



Presentation date: February, 2022

Date of acceptance: May, 2022

Publication date: June, 2022

## APPLIED HISTORY

AND THE TEACHING OF LEADERSHIP: A CASE FOR THE USE OF HISTORIC CASE STUDIES IN LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

### **LA HISTORIA APLICADA Y LA ENSEÑANZA DEL LIDERAZGO: UN CASO PARA EL USO DE ESTUDIOS DE CASOS HISTÓRICOS EN LOS PROGRAMAS DE LIDERAZGO**

Otto Federico von Feigenblatt<sup>1</sup>

E-mail: [vonfeigenblatt@hotmail.com](mailto:vonfeigenblatt@hotmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6033-6495>

J. P. Linstroth<sup>2</sup>

E-mail: [linstrot@barry.edu](mailto:linstrot@barry.edu)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7086-8011>

<sup>1</sup> Keiser University. Estados Unidos.

<sup>2</sup> Barry University. Estados Unidos.

#### Suggested citation (APA, 7<sup>th</sup> edition):

Otto Federico von Feigenblatt, O. F., & Linstroth, J. P., (2022). Applied history and the teaching of leadership: a case for the use of historical case studies in leadership programs. *Revista Universidad y Sociedad*, 14(S3), 433-438.

#### ABSTRACT

Macro level theories and a vast array of “best practices” characterize leadership training programs. Nevertheless, the importance of concrete case studies has been proven in business education and a small yet growing number of historians are focusing on the application of historical studies to contemporary problems. The present study explores a few successful initiatives in the inchoate field of applied history and provides a few suggestions as to how applied history can enrich the teaching of leadership in a vast array of programs ranging from business administration to educational leadership. Additionally, and specifically, historical leadership in relation to courage is discussed, thereby demonstrating why history is so crucial and as exemplar for the epistemology of leadership in education.

**Keywords:** Applied History, Courage, Leadership, Teaching, Training.

#### RESUMEN

Los programas de formación en liderazgo se caracterizan por sus teorías a nivel macro y una amplia gama de “mejores prácticas”. Sin embargo, la importancia de los estudios de casos concretos ha quedado demostrada en la educación empresarial y un número pequeño pero creciente de historiadores se está centrando en la aplicación de los estudios históricos a los problemas contemporáneos. El presente estudio explora algunas iniciativas exitosas en el incipiente campo de la historia aplicada y ofrece algunas sugerencias sobre cómo la historia aplicada puede enriquecer la enseñanza del liderazgo en una amplia gama de programas que van desde la administración de empresas hasta el liderazgo educativo. Además, y de forma específica, se analiza el liderazgo histórico en relación con el valor, demostrando así por qué la historia es tan crucial y como ejemplo para la epistemología del liderazgo en la educación.

**Palabras claves:** Historia aplicada, Valor, Liderazgo, Enseñanza, Formación

## INTRODUCTION

The field of leadership studies is dominated by quantitative research methods mostly borrowed from economics and from sociology (Kimball, 2013). One of the reasons for this emphasis is the need to develop best practices to train the next generation of leaders. Nevertheless one of the negative externalities of this emphasis on empirical quantitative hypothetico-deductive research is a complete disregard for the influence of historicity (von Feigenblatt, 2010c; von Feigenblatt & Acuña, 2021). In other words, research results aim to be ahistorical and atemporal. Surprisingly other disciplines dealing with the phenomenon of governance and management such as political science and anthropology have moved in the opposite direction. Intersectionality theory focuses on the influence of multiple identities on social phenomena, critical theory emphasizes the influence of unfair structures, and the postmodern approach questions the epistemological dominance of positivism, *inter alia* (von Feigenblatt, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; Del Rio & Moran, 2020).

It is time to break academic silos and to open the field of leadership studies to crosspollination from ancillary disciplines tackling some of the same phenomena. History brings with it a dynamic research method which transcends the narrow quantitative/qualitative dichotomy. puts it best when he states:

Man now seeks to understand, and to act on, not only his environment, but himself; and this has added, so to speak, a new dimension to reason, and a new dimension to history. The present age is the most historically minded of all ages. Modern man is to an unprecedented degree self-conscious and therefore conscious of history. He peers eagerly back into the twilight out of which he has come in the hope that its faint beams will illuminate the obscurity into which he is going; and, conversely, his aspirations and anxieties about the path that lies ahead quicken his insight into what lies behind. Past, present, and future are linked together in the endless chain of history.

Thus, according to Carr, history is intertwined with all of our activities and aspirations, inclusive of those in leadership and all of our academic endeavors because we are wholly immersed within history and eternally linked to our pasts.

Furthermore, the now well known, case study method of teaching business administration, shows that concrete case studies taken from the real world can be great teaching tools, bringing the complexity of actual world phenomena to the classroom (von Feigenblatt et al, 2022; Mann et al, 2001).

## DEVELOPMENT

### The State of the Art in the Teaching of Leadership

While it may be perilous to make broad generalizations, it is important to have a lay of the land in terms of the most common approaches to teaching leadership. As one of the interdisciplinary fields with the most immediate impact on the lives of millions of people, it is surprising that the study of history has not been traditionally included in this subfield of leadership (Ewest & Klieg, 2012; Ordirika, 2020). This is partly due to the dominance of the field by theories derived from the field of business administration and management which tend to be present and future oriented (Rivero & von Feigenblatt, 2016). Moreover, the divide between the social sciences and the humanities in terms of epistemology and methodological preferences has also made cooperation difficult.

Recent attempts by historians to operationalize their field for the use of policy makers is noteworthy. In particular, the relatively inchoate field of applied history has made important inroads into the teaching of international relations and diplomacy (von Feigenblatt, 2019; Miller, 2009). In the case of business administration, case studies, are used as part of most MBA programs however the emphasis is on case studies taken from the business world. If the emphasis is on the phenomenon of leadership, then case studies can come from a vast array of contexts and circumstances so as to broaden the knowledge of emerging leaders.

The debate over the inclusion of historical cases in leadership training echoes the broader debate over the liberal arts versus more targeted professional studies. Therefore, the debate involves broad philosophical differences over the purpose of leadership and about priorities in the field of education. Many scholars who favor vocational and professional training targeted on specific skills tend to cite studies supporting quick learning gains through a narrow focus versus a broader less focused approach in the traditional liberal arts (von Feigenblatt, 2020a; von Feigenblatt et al., 2022; Sorkin, 1983; Waugh & Ketusiri, 2009). There are also important issues of costs. Part of the attraction to the vocational approach is that it is effective and efficient in the short term. Moreover, the results are measurable and easily quantifiable. The previously mentioned characteristics are compatible with the short term emphasis of the American private sector. Elected officials in Western democracies also favor programs and approaches with short term results which are easily measured and thus can be presented to constituents as clear successes. The fetishism of numbers and with narrow measurable results is understandable due to the structure of democratic

systems and Western corporate boards. Moreover, the public has a short attention span and while institutions have long life spans, individuals do not.

### Humbolt, the Liberal Arts, and the Case for Applied History in Leadership Studies

Wilhelm von Humbolt, the great German philosopher of education, explored the purpose of education and ventured to propose a few goals for this complex process. He was a fervent advocate for the holistic education of children. For Humbolt, the goal of education was not to learn a particular trade nor to achieve a certain set of specific skills but rather to embark in a process of self-construction, a process he labeled "bildung". Humbolt was clearly influenced by renaissance ideas of the ideal scholar, by enlightenment mores regarding the search for knowledge, and also by the traditional education for the elites (Sorkin, 1983; Villarroya & Llopis-Goig, 2021). The grand tour for the young members of the aristocracy and the emphasis on exposure to a wide range of cultural and social activities was deemed to be a perfect blend for the holistic growth of the members of the elites. This partly explains the contemporary divergence between the leadership training for diplomats in comparison to the leadership training for private sector managers (von Feigenblatt, 2020b; von Feigenblatt et al, 2021). The narrow focus of leadership training for private sector managers may in a way reflect the values of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeoisie while the broad range of experiences included as part of the education of diplomats may reflect the aristocratic culture embodied by the participants in the pivotal Congress of Vienna. Nevertheless there are other important considerations such as the time pressure and result oriented structure of the private sector versus the long term orientation of the diplomatic corps. There is a historical case to be made that the two fields still represent the congealed cultural traits of the main sectors that prevailed during their formative periods.

Therefore, it is the impetus of this paper to promote an interdisciplinary and a multidisciplinary approach to leadership and education, especially by adopting history in conceptualizing leadership goals. The following section will support why historical cases may be utilized for a broadening of the subdiscipline of educational leadership.

### The Usage of Historical Case Studies Such As the "Historical Case of Courage" in Teaching Leadership

The previous section has presented a brief overview of the main tectonic lines dividing the teaching of leadership in the different fields as well as introduced the classical views of Wilhelm von Humbolt regarding education in

general and the teaching of leadership in particular. Even so, it is important to emphasize what historical case studies may be significant for teaching leadership. Certainly, some historical cases which come to mind are those related to the concept of "courage" in regard to leadership. A classic example of a historical study of figures in history who acted courageously are those historical figures found in the pages of the Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Profiles in Courage* by former U.S. President John F. Kennedy (1956; new edn. 2003).

To be courageous in leadership often means rising above given circumstances and to act beyond the norm and to act beyond expectations. Oftentimes, leaders may be called upon to do what is morally right rather than to follow along with the general consensus of expedience. The book, *Profiles in Courage* (1956), provides historical case studies about those individuals who rose above the fray throughout history and about whom made difficult decisions rather than follow the crowd.

Here we will briefly summarize the significance of those historical leaders from American history who acted above and beyond the throng in order to do what was right. All are examples of historical courage in leadership.

For instance, former president of the United States, John Quincy Adams, when he was a senator voted to embargo Great Britain, an act ruinous to Massachusetts but of importance to national interest because of British bellicosity to the former colonies. Moreover, it was a courageous act because he could have lost his senate seat by voting against the interests of his state. As Quincy Adams remarked: "...Private interest must not be put in opposition to the public good" (Kennedy 1956: 43). "The embargo completely idled the shipbuilding industry, destroyed the shipping trade and tied up the fishing vessels; and stagnation, bankruptcy, distress, and migration from the territory [of New England] became common" To state John Quincy Adams was maligned by the act in Massachusetts would be an understatement. Adams eventually would give up his seat and temporarily return to private life because he was "hated by the Federalists and suspected by the Republicans...he never forgot the incident or abandon his courage of conscience" John Quincy Adams acted in the interest of his country, which would go to war with Great Britain again soon after the embargo in the War of 1812. Adams acted not in popularity but instead for the better welfare of the public.

Another famous leader in American history was Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster who had a plan to save the union of the United States. Like Quincy Adams, Webster believed he was acting on behalf of the better

good of the public. In 1850 the United States was divided by those in the South favoring slavery and those in the North favoring abolition. The worry among some senators such as Webster was that the union would tear itself apart and the south would secede, causing civil war, an eventuality of course. As Kennedy summarizes the mood in the country: "The time was ripe for secession, and few were prepared to speak for union" Daniel Webster made a famous speech to the U.S. Senate supporting a compromise, which essentially preserved the union of the United States. And Webster stood behind his speech with conviction. Webster stated: "...If necessary I will take the stump in every village in New England...What is to come of the present commotion in men's minds I cannot foresee; but my own convictions of duty are fixed and strong, and I shall continue to follow those convictions without faltering...."

Nonetheless, resentment about the Compromise of 1850 lingered for years until the Civil War (1861-1865). "The Compromise of 1850 was made up of five bills that attempted to resolve disputes over slavery in new territories added to the United States in the wake of the Mexican-American War (1846-48). It admitted California as a free state, left Utah and New Mexico to decide for themselves whether to be a slave state or a free state, defined a new Texas-New Mexico boundary, and made it easier for slaveowners to recover runaways under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The Compromise of 1850 was the mastermind of Whig senator Henry Clay and Democratic senator Stephen Douglas" (<https://www.history.com/topics/abolitionist-movement/compromise-of-1850>). In effect, the Compromise of 1850 nullified the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which tried to settle the slavery question in the United States. Moreover, without the support of the likes of senator Daniel Webster, the compromise would not have happened.

In sum, Daniel Webster was considered a traitor to abolitionists who thought Webster had gone too far by compromising the values of those against slavery. Prior to his death, Webster wrote why he believed in compromise: "I shall stand by the Union...with absolute disregard of personal consequences. What are personal consequences... in comparison with the good or evil which may befall a great country in a crisis like this?...Let the consequences be what they will, I am careless. No man can suffer too much, and no man can fall too soon, if he suffer or if he fall in defense of the liberties and Constitution of his country".

Another leader who risked all for the sake of the United States, was the Texan Sam Houston. Like Daniel Webster before him, he believed compromise was necessary to preserve the union of the United States at all costs.

"Sam Houston was a Democrat of long standing. And Sam Houston was a Southerner by birth, residence, loyalty and philosophy. But Sam Houston was also Sam Houston, one of the most independent, unique, popular, forceful and dramatic individuals ever to enter the Senate chamber. The first Senator from Texas, his name had long before been a household word as Commander in Chief of those straggling and undermanned Texas volunteers who routed the entire Mexican Army at San Jacinto, captured its general and established the independence of Texas. He had been acclaimed as the first President of the Independent Republic of Texas, a Member of her Congress, and President again before the admission of Texas into the Union as a state" (Kennedy 1956: 94). Houston had supported both the Compromise of 1820 and Compromise of 1850 and would preserve the union of the nation above all else. Yet, to many Sam Houston was a traitor to Southerners and the Southern cause because he did not want to "plunge the nation into new agitation over the slavery issue" It was the same Houston who tried to quell the secessionist fervor in Texas and spoke against sectionalism with great courage. As governor of Texas he was ignored when a Secession Convention was called in Texas following the election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States. As Houston declared: "I ask not the defeat of sectionalism by sectionalism, but by nationality...These are no new sentiments to me. I uttered them in the American Senate in 1856. I utter them now. I was denounced then as a traitor. I am denounced now. Be it so! Men who never endured the privation, the toil, the peril that I have for my country call me a traitor because I am willing to yield obedience to the Constitution and the constituted authorities. Let them suffer what I have for this Union, and they will feel it entwining so closely around their hearts that it will be like snapping the cords of life to give it up..." (Kennedy 1956: 105). Sam Houston was no traitor. He believed in conserving and sustaining the union of the United States over the question of slavery and over the election of Lincoln. Yet, as a leader he was comparatively alone in his convictions because the impetus to secede among his fellow Texans was far greater than maintaining the union of the United States.

To summarize, to be a great leader one needs to have the conviction and virtue of courage. The historical examples of John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, and Sam Houston were used to demonstrate why history may be illustrative for proving how the past is so important for leadership studies. While it is the norm today for leadership studies to be quantitatively driven, we think these examples reveal why history is so significant for understanding how leadership education may be improved upon and why history may form the basis of understanding leadership itself.

## CONCLUSIONS

When E. H. Carr (1961: 5) asks: What is history? our answer, consciously or unconsciously, reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question, what view we take of the society in which we live." Indeed, to limit leadership studies to economics and sociology limits the scope of possibilities for leadership studies. Here we have shown that the study of the past may illuminate why history is so central for leadership studies. We have demonstrated that for example "courage" is one of the key leadership traits and historical figures like John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, and Sam Houston embodied this characteristic in their actions to preserve the union of the United States. Clearly, we may benefit from the history lessons of the past and leadership studies which focus on past leaders and leadership skills will better reflect a broadened understanding of leadership in general.

## REFERENCES

- Del Río, E., & Moran, K. (2020). Remaking television: One Day at a Time's digital delivery and Latina/o cultural specificity. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 44(1), 5-25.
- Ewest, T., & Kliegl, J. (2012). The case for change in business education: How liberal arts principles and practices can foster needed change. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 12(3), 75-86. [http://www.na-businesspress.com/JHETP/ewest\\_abstract.html](http://www.na-businesspress.com/JHETP/ewest_abstract.html)
- Kimball, B. (2013). Do the Study of Education and Teacher Education Belong at a Liberal Arts College? *Educational Theory*, 63(2), 171-184.
- Mann, D., Marco, G., Khalil, B. L., & Esola, C. (2001). Sustainable Markets: Case Study of Heinz. *Journal of Business Case Studies*, 7(5), 35-42. <https://www.clutejournals.com/index.php/JBCS/article/view/5603/5684>
- Miller, J. (2009). Soft Power and State-Firm Diplomacy: Congress and IT Corporate Activity in China. *International Studies Perspectives*, 10(3), 285-302.
- Rivero, O., & von Feigenblatt, O. (2016). New normal initiatives prompts US business schools to enhance curricula. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 7(3), 423-432. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN\\_ID2749157\\_code1165064.pdf?abstractid=2749157&mirid=1](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID2749157_code1165064.pdf?abstractid=2749157&mirid=1)
- Sorkin, D. (1983). Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (Bildung), 1791-1810. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44(1), 55-73.
- Villarroya, A., & Llopis-Goig, R. (2021). Elites and Culture: Social Profiles in the Cultivated Population. *Cultural Sociology*, 15(4), 509-538.
- von Feigenblatt, O. (2009a). Human Security and the Responsibility to Protect: A Holistic Approach to Dealing with Violent Conflict in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1), 27-40.
- von Feigenblatt, O. (2009b). Disciplinary'moratorium': Post-colonial studies, third wave feminism, and development studies. *Revista Vivat Academica*, 11(108), 1-5. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN\\_ID1523545\\_code1165064.pdf?abstractid=1523545&mirid=1](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID1523545_code1165064.pdf?abstractid=1523545&mirid=1)
- von Feigenblatt, O. (2010a). Exploring human security through phenomenological research: A brief review. *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia*, 9(2), 27-32. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN\\_ID1689722\\_code1165064.pdf?abstractid=1689722&mirid=1](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID1689722_code1165064.pdf?abstractid=1689722&mirid=1)
- von Feigenblatt, O. (2010b). La contribución japonesa a los campos de seguridad. *Observatorio Iberoamericano de la Economía y la Sociedad del Japón*, 2(7), 1-8.
- von Feigenblatt, O. (2010c). The Importance of Culture in Emic Interpretations of the History of Thailand's Southern Separatist Movement: The 'Gentlemen's Agreement' of 1943 and the Malaysian Relationship with the Separatists. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 2(1), 46-56. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN\\_ID1621079\\_code1165064.pdf?abstractid=1621079&mirid=1](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID1621079_code1165064.pdf?abstractid=1621079&mirid=1)
- von Feigenblatt, O. (2019). Flexible Diplomacy: Scholars and Key Players in Track II Diplomacy. *Espirales Revista Multidisciplinaria de investigación*, 3(28), 32-45.
- von Feigenblatt, O. (2020a). Electronic badges, Heraldry, E-Certificates and the Balkanization of Credentials. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 10(4), 743-762.
- von Feigenblatt, O. (2020b). The Importance of Historical Heritage and the Fallacy of the Cancel Movement: International Case Studies. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 10(3), 483-492.

- von Feigenblatt, O. F., Pardo, P., & Cooper, M. (2021). Corporatism and Benevolent Authoritarianism: Viable Antidotes to Populism. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* (2021) Volume, 11(1), 95-98.
- von Feigenblatt, O., & Acuña, B. (2021). Two Case Studies Dealing with Social Studies at the Secondary Level: Applied Anthropology And Grounded Theory. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 11(2), 237-252.
- von Feigenblatt, O., Peña, B., & Cardoso, M. (2022). Aprendizaje personalizado y education maker: Nuevos paradigmas didácticos y otras aproximaciones. Ediciones Octaedro. [https://books.google.es/books?hl=es&lr=&id=RRhgEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=16.%09von+Feigenblatt,+Otto+Federico,+Acu%C3%B1a,+B.+P.,+%26+Cardoso-Pulido,+M.+J.+\(2022\).+Nuevos+paradigmas+did%C3%A1cticos+y+otras+aproximaciones:+aprendizaje+personalizado+y+Education+Maker.+Barcelona:+Octaedro.&ots=Bn-9CrXt4w&sig=TGRVZ42T3GmLguaJNwmi5Das0IE#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.es/books?hl=es&lr=&id=RRhgEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=16.%09von+Feigenblatt,+Otto+Federico,+Acu%C3%B1a,+B.+P.,+%26+Cardoso-Pulido,+M.+J.+(2022).+Nuevos+paradigmas+did%C3%A1cticos+y+otras+aproximaciones:+aprendizaje+personalizado+y+Education+Maker.+Barcelona:+Octaedro.&ots=Bn-9CrXt4w&sig=TGRVZ42T3GmLguaJNwmi5Das0IE#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Waugh, R., & Ketusiri, A. (2009). Lecturer Receptivity to a major planned educational change in a centrally-controlled system at Rajabhat Universities in Thailand. *Journal of Educational Change*, 10(1), 13-36.