**TRANSFORMING GRADUATE EDUCATION:**

**DEVELOPING LEADERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

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**Transforming Graduate Education: Developing Leaders for the 21st Century**

**ABSTRACT**

What would a graduate program look like if its purpose was to create leaders? How and what would we teach? How and what would students learn? How would students work together? What would be the role of the faculty? This paper describes the creation and delivery of a graduate program that develops students as transformation leaders. Alumni of the program share the impact the program has had on their lives.

Keywords: graduate education, leadership, transformational

**Transforming Graduate Education: Developing Leaders for the 21st Century**

What if the purpose of graduate management education is to create transformative leaders instead of creating managers? This question drove us when we embarked on designing a new graduate management program at our university. We then asked another question, what if the purpose of education is to transform our students rather than teaching them knowledge and analytical skills? We knew these were daunting and lofty goals, and we wondered if we could design a program that could meet these goals given the challenges of the current academic environment.

Before we could answer such questions, we had to scan the current graduate management education landscape to identify the prevailing trends. The most dominant programs in graduate management education have been MBA programs. The MBA program has been in existence for more than 100 years—In 1908, Harvard University formally opened its Graduate School of Business Administration (Harvard Business School History, 2018), and the popularity of the MBA program has been on the rise since the 1980's. In 2014, more than 250,000 applicants applied to the MBA program globally, and more than 100,000 degrees were awarded. In 2016, there were 786 AACSB accredited schools globally of which 541 were US or Canada based (AACSB Data Guide, 2017). This was almost an increase of more than 50% from 341 accredited programs in the US or Canada in 16 years (from 2000). Unfortunately, the path to such an increase in popularity has not been a smooth ride. Most MBA programs were originally designed to provide future administrators (the name “administration” in the degree is a clue, and Harvard's decision to name it business administration attests to this point ) with analytical skills so that they could apply rational management principles once they embarked on their careers. Such designing principles might have been appropriate in the turn of the century manufacturing environments where organizations were most interested in increasing organizational control and efficiencies (Taylor, 2014). But we are no longer in that stable and predictable business environment. Today's business environment is radically different from those of yesteryears. Our economy has shifted from a manufacturing to a knowledge/ service economy, and with this change the nature of work is more dynamic and organic. In addition, the business environment has gone from stable and predictable to one that is filled with disruptive and accelerated changes due to technological innovations and global changes. In response to such changes, management educators have been calling for a change in the MBA curriculum. In 1988, Porter and McKibben (1988) published an article that criticized the MBA program for focusing too much on analytical skills and not on non-analytical skills that employers were looking for from MBA graduates. There have been other criticisms from others ranging from lack of leader- ship development, lack of adaptability, etc.

MBA programs have not been standing still and have tried to change to address some of the criticisms. Most of the changes that have been implemented by MBA programs have been either incremental or evolutionary (Haslett, 2011; Stanford Graduate School of Business, 2016). So, although these changes are moving in the right direction, they have not mitigated the criticisms levied on the programs. Recent articles (Grey, 2004; Rubin & Dierdort, 2011; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2013; Starkey & Tempest, 2009) on the MBA programs attest to this. In other words, such cosmetic changes have not been sufficient in addressing the critics of the MBA programs.

A review of the management education landscape confirmed to us that we need to drastically change the way we design and implement the business graduate program if we desire to achieve our own objectives of creating transformative leadership and transforming our students.