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# MSOLE at Five: They said it would never happen

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**A dream** comes true. It started as an idea. Actually, it started as a question: “Why are we not teaching leadership in any of our MBA courses?” Leadership was mentioned a time or two in several offerings, but certainly nothing more than a few pages in a text or a chapter at most. And while we also taught ethics (presumably in most, if not all, of our graduate courses), there was only one course allegedly teaching ethics in the MBA program. Something was missing.

In Summer 1999, a group of MBA capstone students was given the task of creating a survey that would be sent to the membership of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. The survey asked chamber members whether a set of courses or a separate degree program in leadership and ethics was needed in Austin and in Central Texas, and if so, would they support such a program with their tuition-benefit dollars?

We were surprised, to say the least, by the response to this survey. We figured we might hear from 10 to 15% of those to whom it was sent. We had a 39% response rate, which we thought was outstanding. The great majority of the respondents said that what was needed in Austin and in Central Texas was a separate graduate degree in leadership and ethics, not an “add-on” to the MBA program. One respondent said, “I have all the managers I can handle; what I need now are people who can *lead* my company into the next century and do it in an ethical and moral fashion.” This was quite an auspicious start as we set out to build our Leadership and Ethics program.

We began by searching for similar programs both locally and nationally. There was none. Sure, there were programs in leadership at a number of universities, and there were programs in ethics, primarily at church-affiliated colleges, universities, and seminaries. However, we found none that blended the two into one program. So we set about to create our own.

A committee made up of representatives from the Graduate School of Management (now the School of Management and Business), New College, and the community at large was tasked to create a mission statement for this yet-to-be-named program and to begin putting together a curriculum that would bring life to this effort. We benchmarked the types of courses that were offered by institutions that offered degrees in leadership and in ethics. We borrowed a few titles, but most we created ourselves. The committee decided to call the new program the “Master of Science in Organizational Leadership and Ethics,” using the acronym “MSOLE.” A 36-hour program of study in both leadership and ethics was designed to be offered in a seven-week, accelerated format. MSOLE was the first graduate program at St. Edward's to be offered in such a format. The curriculum called for classes that met one night per week, with two courses offered each academic session. Students would proceed through the program in cohorts. MSOLE was also the first graduate program in the university that had a clear research emphasis as the basis for the capstone course.

The program went through the normal review process established by the university. It was first approved at the

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school level, then went to the Graduate Council where it was given the go ahead. Next, the program proposal was taken to the Board of Trustees, where it once again received approval. Finally, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the university's accrediting body, granted its approval. MSOLE was ready to go. A year and a half of hard work by many people both on and off campus was finally coming to fruition.

In January 2001, we welcomed our first cohort of 14 students to the MSOLE program and to the St. Edward's University campus. Their first course, "Foundations of Organizational Leadership," was taught by Tom Sechrest and Ted Middelberg, who were both high-tech corporate leadership professionals. Sechrest suggested a colleague whom he felt could teach the second course in the sequence, "Critical Thinking," and Linda Dickens joined MSOLE as an adjunct faculty member. The third course in the curriculum was called "Leading Organizational Change." Tom Ryan, an alumnus of St. Edward's, and a professional with many years of experience in leading large-scale organizational change with Shell Oil Company was brought in to share his knowledge, and I joined him as co-facilitator the first time the course was offered. Ryan has continued to teach the "Change" course ever since. The fourth course in the sequence, "Foundations of Ethics," was taught by Susan Neal, an organizational development consultant. Neal's business partner, Connie Porter, subsequently co-facilitated "Leadership and Teams" with her. Sechrest and Middelberg again teamed up for "Ethics and Leadership." Jeff Haldeman was brought on board as an adjunct instructor to teach both "Organizational Ethics" and "Organizational Behavior." Gary Pletcher, an MBA faculty member, taught "Global Leadership," and Brad Fregger, who was the executive-in-residence, taught "Leadership and Imagination." I led the first cohort through "Leadership in Action Research" and the Capstone course. Eleven members of the first cohort graduated in December 2002 with the first Master of Science in Organizational Leadership and Ethics degrees bestowed by St. Edward's University.

We have continued to bring in new cohorts of students each fall and spring since the program began, having recognized early on that summer entry for business professionals was not practical. Since that first graduation in December 2002, eighty-two more students have received the MSOLE degree.

Just as the mix of students and faculty has changed over the course of this program, so has the program itself. The original curriculum served MSOLE well for the first

three years of the program. Linda Ford, who had been hired to teach in both the MSOLE and the MBA programs, suggested that learning opportunities for students might be broadened by adding electives to the program. Three new courses were added, and other courses were adapted and renamed in the interest of keeping the program on the leading edge of leadership and ethics education. "Foundations of Ethical Leadership" and "Building Ethical Organizations" were added to the core curriculum. "Leadership and Imagination" was made an elective along with new courses "Leadership and Financial Performance," "Leading Strategy," and "Special Topics in Leadership and Ethics." Recognizing the key role of finance in business, in Spring 2006, "Leadership and Financial Performance" was elevated to a core course and "Organizational Behavior" was added to the list of electives.

In 2002, students in the MSOLE program began to play an integral role in a joint effort with the Samaritan Counseling Center of Austin and the Center for Leadership and Ethics at St. Edward's to help select the most ethical businesses and the most ethical businessmen and women through the Central Texas Ethics in Business (EIB) Awards. The first of these activities was led by Connie Porter and Susan Neal and culminated in both of these faculty members and a small group of students presenting their research at a national conference. Since then, our students have continued to spearhead the research efforts of EIB. Over the past several years this effort has been led by Ted Middelberg, Linda Ford, Pauline Albert, and Tom Sechrest. Both MBA and New College students have supported the work of the MSOLE researchers. Each fall the organizational and individual exemplars of ethical business conduct are honored during the EIB Awards banquet.

We have been fortunate to have had and to still have some of the best possible faculty teaching in this program. Tom Sechrest, Ted Middelberg, and Tom Ryan have been with us from the beginning. Linda Ford, Pauline Albert, Connie Porter, Tom Howard, Hamilton Beazley, Tom George, and Allison Allen are others who have taught or who continue to teach in MSOLE and who have played an integral part in the success of the program and the success of our students.

Fall 2006 will see another change. After serving as program director since the program was launched (actually having been involved with the program since the asking of the question), I have decided to step down from this position. I feel that I have accomplished all I wanted to accomplish with this program and leave with no regrets. Tom Sechrest, who was brought on board in Fall 2005 as

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a full-time faculty member in the program, will take over as director.

Some have said, “This is your baby, how can you walk away from it?” My response is that like all babies who are properly nurtured and loved, there comes a time when you have to get out of their way and let them grow without you. I could not be happier about the success of this program. We continue to have great students, excellent faculty, the support of the school and the university, and the knowledge that what we are doing is making a difference in the way business is done in Austin and in Central Texas. The success of any educational effort is when your students come back and tell you what a difference a course or a program has

made in their lives, and this we hear constantly. Another mark of success is when your students recommend other students to the program. Without a doubt, the greatest number of new students enrolling in MSOLE has come from such referrals.

During new student orientation, I tell the new MSOLE students to go home that night and take a picture of themselves, because at the end of the next two years they will not be the same person they are that night. I wish I could count the number who have said to me and to other faculty members, “It did not take two years; I am already a different person.” That, in my opinion, is the true meaning of education.

## **Biography**

Allan Pevoto is associate professor, director of the Master of Science in Organization Leadership and Ethics, and chair of the human resources management program in the School of Management and Business at St. Edward's University, where he teaches graduate courses in human relations, organizational behavior, human resources development, and compensation management. Allan holds BS and MEd degrees the University of Houston and a PhD from Texas A&M University.