL, USA

<sup>2</sup>Student Affairs Concentration, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA

The second iteration of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda creates intentionality and structure for the advancement of scholarship and leadership learning within higher education contexts. The current paper provides critical insight for the nine guiding research priorities included within the agenda, the process that led to their development, and strategies for maximizing their utility. The perspectives inherent to the current paper provide broad implications for leadership education, its application across multidisciplinary contexts, and provides a trajectory for the development of leadership learners for a complex world. Leadership educators and scholars should utilize the current paper and the corresponding research agenda priorities to inspire constructive dialogue, collaborative research, and further legitimize the diverse fields of leadership education.

---

Correspondence: Anthony Andenoro, Institute for Ethical Leadership, St. Thomas University, Miami, FL, USA.  
E-mail: [andenoro@stu.edu](mailto:andenoro@stu.edu)

## Introduction

Leadership education is often fragmented in its approaches, providing the requisite need for “coherent models that integrate research, pedagogy, and best practices of our accumulated experiences” (Riggio, Ciulla, & Sorenson, 2003, p. 226). Furthermore, leadership, by virtue of its ontology is interdisciplinary, experiencing low consensus, which can be challenging for programs, faculty, and students navigating the influences of the higher education system with institutionalized norms set by high consensus disciplines (Lattuca, 2001). However, challenges often lead to opportunities, and as such the nature of leadership has the potential to unite the research, teaching, and practice of leadership in its true form, bringing more rigorous, complex understandings of leadership and legitimacy to the work of leadership scholars and educators (Friesen, 2018). For the practical purposes of contextualizing leadership education for the current paper, leadership education is defined as “the pedagogical practice of facilitating leadership learning in an effort to build human capacity and is informed by leadership theory and research. It values and is inclusive of both curricular and co-curricular educational contexts” (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 3).

In 2013, the inaugural National Leadership Education Research Agenda (NLERA) was released to provide, (a) research priorities that guide applied scholarship contributing to the development of future leaders and managers through higher education, and (b) key elements that further define leadership education as a discipline (2013). The document aligned with Boyer’s idea of true scholarship, asserting that research should inform teaching and teaching should inform research (1996). However, 7 years after the first National Leadership Education Research Agenda’s inception, the world looks very different. The ever-evolving landscape of higher education and the incontrovertible complexity of our world require new paradigms and processes for the development of the next generation of leaders. Concurrently, the validity and value of higher education and by association, leadership education is being challenged. The COVID-19 global pandemic and lack of economic sustainability have forced higher education institutions to make substantial budget cuts, reduce programmatic offerings, and reinvest in margin generating academic programs that create career-readiness and explicit con-

nections to essential industries. This coupled with the rise of nationalism, independence, and pervasive reduction of empathy due to ethical-fading result in a perfect storm challenging the legitimacy of leadership education academic and student development programs.

The preceding perspectives, increasing complexity, and new variables that shift the emergent landscape for leadership education as a discipline, precipitate the emergence of a new trajectory for leadership education research grounded in a more substantial charge. This is the impetus for a second iteration of the NLERA. While the first NLERA created a foundation, the purpose of the second integration is to push the bounds of discovery, integration, application, and teaching that increases legitimacy for the diverse fields of leadership education and increases impact for our world. Consistent with the ideas historical perspectives of scholarship (Boyer, 1996) and in concert with those perspectives’ evolution (Boyer, Moser, Ream, & Braxton, 2015) the second iteration of the NLERA achieves four goals, (a) it provides context for the systemic societal challenges and illuminates potential questions that will lead to useable knowledge (discovery), (b) it inspires and extends the work of the academy within practical contexts by promoting collaboration and utility for emergent findings and resulting implications (application), (c) it reaffirms the multidisciplinary approach and interdisciplinary outcomes that can shape change for our world (integration), and (d) it creates best practices for leadership teaching and learning as both an art and a science (teaching). Further the second iteration provides a renewed focus for the development of the epistemological foundations for leadership and leadership learning, the ontological intersections of leadership education, and the axiological value of leadership for our world.

The preceding aligns with Kellerman’s calling for standards that advance the understanding of leadership (Kellerman, 2018) and the ILA Leadership Education and Leadership Scholarship Member Communities’ commitment to address the need for the development of guiding documents that illustrate value for interdisciplinary and disciplinary leadership programs. The following provides a context for the strategic development of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda’s second iteration to address the research priorities for 2020–2025, the next 5 years of leadership.

## The Process

The inaugural NLERA created context for scholarly dialogue, collaboration, and a roadmap for the advancement of the diverse fields influencing our understanding of leadership education. The agenda was leveraged as a barometer for the development and selection of conferences proceedings and presentations, internal institutional, and extramural funding priorities, has been one of the most cited leadership education publications in history, and has led to a significant number of research publications in peer-reviewed journals. Since 2014, 692 peer-reviewed research publications that align with and inform the research priorities presented in the inaugural agenda have appeared in selected referred journals. However, while this is significant, the framers of the first agenda understood that the ever-changing global landscape would require subsequent adaptations and future research agendas that embrace the increasing diversity and scope of leadership education as a field.

The second edition of the NLERA resulted from an inclusive multiphase process. In collaboration with the *Journal of Leadership Studies (JLS)*, and with support from the ILA and the Interassociation Leadership Education Collaborative, the editors disseminated a call for submissions across a wide range of disciplinary and industry-based sectors. The *JLS* symposium call yielded 141 submissions from 84 universities and organizations located in 21 countries, which accordingly were reviewed for merit within the context of the overarching priorities for the NLERA. This significant response created the foundation for an amazing symposium shaping the trajectory for leadership education research and advancing the field and an acceptance rate of 7.6%. Concurrently, the editors conducted a constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 2017) of the submissions allowing for themes to emerge naturalistically. Trustworthiness was further established through a content analysis (Schreier, 2012) of the recommendations for future research identified in peer-reviewed articles appearing in the *Journal of Leadership Studies*, *Academy of Management Leadership and Education*, *Journal of Leadership Education*, *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, the *Journal of College Student Development*, and *Leadership Quarterly* between 2013 and 2019. The synthesis of the constant

comparative analysis and content analysis resulted in the identification of the nine priority areas appearing in the NLERA. Across the nine priority areas, 54 authors were selected to participate in collaborative workgroups charged with developing the NLERA research priorities. An iterative process facilitated by the editors ensued, ultimately leading to the published research priorities. The process embraced a divergent approach to manuscript development that aligned with the collaborative and inclusive nature of leadership as both a disciplinary pursuit and interdisciplinary application. The included research priorities are inclusive of cognitive diversity, institutional and organizational heterogeneity, multidisciplinary approaches to leadership learning, and the broad application of leadership across high education and well-beyond. The collaborative and inclusive approach allowed for depth and breadth within each of the research priorities. Furthermore, the extreme relevance to the current global challenges is reflective of our authors' ability to conceptualize and frame the idea of scholarship with context for the past, understanding for the present, and foresight for the future. The editors initiated the process in early 2019 and the submissions were received as COVID-19 transmission accelerated in the United States. These priorities are therefore not in reaction to the current global events, particularly the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and the civil unrest stemming from racial disparities and systemic racism, but are instead potential opportunities to reframe and transform leadership education.

## Framing the Priorities

Embracing a dialectical approach of both/and thinking becomes critical to the future of research related to leadership educators, leadership learners, and leadership education more broadly. The current symposium is intended to be used as individual calls to action as well as a collective approach to a paradigmatic shift in how our work is considered.

Within Priority 1, Beatty et al. (Beatty et al., 2020) noted, "In order to reimagine leadership education research, researchers must commit to placing social identities and power at the center of assessment and analysis" (2020, p. xxx). This poignant statement holistically frames this symposium and the accompanying

research agenda, providing context and directional clarity for the leadership educator and leadership education as a whole. Priority 2 furthered the idea, providing that (Chunoo, Tevis, Guthrie, Norman, & Corces-Zimmerman, 2020, p. xxx).

The next evolutionary step in understanding leadership learning will require centering socially just processes and outcomes in leadership education research. The somewhat long and winding path from theories of great men, through trait, cognitive, and behavioral definitions of leadership to post-industrial relationships in organizations and communities has led us to a place where the heart of leading lies in uplifting communities and developing individual and collective agency. As we continue to define the edges of leadership education, we can no longer marginalize diverse ways of thinking about leadership, being leaders, and crafting leadership commitments.

Priorities 3 and 4 focus on leadership learners and the professional identity of leadership educators respectively. Building upon earlier priorities, Pierre et al. (2020) noted that,

by centering the perspectives of marginalized populations in research and using a critical lens to evaluate and improve leadership practice, we amplify the voices of those who have traditionally been excluded from leadership spaces.

This intentional practice of considering voices that are included, excluded, heard, and unheard have the potential to powerfully transform not only leadership education, but education as a collective and interdisciplinary opportunity for societal growth.

Priority 5 examines how leadership education and future research in the area are crucial to how complex problems are addressed and transformed. While Priority 5 primarily focused on sustainability as a means of addressing complex problems, it is also important to consider the alternative systems-based approaches for understanding innovation within context of complexity and broad disequilibrium. More specifically, COVID-19 has exposed cracks in societal and organizational infrastructures that illuminate opportunities to deconstruct systems of oppression that connect directly and indirectly with overall sus-

tainability efforts. Satterwhite et al. wrote (Satterwhite et al., 2020, p. xxx),

It is essential that diverse voices, ideas, and worldviews are heard and included. Doing so requires that we root the work in power and privilege analysis. This also challenges us to move the acquisition of knowledge from a transaction between researcher and participant to a co-creation of knowledge. Practices such as indigenous methodology (Kovach, 2010); culturally-responsive methodology (Berryman et al., 2013); community-based participatory research, including asset-mapping and other community-led observation practices (Johnson, 2017; Stoecker, 2013); and action research (Patton, 2002; Saldana & Omasta, 2018) can help inform and expand this shift in practice towards advocacy and activism research.

The interdependent nature of complex problems and leadership education creates the impetus for pedagogical considerations that inform the interdisciplinary nature of the field. As more institutions shift to remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has also been increased attention for digital activism and digital learning, particularly related to dialogue. Priority 6 focused on the importance of intentionality with respect to this shift and work. In priority 7, interdisciplinarity offers both a thoughtful consideration for how leadership education is considered overall as well as a mechanism for considering aspects within the facilitation of leadership learning. Priority 8 focused on a disciplinary approach informing ethical leadership, while narrow in scope, it provides a starting point for the inclusion of pedagogically diverse frameworks to promote ethical leadership and effective decision-making. Priority 9 addresses emergent methodologies to reframe and address how the critical questions that inform leadership education and leadership for our world are approached. Alone, each of the priorities present a compelling starting point and an ambitious goal for leadership education researchers and practitioners. However, collectively the priorities establish a research trajectory capable of illuminating opportunities for innovation and change, articulating and contextualizing purpose for the multidisciplinary contexts of leadership education, and creating value for the world.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The inaugural National Leadership Education Research Agenda stimulated dialogue and spurred research efforts through its research priorities. Additionally, it further defined leadership education with respect to Leadership Development and Leadership Studies, and contributed to the understanding of leadership education as a discipline. Concurrently, it elucidated questions regarding the process for development and accompanying role delineation for future agenda. As a result, the updated iteration embraces a process that promoted collaboration and inclusion through a widespread call for researchers, educators, and practitioners and included individuals authors representing from around the world who approach leadership from a variety of frameworks. Each priority was authored by a collaborative group of individuals who integrated their initial submissions to create something that extended beyond singularity and is reflective of a multiplicity of perspectives. The process and the produced manuscripts are also indicative of the chaotic nature of leadership and the challenges and opportunities inherent to a call to action for leadership education. There is also a paradox of word limits amidst the twin pandemics—COVID-19 and racism, where depth and breadth are both critical to how we consider the ways in which leadership can be a transformative tool for the future. The symposium embraces intentionality and structure for leadership aimed at advancing the scholarship that informs leadership learning within broad higher education contexts. This idea and the NLERA's ability to create the underpinning for effective leadership education has never been more pertinent. However, the ability to contribute value is predicated on the desire to act. As such, it is incumbent upon leadership educators and practitioners to assume the responsibility and promise of quality leadership education scholarship that meets local, national, and global challenges and contributes meaning and value for the diverse populations of our world.

## References

- Andenoro, A. C., Allen, S. J., Haber-Curran, P., Jenkins, D. M., Sowcik, M., Dugan, J. P., & Osteen, L. (2013). *National Leadership Education research agenda 2013–2018: Providing strategic direction for the field of leadership education*. Association of Leadership Educators. Retrieved from <http://leadershipeducators.org/>
- Beatty, C. C., Irwin, L. N., Owen, J. E., Tapia-Fuselier, N., Guthrie, K. L., Cohen-Derr, E., ... Yamanaka, A. (2020). A call for centering social identities in the National Leadership Education Research Agenda: Priority 1 of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda 2020–2025. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, xx(xx), xxx–xxx.
- Boyer, E. L. (1996). From scholarship reconsidered to scholarship assessed. *Quest*, 48(2), 129–139.
- Boyer, E. L., Moser, D., Ream, T. C., & Braxton, J. M. (2015). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Chunoo, V. S., Tevis, T., Guthrie, K. L., Norman, S., & Corces-Zimmerman, C. (2020). Evolution & revolution: Social justice and critical theory in leadership education research: Priority 2 of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda 2020–2025. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, xx(xx), xxx–xxx.
- Friesen, K. L. (2018). Considerations for collective thinking about academic leadership programs. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 12(2), 49–52.
- Glaser, B. G. (1965). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Social Problems*, 12(4), 436–445.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2017). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.
- Kellerman, B. (2018, October 29). *Standards* [web log post]. Retrieved from <https://barbarakellerman.com/blog/page/4/>
- Lattuca, L. R. (2001). *Creating interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinary research and teaching among college and university faculty*. Vanderbilt University Press.
- Pierre, D., Dunn, A. L., Barnes, A. C., Moore, L. L., Seemiller, C., Jenkins, D. M., ... Odom, S. F. (2020). A critical look at leadership educator preparation: Developing an intentional and diverse approach to leadership learning and development: Priority 4 of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda 2020–2025. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, xx(xx), xxx–xxx.
- Riggio, R. E., Ciulla, J., & Sorenson, G. (2003). Leadership education at the undergraduate level: A liberal arts approach to leadership development. *The Future of Leadership Development*, 223–236.
- Satterwhite, R., Sarid, A., Cunningham, C. M., Goryunova, E., Crandall, H. M., Morrison, J. L., ... Miller, W. M. (2020). Contextualizing our leadership education approach to complex problem solving: Shifting paradigms and evolving knowledge: Priority 5 of the National Leadership Education Research Agenda 2020–2025. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, xx(xx), xxx–xxx.
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. Sage Publications.

*Anthony C. Andenoro serves as the Executive Director and Professor for the Institute for Ethical Leadership at St. Thomas University in Miami, FL. He maintains an active research trajectory yielding implications for the development of leadership capacity aimed at addressing complex problems in organizational and community settings. Communication can be directed to [andenoro@stu.edu](mailto:andenoro@stu.edu).*

*Kristan Cilente Skendall serves as the associate director in the Gemstone Honors Program and as an affiliate faculty member in the UMD Student Affairs Concentration. She served as co-editor of *The social change model: Facilitating leadership development* (2017; Wiley). Email [kskendal@umd.edu](mailto:kskendal@umd.edu).*