EQUINE FACILITATED LEARNING (EFL) LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS AND CURRENT LEADERSHIP THEORIES

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Only a few scholarly studies examine the relationship of equine facilitated learning (EFL) leadership programs to leadership theories, their related success evaluations, and leadership training.*

Purpose: *Characteristics of 13 EFL leadership program are explored to examine their ties to four leadership theories: authentic, servant, situational, and transformational, their requisite success evaluations of the leadership theories, and how leadership is incorporated within the programs.*

Methodology/Approach: *A qualitative research design addresses research questions through manual qualitative content and thematic data collection and analyses gathered from program website information. Interviews with four program leader participants about their programs are also explored.*

Findings/Conclusions: *Program characteristics tend to be inconsistent. There are discrepancies among the programs and between the participants' perceptions of their programs' leadership theories and the information presented on program websites. Programs generally do not tend to adhere to one of the leadership theories investigated or to their related success metrics.*

Implications: *Programs should be more consistent and subscribe to a specific leadership theory, or theories, so they can accurately, reliably, and with validity, measure their outcomes. Lee & Dankin (2016) and Arci. Et. al (2016) were among those who suggested that additional research is needed.*

Keywords: equine facilitated learning leadership programs, leadership theories, leadership theory metrics

INTRODUCTION

Equine facilitated learning (EFL) is a more recent offshoot of animal facilitated therapy (AFT) and equine facilitated therapy (EFT) programs. It has only emerged within the field within the past 20 years (EAGALA, 2019). Horses help humans to achieve a wide variety of benefits, including, but not limited to, assisting them with developing a better self-concept and ability to communicate, and with building trust and perspective skills. Because they are both herd and flight animals and human and horse interactions are tactile by nature, horses can also aid humans by helping them to reduce their anxieties, their senses of isolation and depression, and to increase a human's sense of self-acceptance, impulse modulation, and assertiveness. Horses can assist humans with creating healthy boundaries and instilling feelings of creative freedom, hope, and spiritual growth (Frederick et al., 2015). Many equine facilitated learning programs now use horses to teach humans leadership skills (Roberts, 2002).

Horses enable people to make immediate and lasting changes, which are different from other experiential learning training programs where participants may need to go away to work on what they need to learn about themselves before making a change. Equine facilitated learning principles are about working in the present moment while becoming aware of the impact of one's energy on another living being. Horses provide authentic, immediate, and honest feedback (Roberts, 2002).

Equine facilitated learning programs allow for the "understanding, explanation, and demystification of social reality through the eyes of different participants. Knowledge is gained through personal experience and subjective realities" (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000, p. 8). Equine facilitated learning envisions a learner-centered environment that maintains a dynamic view of learning. Human/animal (specifically equine) interactive and experiential education programs dovetail nicely with alternative education and learning and the view that reality is subjective. They differ from person to person with interactions based on real-world phenomena Conducting further research on equine facilitated learning fits nicely into the experiential learning theory, which places experience at the center of the learning process (Scotland, 2012).

Equine facilitated learning leadership programs using horses can also include learning new things about oneself, new techniques, setting boundaries, and learning to be more flexible. Programs can also teach the development of greater self-

confidence, new and different strategies, and the development and enhancement of leadership skills (Equine Experiential Education (E3A), 2022). Although equine facilitated learning programs are popular, they encompass a new, not well explored, researched in depth, or carefully implemented approach to scholarly research. This is especially true as that approach relates to teaching leadership skills.

This research investigates the characteristics of 13 EFL leadership programs based on Arci, et al.'s 2016 research. In addition to examining common themes relating to leadership theories, it examines the preferred metric evaluations of authentic, servant, situational, and transformational leadership theories used to measure EFL leadership program successes. It also explores how leadership is incorporated into the programs explored.

Much equine facilitated therapy (EFT) scholarly research is available. However, although equine facilitated learning and EFL leadership programs are "hot topics," they are lacking in scholarly research. Equine facilitated learning training programs now available encompass leadership training as a significant component. Stock & Kolb (2016) stated that although equine facilitated learning (EFL) programs are available to use horses as training instruments to teach professional development and leadership skills, there needs to be more scholarly research on the subject.

More research is also needed to determine how the successes of these programs are determined, evaluated, and measured (Arci, et al., 2016). The benefits and effects of EFL leadership training on its participants to assess and measure the successes of these programs, especially as they relate to current leadership theories, is sparse. Lee & Dankin (2016) confirmed by indicating that observing equine behavior and reactions allows the examiner to determine and understand effective techniques in human relationships. Their examples included identifying how to approach tasks to identify which feelings surface when collaborating with the horse(s), as these feelings can mirror other areas of life and participant issues. They also suggested that further research is needed.

A thorough investigation of leadership theories and EFL programs has yet to be conducted. Despite the multitude of equine facilitated learning (EFL) training programs that are now available and although a significant component of these programs often encompasses leadership training, more research is needed to determine the impact of EFL leadership training on its participants. A better understanding of the techniques utilized to teach leadership skills in EFL programs is also needed.

The study attempts to provide a better understanding of the characteristics of 13 EFL leadership programs outlined by Arci et al. (2016). The website contents and interviews with EFL leadership program leaders are examined. The study investigates EFL leadership program characteristics and their strategic plan business components such as mission and vision statements, values, and goals and objectives. It also examines these programs against four leadership theories: authentic, servant, situational, and transformational, against their related success evaluation instruments, how the programs evaluate and measure their program successes, and how they incorporate leadership into their programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly research conducted on animal facilitated therapy (AFT) and equine facilitated therapy (EFT) programs is devoted to equine facilitated learning (EFL) programs, but only some research is devoted to equine facilitated (EFL) programs. However, few scholarly studies examine the relationship of these programs to leadership training and related leadership theory success evaluations. Many EFL programs do not employ adequate control groups and are inconsistent in their program offerings and ties to leadership theories and their evaluation instruments (Lee & Dankin, 2016).

The literature review involved accessing full-text scholarly databases for information. The terms "animal facilitated therapy," "authentic leadership theory," "equine facilitated therapy," "equine facilitated learning," equine facilitated leadership," "equine facilitated social work, "leadership," "servant leadership theory," "situational leadership theory," and "transformational leadership theory" were researched with EBSCO and Pub Med Central serving as the primary sources of scholarly articles. Filters included full-text articles with inclusive dates of 2000-2022 for the equine terms. Leadership theory searches included dates of 1970-2023. The researcher searched the University of Findlay, OCLC, the Consortia of Academic and Research Libraries of Illinois (CARLI), the Illinois College of Optometry, and OhioLINK's online library catalogs and databases for full-text article searches and primary sourcebook material. The researcher conducted an exhaustive literature review over six years, from 2017-2023.

Typically, in equine-based programs, participants must be able to interact with the horse in real time without engaging in force. Equine facilitated learning occupies its learners with an informal learning approach and experience. Equine programs rely little on pre-determined organizational, delivery, and evaluation guidelines with the specific intention of the learner's development of skills and knowledge in mind; they are embedded in the learners' experiences (Roberts, 2002). Programs

utilize the assumption of learning as a continuous process rooted in transactions between the participant and the environment (Kolb, 2015).

Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA), a not-for-profit equine facilitated learning (EFL) organization founded in 1999, is the organization mostly credited for developing both equine facilitated therapy (EFT) and EFL as a holistic theory defining learning as the central process of human adaptation. From the participant's perspective, EFL involves the whole person, with the researcher dominating the actions (EAGALA, 2019, 2022). EAGALA indicates that its programs involve an experiential learning experience.

Lee & Dankin (2016) stated that while equine facilitated therapy (EFT) addresses treatment goals, equine facilitated learning (EFL) focuses on learning goals such as problem-solving and team building. They, too, stressed the need for further research. A study by Ewing et al. in 2007 helped to bridge the gap between traditional EFT and EFL programs by being one of the first to investigate equine facilitated learning. Their study was unique in that they emphasized that clients must interact with the horse in its natural environment and have their experiences there. Dell et al.'s 2011 landmark study also intended to connect EFT to EFL practices and successes. Dell et al.'s study outcomes did not indicate significant statistical improvements in clients' self-esteem and feelings of interpersonal empathy. The results did not show decreased depression and loneliness among those subjects studied after program participation, as was expected. Again, the authors suggested that further research was necessary.

A program conducted for at-risk youth in Guatemala determined that although the attitudes of the families and those studied changed post-treatment, the researcher felt that larger and more diverse groups needed to be measured to qualify better and quantify data regarding leadership skill improvement resulting from program participation (Gibbons et al., 2017).

Another study by Arci et al. also conducted research in 2016 on equine facilitated activities and therapies. The purpose of their investigation was to provide both a systematic review of equine program certifications to help facilitate more consistency in education programs throughout the field. However, they also identified that there is no unifying theory as to why activities involving horses result in psychological benefits to humans. The study also found that nuances in program approaches must be considered before enrollment in an equine facilitated certification program to ensure the type of certification is in accordance with the participant's orientation and objectives.

Table 1 outlines the similarities and differences among AFL, EFT and EFL as identified by the Literature Review.

TABLE 1
Similarities and Differences Among AFT, EFT, and EFL Programs

AFT	EFT	EFL
Animal-based	Animal-based	Animal-based
Mostly therapy	Therapy	Experiential learning
Tactile in nature	Tactile in nature	Tactile in nature
Builds human communication, trust and perspective skills, and helps to reduce human anxieties, isolation and depression	Builds human communication, trust and perspective skills, and helps to reduce human anxieties, isolation and depression	Builds human communication, trust and perspective skills
	Client must interact with the horse in its natural environment	Client must interact with the horse in its natural environment
	Horses provide honest and authentic feedback	Horses provide honest and authentic feedback
Can address treatment goals	Addresses treatment goals	Addresses experiential learning and leadership goals with a focus on learning goals such as problem-solving and team building
Mostly client based	Client based	Participant based

(Continued)

	Providers are much more strictly regulated re: training, credentials etc.	Providers are not as regulated and can include trainers, educators, and life coaches
		Continuous process rooted in the transactions between the participant and the environment
		Direct, immediate energy impact of horse on human
		Teaches new and different strategies to identify which feelings surface when collaborating with horses, as these feelings can mirror other areas of life and participant issues
		Can be used to develop and enhance leadership skills
		Participant base is drawn from all organizations, including corporations

Leadership is a process by which a person influences other people to achieve an objective. It directs the group in cohesive and coherent ways. Several prominent theories in leadership literature present a strong emphasis on ethical leadership and are rooted in leadership models and management theories. They include authentic, servant, and transformational leadership (Miller, 2022; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). They, in addition to the situational leadership theory, which is often used in combination with the three others, were chosen for this study since they are some of the most current, popular, and contemporary leadership theories.

Authentic Leadership
Authentic leadership is a more recent leadership theory developed in 2003 by George, a Harvard University professor and successful businessperson. The concept of authentic leadership stems from the word "authenticity," which means, according to Hartner (2002) on page 382, "one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings." The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) is considered to be the best evaluation tool for authentic leadership. Its four themes are authentic behavior (transparency), balanced processing, an internal moral compass, and self-awareness (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Authentic leadership for EFL programs is relevant to EFL leadership instruction since horses are consistent in their actions, authentic, and live in the moment. George (2003) mentioned that the core of authentic leadership is self-awareness. Gardiner's 2015 concept acknowledged authenticity as being about the self and the self in relationship to others, also relevant to EFLL program instruction.

Servant Leadership
Servant leadership is a concept that has roots in ancient history and dates back thousands of years. It is the philosophy of the leadership of ancient monarchies, one of service to both people and the country. Confucius, the Zhou Dynasty, the Bedouin-Arab culture, and Jesus Christ were all servant leadership practitioners. In the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King subscribed to servant leadership (Jeyaraj & Gandolfi, 2019).

As a recent outgrowth of the Servant Leadership Theory, Greenleaf (1970) re-defined the most accepted view of servant leadership as "a philosophy and set of practices that enrich the lives of individuals, build better organizations, and ultimately creates a more just and caring world." Servant leadership is oftentimes has ties to religious organizations. Liden et al.'s 2008 Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ) is considered the most widely used measurement tool to assess servant leadership.

Ehrhart (2004) was one of the first to assess the concept of servant leadership. He stated a servant leader recognizes his or her moral responsibility not only to subordinates, but also to the organization's successes, customers, and stakeholders.

Situational Leadership

Hersey & Blanchard originally developed their Situational Leadership Theory in 1969. Their theory was based on the premise that a leader can change the behavior of his or her followers. They also stated that a leader can apply different leadership styles according to an employee/subordinate's maturity and performance readiness levels. Cote (2017) expounded upon Hersey & Blanchard's theory when he enhanced the focus of situational leadership to include how leaders use situations to influence their followers.

The leader's use of these assessment levels depends on their followers' readiness levels with Level Four as the highest level of follower readiness. A combination of leadership styles may need to be used with situational leadership for it to be most effective (Cote, 2017). The evaluation instrument most used for situational leadership is the SLII (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977).

Hersey & Blanchard's (1977) four styles of situational leader assessments included:

> Telling, Directing, or Guiding (Level One)
> Selling, Coaching, or Explaining (Level Two)
> Participating, Supporting, Facilitating, or Collaborating (Level Three)
> Delegating, Empowering, or Monitoring (Level Four

While the Situational Leadership Theory is one of the most widely known theories in the leadership domain, it is among the less substantiated models (Thompson & Vecchio, 2009). Because of that, a situational leadership approach in EFL programs is not deemed to be very useful to EFL leadership instruction as (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977).

Transformational Leadership

Both Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) are pioneers of the Transformational Leadership Theory. (Shaukat & Asma, 2018). Transformational leaders communicate well and are described as self-aware, authentic, empathetic, and humble. Transformational leaders inspire their team members because they expect the best from their team. They hold themselves accountable for their actions as leaders, set clear goals, and have good conflict-resolution skills, leading to high productivity and team engagement (Bass, 1985).

Edwards & Kaban (2020) characterized transformational leadership as motivating employees in the direction of the organization's shared vision and goals. It is a bottom-up leadership theory based on whether the leaders help employees set goals and monitor their progress. Negative feedback, reinforcement, and corrective actions are utilized with employees who do not meet the leaders' expectations. From the literature review, Bass' MLQ and MLQ5X are still considered the best measurements of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1996, 2004, 2009).

Bass (1996, 1997) stated that transformational leadership is considered to be effective in any situation or culture and does not specify any conditions under which authentic transformational leadership is irrelevant or ineffective. A positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational effectiveness has been replicated for leaders at different levels of

TABLE 2
Leadership Theories and Metrics and their Relevance to EFL Leadership Programs

Leadership Theory	Associated Metric Tenant	Associated Metric Tenant	Associated Metric Tenant	Associated Metric Tenant	Associated Metric Tenant	Associated Metric Tenant	Associated Metric Tenant
Authentic (ALQ-Walumbwa et al. 2008)	Self-awareness X	Balanced processing X	Authentic behavior X	Internal moral compass			
Servant (SLQ-Liden et al., 2008)	Behaving ethically	Conceptualizing	Creating value for the community	Emotional healing	Empowering X	Helping followers to grow and succeed X	Putting others first X
Situational (SLII- Hersey & Blanchard, 1977)	Telling, Directing or Guiding X	Selling, Coaching or Explaining	Participating, Supporting, Facilitating, or Collaborating	Delegating, Empowering or Monitoring X			
Transformational (MLQ and MLQ5X-Bass, 1985, 1996, 2004, 2009)	II-Idealized Influence X	IM-Inspired Motivation X	IS-Intellectual Stimulation X	IC-Individualized Consideration X			

authority, organizations, and countries (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). As such, transformational leadership approach in EFL programs is deemed to be useful to EFL leadership instruction.

Table 2 outlines each leadership theory, its associated metric tenant, and their relevance to EFL leadership programs (marked with an "X").

Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) Leadership

Equine facilitated learning leadership allows participants to view situations differently and glean new insights by helping them to revise their behaviors and unconscious processes. Through the horse's teachings, participants can learn how goals are established, how decisions are made, conflict resolution, team development, task management, how to treat and behave toward others, better interpersonal skills, open communication, trust, honesty, skillful action, thoughtful decision making, and self-awareness.

Horses motivate EFL program participants by offering unusual challenges, a new and experiential environment in which to learn, immediate feedback, and the opportunity to practice learned skills in real-time (Meola, 2016). The return on investment is significant; breakthroughs occur more quickly than in traditional coaching situations (Felton, 2012). Lyle & Schlamb (2017) stated that horses are a natural model for leadership since the equine human relationship teaches leaders to be attentive to the needs of those with whom they engage by teaching responsibility, caring, patience, empathy, trust, respect, and confidence. Hagen (2007) indicated that EFL leadership programs offer different and effective perspectives on leadership training. Participation in an EFL leadership program may be a proven and effective method of learning or honing leadership skills (Bilginoglu, 2021).

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The study examined the content of 13, ten not-for-profit and three for-profit, equine facilitated learning (EFL) leadership program websites. These are readily available through internet searches and resident in the public domain. The EFL leadership programs selected for the study utilized criteria identified by Arci et al.'s 2016 study and by program websites indicated that they offer EFL and EFL leadership programs. The research explored program characteristics, their strategic plans to include mission and vision statements, values, goals, and objectives, their program relationships to the four leadership theories examined by the study, as well as their relationship to the leadership theory metrics identified by the literature.

Information was also collected from interviews with EFL leadership program leaders who agreed to participate in the study. To meet study participation criteria, participants needed to be leaders in one of the 13 EFL programs explored. Program leaders were contacted using convenience sampling via email. If those initially contacted via email agreed to an interview, a telephone or video session was set up. There was a minimal chance that they could share negative information about their programs and practices due to employment considerations. It was decided to de-identify the names of specific programs studied, participants, locations, their locations, and the parent program (if any) with which they were associated to minimize risk; pseudonyms were assigned instead. Each was free to choose not to answer a question with which they deemed uncomfortable, and they could opt to cease participation in the study at any time.

There was a wide variety among the EFL leadership programs and program leaders featured in the study. Every attempt was made to select the greatest diversity. Interviews were solicited from those with varying financial resources to ensure equity and equality among participants. Programs and program leaders consisted of a mix of for-profit and non-profit organizations of varying sizes in various locations. They offered different types of classes, class types and sizes, costs, and marketed to a wide range of constituents.

Program leaders identified how their programs presented their approaches to leadership on their program websites, which current leadership theories and their related metrics influenced them, and how their programs incorporated leadership into their programs. They also identified five words that they felt described their programs.

By choosing to interview any of the 13 program leaders who offered to participate in the study, there was no discrimination in the sampling. All program leaders who wished to participate did so. The Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Findlay approved this research in December 2022.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this exploration were as follows:

1. How do EFL leadership programs present their approaches to leadership on their program websites?
2. Which current leadership theories and their related assessment influence EFL leadership programs?
3. How do EFL leadership programs incorporate leadership into their programs?

Research Design

The research design addressed Research Questions One and Two through website qualitative content, thematic analysis, as well as from the interviews. The design addressed Research Question Three by interviewing participants. It was expected that the researcher would interview three to five program leaders; four chose to participate.

A qualitative content analysis (QCA) was used as the qualitative research method since it is typically characterized by and is used for obtaining descriptive information, embedding data in the communication context, developing themes, analyzing through a rule-guided and systematic procedure, and determining quality criteria and reliability (Fraenkel et al., 2019; Gläser-Zikuda, 2020). QCA was an appropriate methodology for the study since it is a procedure used to determine the meaning of data derived from documents and other texts (Saldana, 2015). The research also explored if the success measurements identified by the four leadership theories were present.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

To respond to the research questions, the researcher collected qualitative information from existing literature, the independent variable of the study, and from the EFL leadership program-specific websites and EFL leadership program leaders who agreed to interviews, the dependent and control variables of the study. Programs were selected from those identified by the 2016 Arci et al. study. The instrumentation consisted of manual coding as the data was a small subset (Saldana, 2015).

Codes were entered into MS Word tables for all 13 organizations and for interviewees and color-coded to identify them by applicable leadership theory. This information was also entered into separate Excel spreadsheets tabs with programs and interviewees listed on each tab. Themes were then identified to organize a repeating set of ideas (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Next, they were compared to themes used by each leadership theory evaluation measurement: ALQ (Walumbwa et. al., 2008), SLQ (Liden et al., 2008), SLII (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), and MLQ, and MLQ5X (Bass, 1985, 1996, 2004, 2009). In the case of both website data and interview information, overall themes were collapsed.

Program leaders were also asked to describe the relationship of their programs to leadership theories and their assessments identified by the study, how leadership training is conducted in their program, and also were asked for five words to describe their program. The researcher manually transcribed interview information using standardized procedures and entered it into the Excel spreadsheet tabs as previously described.

Data Analysis

The data analysis associated with this study provided a highly flexible approach that could be modified as the literature, website information, and the study progressed over time. Data was analyzed after IRB approval, at which time the website data was collected and interviews took place. A qualitative deductive data analysis followed the data collection since the data was evaluated against predetermined categories and theories. The researcher analyzed the data into feasible parts to code the information, categorize it, and to search for emerging thematic patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; & Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

A manual thematic analysis explored, identified, analyzed, organized, and reported themes found within the data sets of the study, as this is a method commonly used for analyzing qualitative data and allows for easy storage and retrieval of material. This type of analysis permitted the researcher to import additional material, such as unexpected information not fitting into the identified themes. It also allowed the researcher to code important material, assign multiple codes, and file the coded material (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Both EFL website data and data gathered from interviews were then analyzed using second-cycle coding. First, EFL leadership program characteristic codes gathered from the websites and program leader interviews were sorted to identify categories (patterns) and to form themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 38). The second coding cycle design initially pinpointed frequencies to identify similarities, differences, and correspondences (Saldana, 2015).

This analysis allowed the researcher to ascertain if leadership themes were tied to the specific leadership theories that addressed the research questions. In addition, it permitted the researcher to determine if the metrics associated with the four leadership theories were present. An inductive thematic analysis approach ensured that the recording, systematizing, and disclosing analysis methods had enough detail so the reader could determine the process's credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher also recorded and manually analyzed interviews to identify common themes.

Results

One program website indicated that horses react in direct proportion to the situation at hand as well as to their herd leader. As such, horses serve as mirrors to humans. Another EFL website stated that feedback from an equine allows participants to gain valuable insights into their internal processes and interpersonal interactions, which was also confirmed through the literature search. Horses acknowledge and follow the most competent leaders and engage humans on empathetic, compassionate, and emotional levels. They also raise human awareness of those around them (Human-Equine Relational Development (HERD), 2022). The relational nature of horses helps them facilitate a transitional change process through authentic relationships (Kelekna, 2009; Rees, 1985; Roberts, 1996).

All websites agreed that horses are able to readily identify insights and realities centered around leadership, team functioning, effective communications, and human behavior. Websites commonly mentioned horses as expert sensors of incongruence, when internal thoughts do not match outward behaviors. Since horses are animals of prey, they are highly attuned to intention, energy, and focus. They also need a horse leader in order to survive (Roberts, 2002). Roberts uses that principle to teach humans to act as a horse leader.

Most websites also mentioned that horses can provide immediate feedback regarding intentions, behaviors, and incongruities. As the goal of EFL leadership programs is for clients to cultivate their quality-of-life skills by improving connection, honesty, self-confidence, self- regulation, and trust when participating in EFL leadership programs, horses are valuable and adept at teaching leadership skills to humans.

Program characteristics examined indicated that seven (50%) websites indicated that the program or program leader(s) are associated with a parent organization such as EAGALA, E3A, and PATH International. Most websites contained mission and vision statements that included "experiential learning." Roberts (2000) stated that EFL program participants should intend to develop learner knowledge and skills. EFL dovetails nicely with the experiential learning theory, which places experience at the core of the learning process (Scotland, 2012). Kolb (2015) reiterated by saying equine-based programs assume a continuous learning process. E3A (2022) and PATH (2022) programs indicated that EFL is experiential learning allowing for the enhancement and development of leadership skills. Gehtmane-Hofmane (2019) confirmed that EFL participants experience a successful experiential learning encounter.

However, website information confirmed that the 13 EFL programs were inconsistent in their offerings. Their program characteristics, classes, staffing and staff requirements, credentialling, costs, and success measurements varied greatly. The presence of Boards of Directors, ethical statements, standards, and adherence to state equine liability laws were not often readily visible on program websites.

Only half or 50% of the not-for-profit programs listed common business-related strategic planning mission, vision, values, and goals and objectives statements on their websites. Only one of the for-profit organizations listed them. Nevertheless, although these organizations tout themselves as "leadership" organizations, as a result, they may not adhere to common business models. Surprisingly, the word "leadership" was missing from most websites.

Many programs offered both class training and certifications for those who wish to begin programs or to work in the EFL field as an instructor. Participants who wish to be certified may include mental health professionals with no horse experience, equine specialists with no mental health experience, students, educators, coaches, and corporate trainers. Other individuals included those who wish to use the program's parent organization's approach or certification process. For-profit programs tended to target corporate audiences, while the not-for-profit programs tended to target all groups outlined above.

Classes were offered in various formats: retreats, workshops, in-person, seminars, hybrid, and online classes and occurred in barns, classrooms, universities, and equine facilities. They varied in length from one hour to six months, with class costs ranging from free to $45 to $5000+. According to the websites, class sizes also differed with a variety of options available. Five programs listed a therapy-based component as opposed to a strictly EFL leadership program.

Program staff member requirements were not standardized. Only one person runs two for-profit programs, one is a former life coach. Therapists ran another program, and another employed only professional staff with equine training and certifications. Sometimes, classes were co-facilitated with an equine specialist and a human clinician specialist, such as a social worker. Two were university-based programs.

Websites revealed that the not-for-profit programs were inclined to be more stringent with their staff training, certifications, CE, and professional licensing requirements. Some staff member requirements included a professional social work license or

EFL certification so that staff members can teach in their program. However, none required their program leaders and trainers to possess educational leadership credentials.

Interviews conducted with four EFL leadership program leaders provided better information regarding their program characteristics; they were honest and very generous with their time and information. Most participants were affiliated with a parent organization. Although their programs may be affiliated with or certified by a not-for-profit parent organization, they may be for-profit programs without a Board of Directors. A few had explicit mission and vision statements, but not all did. However, all were able to articulate their mission and vision statements. Most had goals and objectives for their programs. Many of their programs are unmounted ones.

Program leaders verified that class sizes, formats, and costs varied widely. Standards, training manuals, and curriculums were in place for all. All but one program taught both therapy and leadership classes. The number of employees within the programs also varied. Most staff members were certified by at least one parent organization.

The literature review also determined the need for more evidence of leadership theory evaluations related to the success tools used to evaluate equine facilitated learning (EFL) leadership programs. It demonstrated little evidence of leadership theory metrics used to evaluate EFL leadership programs' successes.

The exploration revealed that the organizations should have mentioned the leadership theories: authentic (George, 2003), servant (Greenleaf, 1977), situational (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969, 1977), and transformational (Bass, 1985, 1996, 2004, 2009). Three programs used pre-, during, and post-psychometric or internally developed evaluations to determine the successes of their programs. Others used surveys and weekly quizzes during the class period as evaluation assessments. Although four programs utilized evaluations conducted before, during, and after participation in their programs, post-assessments were conducted only by six.

In addition, not one of the EFL websites investigated during this study showed any evidence of evaluations commonly used to evaluate the four leadership theories such as ALQ-authentic (Walumbwa et al., 2008), SLQ-servant (Liden et al., 2008), SLII-situational (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), and MLQ and MLQ5X-transformational (Bass, 1985, 1996, 2004, 2009).

The most revealing data were discrepancies between the participant's perceptions of their programs' leadership theories and what appeared on their program websites. The data indicated that all four participants felt their programs used servant leadership as their primary leadership theory. However, that was not always true. All four felt their programs were "faith-based" and subscribed to the servant leadership theory. As previously stated, the words they used to describe their programs did not agree with this assessment.

CONCLUSIONS

The literature review affirmed that horses are a natural model for leadership since the equine-human relationship teaches leaders to be attentive to the needs of those they engage by teaching responsibility, caring, patience, empathy, trust, respect, and confidence (Lyle & Schlamb, 2017). In addition, horses motivate EFL program participants by offering unusual challenges, a new and experiential learning environment, immediate feedback, and the opportunity to practice learned skills in real-time (Meola, 2016). Felton's 2012 study showed that the return on an EFL program investment is significant, especially for companies and corporations that choose to offer them, as breakthroughs occur more quickly than in traditional coaching situations.

From website information, the 13 EFL programs, whether for-profit, or not-for-profit, tended to be inconsistent in their offerings. Their program characteristics, classes, staffing and staff requirements, credentialling, and costs differed greatly.

Equine facilitated learning (EFL) leadership programs need help agreeing upon how their programs can be described. What are the differences and essential elements of each respective type of program (equine facilitated, experiential, therapeutic)? Many types of programs are available with little apparent regulation within the industry-a more consistent approach among programs (Arci et. al., 2016; Roberts, 2002) to define the basic characteristics of EFL leadership programs is needed.

The absence of mission/value/goals/objectives on EFL leadership program websites indicates a need for programs to follow strategic plans, something highly recommended in business and leadership settings. Although standards, training manuals, and curriculums were in place for all, they were inconsistent.

Arci et al. (2016) also called for the need for a review of EFL programs. Information is often proprietary and hidden behind membership or paywalls. As they also point out, the legitimacy of these programs can only sometimes be readily established as details about some programs are not easily available. Standards must be more consistent among programs and leave much to interpretation. Each program has unique ideas and principles regarding certifications, posing difficulties for potential participants when choosing a certification. Program requirements such as licensures, state requirements, and continuing education opportunities are all factors to consider. Staff certification offerings and trainings must be more consistent within the industry as instructors' and program directors' educational requirements vary significantly.

Teaching leadership in EFL leadership programs is often used to justify programs without thinking through the implications, training needed, costs, or how to successfully measure their results. What is being taught or experienced by participants may not be a leadership course at all.

Preliminary evidence suggests that authentic leadership may be more important than transformational leadership as a determinant of team and organizational performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Hoch et al.'s 2018 studies indicated that authentic leadership is linked to several positive follower outcomes. The literature review results showed horses to be "authentic" in their actions and reactions toward others. As a result, authentic leadership principles are a natural fit for EFL leadership programs.

Servant leadership consists of helping others to accomplish shared objectives. Its tenants include individual development, empowerment, and consistently working toward the health and long-term welfare of its followers. Servant leaders must nurture, defend, and empower their followers by helping them become healthier, wiser, and accepting of their responsibilities (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Liden et. al., 2008 produced the most valid evidence to measure servant leadership. Servant leadership showed more promise as a stand-alone theory (Hoch, et. al., 2018).

Surprisingly, participants interviewed stated their programs were "servant leadership" programs, even though the words they used to describe their programs were those used to describe authentic and transformational leadership theories. This was potentially due to the fact that their programs began as equine facilitated therapy (EFT) programs that were beginning to teach leadership classes.

The least useful of the theories examined is the situational leadership theory developed by Hersey & Blanchard, 1977) (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). This agreed with the website analyses and interviews since situational leadership and its measurements were mentioned little.

Bass (1996, 1997) stated that transformational leadership is considered to be effective in any situation or culture and does not specify any conditions under which authentic transformational leadership is irrelevant or ineffective. A positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational effectiveness has been replicated for leaders at different levels of authority, organizations, and countries (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). As such, transformational leadership approach in EFL programs is deemed to be useful to EFL leadership instruction. Words used by interviewees to describe their programs were those that relate to Bass' transformational leadership MLX and MLQ5X.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, the EFL leadership program industry needs to adopt a better set of standards for its program characteristics, classes, staffing, horse experience, and the cost, length, and type of classes. EFL leadership programs need to develop a more consistent approach to teaching their programs with a model in place to better oversee and approve curriculums and certifications.

More consistent training of EFL programs and program leaders in leadership and leadership concepts is recommended, especially if they are part of an EFL parent organization. In addition, it is recommended that program leaders have a clear idea of the type of leaders they are training. A guided theoretical model for these programs is also suggested, one possibly based on equine facilitated therapy programs which are more mature, robust, and regulated.

Equine facilitated learning (EFL) leadership programs should better align their programs with one or more specific leadership theories, related themes and categories identified in the literature review, such as such as authentic (George, 2003), servant (Greenleaf, 1977), situational (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969, 1977), and transformational (Bass, 1985, 1996, 2004, 2009) since the analysis revealed that it was clear that most programs did not align with a specific leadership theory or its related themes. On the contrary, leadership was discussed vaguely and indefinitely.

Only a few EFL leadership websites offered success evaluation tools, and none were related to the four leadership theory evaluation tools mentioned in the literature such as ALQ-authentic (Walumbwa et al., 2008), SLQ-servant (Liden, et al., 2008), SLII-situational (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), and MLQ and MLQ5X-transformational (Bass, 1985, 1996, 2004, 2009) Consistent and clear pre, during, and post-assessments are recommended. Implementing these changes would lead them to more successful programs that utilize leadership theories and metrics in their programs.

Equine facilitated learning (EFL) leadership classes that adhere to a leadership theory or theories with defined measurable outcomes and will allow participants the confidence that they are receiving that for which they have paid. Arci et al. (2016) identified that there is no unifying theory as to why activities involving horses result in a benefit to human co-facilitators. Without a clear definition of leadership, the theory or theories to which their programs subscribe and related evaluation tools, programs run the risk of unethical business behavior by their inconsistencies. By subscribing to a specific leadership theory or theories and their related success evaluations, programs can accurately, reliably, and with validity measure their outcomes; after all, program participants pay for these programs and services.

Each participant was asked to describe their program in five words. There was clearly a misalignment between the words program leaders used to describe their programs and the information found on program websites. There were inconsistencies between the perception of participants, their programs and the leadership theory to which their programs subscribed.

There needs to be more distinction between leadership theories in the respective programs. The individual EFL programs must aspire to analyze those leadership theory or theories to which they subscribe and begin to teach their classes accordingly. Program objectives can then be clear and can be evaluated more effectively. From a marketing standpoint, this could also benefit EFL programs. The analysis showed that the not-for-profit programs adhere to servant leadership theory first and authentic leadership second and the for-profit organizations lean heavily toward the authentic leadership theory, it could be of great benefit for them to follow those theories. Adhering to a theory or theories and its recommended evaluations is necessary for them to train their participants. Otherwise, their leadership trainings cannot be guaranteed or evaluated effectively. Bligh et al. (2007) said that a chosen leadership style is significant because it clarifies.

The data does suggest that there are not many incentives for equine facilitated programs to change. Almost all programs continue to charge participants fees for classes, memberships, certifications, and continuing education requirements even though there is little regulation within the industry. Interviews pointed out that programs may or may not adhere to parent program guidelines; in fact, at least two program leaders were certified by several programs. The data also demonstrated that program leaders were unclear regarding to which leadership theory their program subscribes. A wide variety of equine facilitated learning leadership classes continue to be offered, and participants continue to pay for and take the classes, raising some ethical concerns about the industry.

LIMITATIONS

There are four key limitations to the findings. First, the data is only generalizable by the website information from which it was collected. Secondly, for-profit organizations tend to mask their website information for proprietary reasons. Other EFL leadership programs require membership or class registrations to be able to view and collect information about their organizations and programs. Therefore, the information used in the data collection process needed to be expanded in its scope since examining the websites needed to allow access to a complete picture of the organizations. Potentially valuable information was often not readily available, which affected the research results as themes needed extrapolation from information only available on the websites.

Thirdly, the reliability of the data is limited in that it was collected from continuously updated EFL leadership program websites. Results may have been affected, as information may have changed after the time of the analysis. These are all important considerations for future researchers. In addition, the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was no opportunity to interview, observe or survey in person classes.

FUTURE RESEARCH

A research gap relates to the EFL leadership program design and its implementation. What research will guarantee the success of these programs? Based on the study's findings, it is suggested that further research is necessary to investigate the relationship between EFL leadership programs to the current leadership theories discussed by the study, their categories, themes, and evaluations identified.

More research is suggested on the connection between servant leadership and EFL leadership programs and how an accrediting body could be developed. Future research utilizing mixed methods research and data collection using surveys, interviews with EFL program leaders, focus groups, and observations at EFL facilities is also recommended. It would be helpful to conduct more research with a larger sample size.

Research is also needed on EFL program graduates and the impact of their leadership training. In addition, further research using standard leadership theory evaluation tools and standard business practices is needed to evaluate program successes.

The challenge for researchers is to develop both qualitative and quantitative studies to examine further whether equine facilitated activities can develop leadership skills using EFL leadership programs. Future studies must also focus on measuring the successes of leadership training using equine facilitated interventions (Bilginoglu, 2021).

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