

Inculcating Executive Presence among Young MBA Students: A Review of Emerging Leadership Competencies

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Abstract

Nowadays, having executive presence has become a key leadership skill that allows one to establish credibility, communicate effectively, and influence outcomes. As a result of the rapid changes in the contemporary business environment, graduates with Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree are supposed to possess not only technical and managerial skills but also certain leadership qualities and interpersonal skills that will help one to display the above-mentioned leadership characteristics of executive presence. The following article aims at examining the current scientific literature on executive presence and determining the essential competencies that can help one to acquire this leadership characteristic as an MBA student. For this reason, various scientific works, books, and publications from different industries were analyzed in order to find the link between communication skills, emotional intelligence, confidence, professionalism, ethical behavior, flexibility, and effective decision making and executive presence. One of the findings that became clear from the analysis of literature on the subject is the fact that the ability to demonstrate the leadership qualities associated with executive presence is not an inborn skill. Rather, it is the skill that can be acquired during the management education process and by means of practical learning, mentorship, and leadership development programs. It is also necessary to mention that the article under discussion implies that executive presence should be taught in the context of MBA education.

Keywords: *Executive Presence, MBA Students, Leadership Competencies, Management Education, Professional Development and Emotional Intelligence*

Introduction

“The ability to project gravitas, communication, and appearance to mobilize teams, exude credibility, and make complex decisions regardless of hierarchical level.”

-Sylvia Ann Hewlett

The ability of a leader to successfully lead does not only depend on his or her skills but also on his or her confidence-building and communication skills. These features can be combined and referred to as executive presence—a leadership competency that makes one influence other people, become credible and confident in resolving organizational issues. Traditionally, the feature of executive presence was thought to be something innate and inherent only to some leaders. However, according to modern scientific literature, executive presence can be developed through learning and practical work experience.

The modern corporate world recognizes that technical skills alone cannot be the only criteria for becoming a good leader. Now leaders are expected to be able to communicate with confidence, gain credibility, build trust, and lead teams while facing organizational difficulties. Therefore, executive presence has become one of the essential competencies that complement professional experience and allow individuals to exercise positive influence in various organizational contexts.

Importance of Executive Presence for Young MBA Students

Modern organizations expect the management graduates not only to have excellent academic qualifications but also some extra qualities. Even though the MBA programme helps to develop technical and analytical skills, the companies seek for individuals who can communicate with confidence, gain others' trust, cooperate within diverse teams and have potential for leadership (Dalavai, 2019; Limardi et al., 2014). Developing executive presence will enable MBA students to demonstrate professionalism, make proper decisions, adjust to business changes and influence other people. In addition to increasing chances of employment, these skills will help graduates to demonstrate credibility in interviews, internships, presentations and beginning of their professional path. In terms of modern organizations that prefer leaders who have not only business skills but also strong interpersonal and ethical ones, developing executive presence during the MBA studies can help students to get ready for increased responsibility and future leadership positions. In this respect, executive presence can be considered as an important competency that complements classroom studies and contributes to professional and career development (Long, 2011; Sherman, 2015).

Executive Presence in the Recent Past

In recent years, executive presence has received increased attention as an important managerial skill in the contemporary business world. A lot of scientific studies have already tried to analyze how executive presence affects leadership effectiveness and career advancement of individuals, however, the literature about this issue is rather fragmentary and focuses on experienced professionals or executives. The development of such quality in young MBA students who have just started the path of leaders has not received enough attention so far. Taking into account that organizations require from management graduates the set of interpersonal and leadership skills together with technical ones, it becomes necessary to consolidate the available knowledge on this matter. The aim of this literature review is to consolidate the existing views on executive presence, define the competencies that are tightly connected with it and discuss them in relation to management education. The review will also help to detect gaps in the current literature and provide suggestions to improve leadership development in MBA students.

Objective of the Review

The objective of the current literature review is to investigate the current research on executive presence and its role in preparing MBA students for being future leaders. The literature review is aimed at detecting the competencies that underlie the concept of executive presence, analyzing its dimensions and theories and identifying the ways of developing these competencies during

management education. Also, the review will try to reveal gaps in the existing research and provide recommendations for integrating executive presence development into the MBA programme.

Methodology

In this paper, a methodology of narrative literature review is applied to examine the concept of executive presence and its importance for developing leadership capabilities among young MBA students. The research relies on the analysis of scholarly sources published in scientific journals, books, conference papers, and professional reports that discuss executive presence, leadership development, management education, and emerging leadership skills.

Sources that are relevant for the study were found in academic databases and search engines using keywords "Executive Presence," "Leadership Competencies," "MBA Students," "Management Education," "Leadership Development," and "Professional Skills." Precedence was given to peer-reviewed sources and professional literature discussing the concept, dimensions, theoretical aspects, and practical use of the executive presence. Publications from more recent years were added to trace how the notion of executive presence has changed with the changes in the business environment.

Collected literature was examined thoroughly and divided into themes related to the concept and evolution of executive presence, its dimensions, leadership competencies linked to executive presence, importance of executive presence for MBA students, executive presence in management education, and development of executive presence. Findings from different studies were compared and synthesized to find common themes, different perspectives and gaps in the existing literature. Instead of collecting primary data and conducting statistical analysis, the current review provides a comprehensive overview of executive presence based on previous research findings.

Literature Review

Concept and Evolution of Executive Presence

Although the topic has received much attention in academic literature, executive presence does not have an official definition yet. Different scholars analyze the concept from their own perspectives; however, it can be noted that executive presence includes professional expertise, credibility, communication, confidence, and ability to influence others. All these different views indicate that the concept of executive presence needs to be regarded as a multidimensional professional competence and not as a fixed personal trait.

Previous literature used to define executive presence in terms of external aspects, such as good appearance, clear communication, and confidence, that are important for credibility and creating a strong impression. However, changes in organizational structure, progress in technologies, globalization, and increasing diversity of workforce made executive presence a broader notion. Modern concepts of leadership include emotional intelligence, authenticity, flexibility, ethical decision-making, resilience, and inclusiveness. These new concepts of executive presence imply

that it is not only about good external characteristics but also a holistic concept of leadership that combines professional expertise, interpersonal skills, and ethical behaviour.

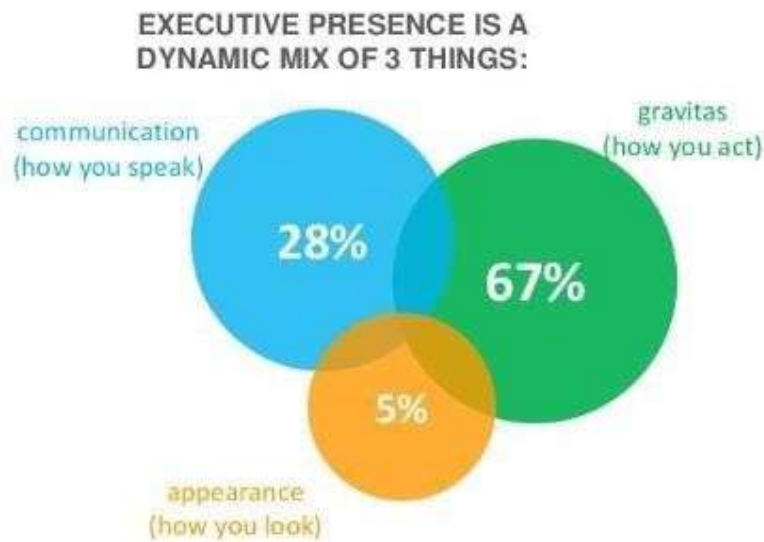
Dimensions of Executive Presence

Executive presence is better described as a multidimensional concept which goes much farther than just communication skills and physical appearance of an individual. Many frameworks were suggested by researchers in an attempt to identify constituent dimensions of executive presence, but all agree on the fact that successful leadership requires an equilibrium between personal values, capabilities and interpersonal behavior. All of these dimensions determine how people perceive and interact with others.

Hewlett's Three-Dimensional Framework

Sylvia Ann Hewlett claims that there are three dimensions of executive presence – gravitas, communication, and appearance. These dimensions collectively impact the ways of developing leader's credibility, conveying messages and presenting oneself in a professional manner.

The framework of Hewlett is mostly concerned with visible aspects of executive presence and consists of three dimensions of executive presence – gravitas, communication, and appearance. Together these dimensions determine how other people perceive leaders and help leaders to build credibility in the organization (Hewlett et al., 2012).



Bates Executive Presence Index

The Bates Executive Presence Index (Bates ExPI™) is an approach developed by Suzanne Bates that looks beyond the obvious elements and evaluates the ability of a leader to engage, align, inspire people, and motivate people into actions.

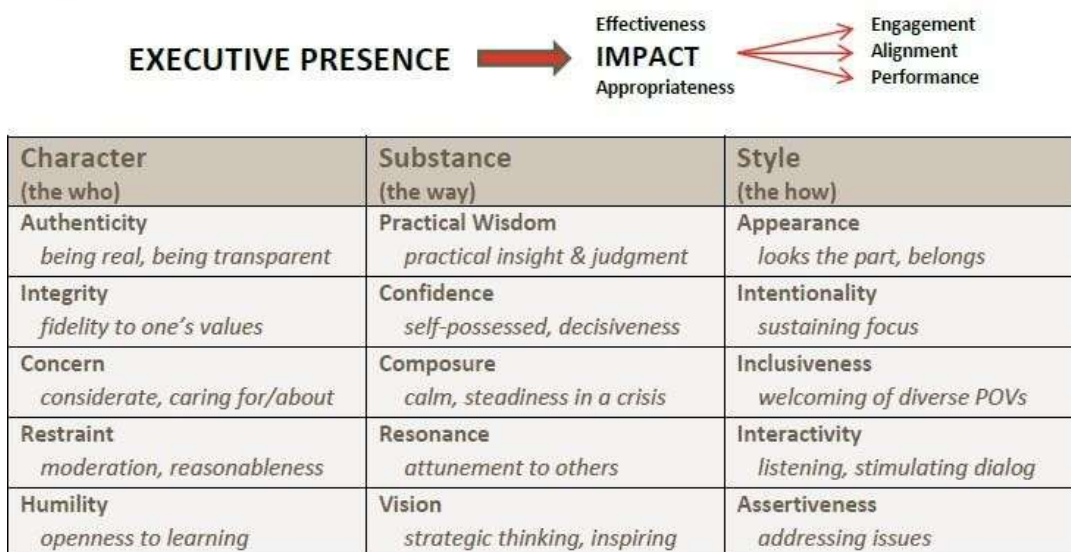
It is popular to describe executive presence through three broad dimensions: Character, Substance, and Style. Character describes the value system of a person and his/her personal qualities which create the basis for trust and credibility. Substance involves the ability of the individual to make good decisions and deal with the complex challenges based on his or her knowledge and experience. Style includes the behaviour of the individual and his/her communicational abilities used to communicate the thoughts and messages.

Thus, combining the three dimensions of executive presence we can conclude that it appears as a result of the combination of the personal values, professional ability and behavioural proficiency. People showing all these three skills are better capable of leading a diverse team and overcoming organizational challenges.

Unlike this approach, the Bates Executive Presence Index is much broader and takes into consideration personal values, professional capabilities and behavioral style. This approach assumes that effective long-term leadership depends not only on external aspects of a leader, but also on such internal traits as integrity, emotional maturity, wisdom, inclusiveness and the ability to engage and inspire people (Bates & Weighart, 2015).

This model has three macro-dimensions consisting of 15 distinct facets.

Figure 1. Bates Model of Executive Presence



The fact that we can measure the parts of executive presence makes the Bates Executive Presence Index really useful for evaluating and developing executive presence through leadership training and professional development programs.

Comparative Analysis of Theoretical Frameworks

We have two models that try to describe what executive presence is about. They both look at sides of this idea. The Hewlett framework talks about how a leader looks and acts, which helps people form an opinion about them. On the hand the Bates approach focuses on what is inside a leader and the skills they need to be a good leader all the time. When we look at both of these views on presence it becomes clear that being a good leader is about how you act and the kind of person you are.

If we compare the two models we can see that neither one is enough to describe what executive presence is. The Hewlett framework helps us understand how a leader earns credibility, which is based on three things: how they carry themselves how they communicate and how they look. The Bates framework on the hand looks at the bigger picture and talks about a leaders character, professionalism and how well they behave. It is clear that executive presence is a part of being a good leader and it includes both how you act and what kind of person you are. So companies and schools should help future leaders develop all of these skills to get them ready for the world of business.

Executive Presence as an Emerging Leadership Competency

In the ten years what people expect from leaders has changed a lot and executive presence has become a really important skill, for the next generation of managers. Now companies want leaders who can think about the picture communicate well work with different teams and make good decisions even when things are not clear. As a result executive presence is now a combination of different leadership skills.

One of the important skills is being able to communicate well which is a big part of executive presence. A good leader should be able to express their ideas listen to others carefully and speak with confidence whether in person or online. It is also important to be able to understand how other people feel, which is called intelligence. Being able to adapt to changes and being resilient when things get

tough are also crucial. Having integrity being ethical and being accountable add to what it means to have presence and help build trust in a leader and the company. When a leader has all of these skills they can make an impact and create an environment where people work together and innovate.

Overall based on what we have read it seems that all of these skills work together and complement each other. To be a leader you need to be able to combine all of these things.

Thus executive presence emerges as the result of interaction of these leadership skills.

Executive Presence in Management Education

Management schools play a role in training future managers to do well not only in school but also in terms of leadership qualities. In the past management schools focused on teaching skills like finance and marketing. Now companies look for graduates who have people skills and leadership qualities. Therefore management education should include both presence and technical skills training.

We can use hands on learning to develop presence and apply what we learn in class to real life. Things like discussing case studies doing business simulations making presentations and doing internships allow students to gain experience in communication, decision making and teamwork.

Getting feedback from teachers people in the industry and friends will also help students understand what they need to work on and become more confident.

So adding these learning activities to the school curriculum can help future managers develop in a way.

Executive Presence among Young MBA Students

Young management students are the leaders of businesses. These students usually have an education and technical skills but they often do not have much work experience. This makes it hard for them to show confidence and leadership when they enter the workforce. Developing presence in young students will help them connect what they learn in school to the real world.

Future leaders who have presence can present their ideas well participate in group discussions and do well in job interviews. They also work well in teams. Show professionalism and good judgment. As companies look for graduates who can lead executive presence is a skill that helps them get hired and succeed.

Strategies for Developing Executive Presence

Executive presence is not something people are born with. It is a skill that can be learned with practice and feedback. People can develop presence by working on their communication skills understanding emotions and getting feedback. Mentoring and coaching are also important as they provide guidance and support.

Things like speaking, networking and working in groups help develop executive presence. These activities give people a chance to apply what they learn in school. Continuous learning and being open, to feedback help people grow and become more confident. For MBA students practicing these things throughout their studies can prepare them for leadership roles.

Ultimately building presence is a long term process. It takes practice, feedback and learning to develop the skills needed for leadership.

Research Gap

There are still some things that we do not understand about presence even though a lot of studies are being done on it. Most of the time researchers look at executives people in high positions or those with a lot of experience. This means that people who are in MBA programs or just starting their careers are not studied enough. We also need to learn more about how to teach presence in MBA classes and whether these methods really work. There is not information on how executive presence develops in different places different schools and different companies. If we can fill these gaps we can create leadership programs and make MBA graduates more ready for what companies need today (Dalavai, 2019; Hewlett, 2024).

Discussion

This review shows that executive presence is now seen as an important skill for leaders in the fast-changing business world (Hewlett, 2024; Bates & Weighart 2015). The research talks about presence as a skill that includes things like how you talk how much people trust you how you handle emotions how flexible you are and how you act with ethics. The way executive presence changes is like the way companies now expect their leaders to be real, emotional flexible, ethical and welcoming along with being good at their job.

The research shows that executive presence can be built through learning, real experience being guided by others getting advice and thinking about what you do. This is especially important for people who are just starting their careers and learning who they are as professionals. If students learn about presence as part of their studies they can get better at talking making choices working with others and being more confident before they start their jobs.

This review also says that management education is very important for developing presence (Long, 2011; Dalavai, 2019). Even though MBA programs give students an understanding of theories they should also focus more on developing how people act and lead. Experiences like talking about business cases giving speeches doing internships playing business games taking part in leadership classes and working with people in the business world gives students a chance to use what they learn in school in life. These experiences help them get ready to lead and deal with problems at work.

Another thing found in the research is that what companies want from leaders has changed a lot in the ten years. Companies now value leaders who're kind welcoming, strong and real along with being good at their job (Hewlett, 2024). This change means that executive presence is not about being in charge or looking good but about being a skill that changes as work changes. So schools should keep checking and changing their leadership programs to match these needs.

The research gap that was found gives a chance for teachers and researchers to work more on leadership for MBA students. Focusing more on presence in school can help bridge the gap between what students learn and what they need to do at work helping them get ready, for leadership roles.

Research shows that executive presence goes hand in hand with solid management skills—it helps people communicate more clearly, earn trust, and adapt when work changes. Teaching executive presence in MBA programs really does help shape more confident leaders who can handle today’s challenges.

Recommendations

So, what can business schools do? First, they should treat executive presence like a real priority. It shouldn’t be just a side note or an optional workshop. MBA programs need to build it into their courses. Leadership classes, public speaking, and hands-on learning all help students grow their confidence, act professionally, and get better at working with different people (Dalavai, 2019; Bates & Weighart, 2015).

Next, schools should give students more chances to put these skills to the test. Presentations, business simulations, talking through real-world cases, internships—all of these bridge what students learn with what business actually looks like. These experiences build critical skills like clear communication, smart decision-making, and leadership (Long, 2011).

After that, mentoring is key. MBA programs should encourage students to seek out guidance from faculty, business professionals, and alumni. Regular check-ins, feedback, and reflective activities help students understand their strengths, work through problems, and keep building confidence.

Students themselves play a big part too. MBA candidates should take charge of developing their executive presence—work on communication, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, adaptability, and cross-cultural teamwork. Stepping into leadership roles, joining student organizations, networking, and volunteering all make a difference.

Finally, we need more research on how to actually measure and develop executive presence in management students. Business schools can use things like leadership simulations, speaking assessments, feedback from peers, and real business projects to see how students grow as leaders.

Conclusion

Executive presence isn’t just another buzzword—it’s a crucial skill that sits right alongside everything else you learn in an MBA. The research makes it clear: executive presence covers communication, confidence, trust, emotional intelligence, authenticity, adaptability, ethical behavior, and collaboration. It’s not some trait you’re born with; you build it through learning, practice, feedback, and strong leadership development (Hewlett et al., 2012; Bates & Weighart, 2015).

As jobs get faster-paced and more demanding, executive presence is only becoming more important. Sure, MBA programs teach analysis and technical know-how—but they also need to give students the skills to lead with presence and trust. Putting executive presence at the heart of

MBA studies, with real experiences and networking, helps graduates step confidently into the roles companies are hiring for.

Right now, we don't know enough about how executive presence actually develops for MBA students, and that's a gap worth closing. Better research can shape better leadership education and help future leaders stand out, lead well, and build strong careers (Dalavai, 2019; Hewlett, 2024). Teaching and nurturing executive presence early on makes a real difference—it helps MBAs land jobs, lead teams, and grow their careers.

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