

APPLYING GROUP PERSPECTIVES:
STUDENT BEHAVIOR CHANGE RESULTING FROM A CO-CURRICULAR
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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Applying Group Perspectives: Student Behavior Change Resulting

From A Co-Curricular Leadership Development Program

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ABSTRACT

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This descriptive study explored undergraduate student application of leadership concepts and corresponding change in leadership behavior resulting from participation in a co-curricular leadership development program. Students who completed workshops related to effective group leadership contributed in focus group discussions regarding their application of learned skills. Students discussed applying knowledge of leadership concepts across the scope of their lives, both in and outside the classroom. This indicated a change in leadership behavior. Concepts applied emerged in five major themes: (a) addressing and managing conflict, (b) facilitating small groups, (c) appreciating and valuing diversity, (d) utilizing collaboration, and (e) accepting shared leadership. Two minor themes also emerged related to defining power and privilege and living with congruence. Implications for practice and suggestions for future research were also addressed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Developing Leaders	1
Evidence of Success.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Rationale for the Study	5
Definition of Terms	7
Organization of the Study	8
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	10
Student Learning Context	10
Learning Reconsidered	10
Leadership Reconsidered.....	11
Industrial vs. Post-Industrial Leadership	13
LeadNow®.....	13
Summary.....	21
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	23
Statement of the Problem.....	23
Methodology and Design.....	23
Sample	25
Procedures.....	27

Data Collection	30
Data Analysis.....	30
Validity	32
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS	35
Application of Leadership Concepts.....	35
Major and Minor Themes	37
Summary.....	50
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS	51
Summary of Findings.....	51
Major Themes	52
Minor Themes.....	57
Theme Connections	58
Learning Outcomes.....	59
Limitations of the Study	60
Implications for Practice.....	62
Suggestions for Future Research	64
Final Conclusion	65
REFERENCES	67
APPENDIX A. FOCUS GROUP HANDOUT.....	72

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Coded Data Segments Referring to Specific Application of Leadership Concepts.....	37
2. All Coded Data Segments (General and Specific Application) Referencing Themes	38
3. General Coded Data Segments Referencing Themes	38
4. Specific Application Coded Data Segments Referencing Themes.....	39

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

We live in a world barraged by challenge and complexity. The presence of complicated social and political issues calls for creative solutions orchestrated by competent leaders. “Our rapidly changing society desperately needs skilled leaders who are able to address complex issues, build bridges, and heal divisions.” (A. W. Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 31). Colleges and universities, as entities preparing young adults for the workforce, are uniquely positioned to develop and produce such leaders (A. W. Astin & Astin, 2000). Cleveland (1980), (as cited in Bass 2008, p. 1059) argued that “equipping minds for leadership ought to be what’s higher about higher education.” Institutions have been encouraged by research claiming leadership can be taught and learned (Brungardt, Gould, Moore & Potts, 1997; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Posner & Kouzes, 1996; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999) and that the potential for leadership exists in every student (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001).

Developing Leaders

In a combined response to both the needs of employers and the results of the research, colleges and universities across the country have increased their offerings of leadership courses, trainings, programs, and experiences through both curricular and co-curricular components (Riggio, Ciulla & Sorenson, 2003 as cited in Spralls, Garver, Divine & Trotz, 2010). At Concordia College, a small, private, faith-based, liberal arts institution in Moorhead, Minnesota, student affairs professionals created and implemented a comprehensive co-curricular leadership program entitled, LeadNow[®].

The LeadNow[®] program is grounded by three elements central to college operations and vision. These elements include: (a) the Concordia College mission, “To influence the

affairs of the world by sending into society thoughtful and informed men and women dedicated to the Christian life” (Concordia College, n.d., “*Concordia College’s Mission*”, para. 2); (b) the theme of the core curriculum, “to be responsibly engaged in the world” (Concordia College, n.d., “*The Liberal Arts Core Curriculum at Concordia*”, para. 1); and (c) one of the five major initiatives for the college’s 2005-2010 strategic plan which calls for Concordia “...to develop leaders of uncommon accomplishment and uncommon service to church and society” (Concordia College, n.d., “*The Five Initiatives*”, para. 2). Students participating in the LeadNow^r program take part in a variety of workshops and service experiences. By completing these requirements, students are able to earn three successive leadership certifications: (a) Personal Perspectives, (b) Group Perspectives, and (c) Global Perspectives.

Evidence of Success

Leadership programs in colleges and universities across the country have documented numerous benefits for participating students. These include an increase in specific leadership skills such as goal setting, decision-making, conflict resolution skills, promoting understanding in diversity, and developing leadership in others (Cress et. al., 2001) as well as building self-confidence in their leadership abilities (Brungardt & Crawford, 1996). In a study of 31 different leadership programs Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (1999) found that participating students:

...indicated increased sense of social/civic/political awareness, increased commitment to service and volunteerism, improved communication skills, a higher sense of personal and social responsibility, increased sense of social/civic/political efficacy, improved self esteem, improved problem solving ability, increased

social/civic/political activity, increased sense of being galvanized for action, increased desire for change, improved ability to vision, improved ability to be focused, improved conflict resolution skills, improved likelihood of sharing power, and improved interaction with faculty. (p. 56)

Thus, research indicated leadership programs on college campuses are teaching students valuable skills and the students are learning these skills.

The LeadNow[®] program coordinators found students are learning leadership skills according to identified outcomes (Almlie, 2010). These findings are primarily based on three assessment components. First, upon completing the workshops and service experiences for each certification, students meet one on one with a faculty member, trained in a one-time workshop facilitated by LeadNow[®] program staff, who conducts a guided interview focused around the learning outcomes related to that certification. Upon completion of this interview, the faculty member fills out a *recommendation and suggestions form*. This form includes a listing of all the learning outcomes associated with that certification level. The faculty member ranks the student according to their understanding of each learning outcome on a scale ranging from 1 (*no understanding*) to 5 (*exceptional understanding*). The form also includes a section for faculty members to write comments regarding strengths, areas for continued growth, and general feedback. This form also serves as an assessment tool for the certification. Analysis of the completed recommendation forms indicated students are learning in accordance with the designated outcomes (Buslig, 2009; Almlie, 2010). Secondly, in 2009 Concordia received a small grant from the private C.Charles Jackson Foundation. This grant allowed for further analysis of the faculty interviews. Ten of the interviews were recorded and then

subsequently transcribed. Analysis of this data revealed that students are learning according to the desired outcomes (Buslig, 2009). Finally, also in 2009, Concordia College participated in the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), a national survey of leadership development among college students. Data from this survey revealed that students participating in LeadNow[®] reported learning about leadership development in a manner consistent with the desired outcomes. Additionally, the MSL data indicated that as involvement with the LeadNow[®] program increases, so does students' level of their perceived learning (Sethre-Hofstad, Brennan, McGuire, Schaible & Wittwer, 2009).

D. L Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) claimed that when learning is assessed as part of an evaluative process, it indicates "the extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skill as a result of attending the program" (p. 22). However, learning alone does not indicate application of skills learned or a change in leadership behavior. D.L. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) consider behavior change to be a subsequent level of evaluation, after learning has taken place. Thus, although assessment of students participating in the LeadNow[®] program indicated student learning has occurred, currently, there is no evidence that students have applied learned skills or changed their behavior as a result of their participation.

Statement of the Problem

Through a number of assessments, it was determined that students participating in LeadNow[®] are learning in accordance with the desired program outcomes. However, an assessment has not been conducted to determine student application of leadership skills and resulting behavior change. Therefore, the questions remained as to whether students are applying skills learned and if so, where are they applying their knowledge of these skills.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine students' application of leadership concepts and corresponding change in leadership behavior after attending LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives sessions at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota.

Research questions.

1. Are students applying knowledge of leadership concepts as defined in learning outcomes from the leadership program?
2. In what situations are students applying their knowledge of concepts learned in the leadership program?

Rationale for the Study

Students participating in the LeadNow[®] program at Concordia College are learning about leadership as defined in the program learning outcomes. If students are to truly "...influence the affairs of the world..." (Concordia College, n.d., "*Concordia College's Mission*", para. 2) as the mission statement suggests, they will need to do more than acquire leadership knowledge. They must turn knowledge into action and utilize the skills they have learned. To date, a study has not been conducted to determine whether or not students participating in the LeadNow[®] program have applied what they have learned, and demonstrated any type of leadership behavior change.

In addition to the question of whether or not students are applying leadership concepts learned, is the question of where this application may be taking place. For students, this transfer of knowledge occurs in the "active context" of their daily lives (Keeling, 2004). A. W. Astin and Astin (2000) asserted:

Most full-time college students spend a significant amount of their time attending classes and carrying out class assignments...students also spend substantial amounts of time working, socializing, performing volunteer work, engaging in team sports, or participating in various types of student organizations. What students often fail to realize is that such activities almost always provide an opportunity to exercise leadership. (p. 18)

Students' lives naturally provide multiple scenarios where the application of leadership concepts could potentially transpire. By answering the question of how and where LeadNow[®] participants are applying leadership skills learned, LeadNow[®] program facilitators will be able to improve curriculum. In addition, this knowledge will add to current literature that has determined leadership can be learned, but has not indicated how and where it is applied (Brungardt, Gould, Moore & Potts, 1997; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kuh, 1995; Posner & Kouzes, 1996; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999).

Group Perspectives

As stated previously, the LeadNow[®] program consists of three levels of certification, each with specific workshops, service experiences and learning outcomes. Prior to beginning this study, Concordia College administration considered each of the certifications, their current participation numbers, the assessments that had been completed, and any future plans (Lyons Hanson, March 2, 2010, personal conversation). After discussing each of these factors, the decision was made to focus this study on the second level of LeadNow[®] certification, Group Perspectives. In addition to narrowing the study to focus on one area, current strategic LeadNow[®] program goals are related to expanding and improving the Group Perspectives certification, thus providing rationale to study this

section of the LeadNow[®] program. The structure of the first certification, Personal Perspectives will be changing in the near future in order to correlate with overall college curriculum changes, so studying student application of learning based on this certification would be better suited for a future date after these changes have taken place. The third certification, Global Perspectives, has a small number of participants and would not provide a large enough sample pool.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the course of this study:

LeadNow[®]: A comprehensive leadership development program for all students at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. The program was developed by student affairs professionals at the college and the trademark has been registered.

Leader Mentor: A trained faculty or staff member who meets one-on-one with a student as the culminating requirement to earn each LeadNow[®] certification. The Leader Mentor conducts a guided discussion to assist the student in reflecting on the learning that occurred. After the discussion, the Leader Mentor will submit a brief recommendation and suggestions form for that student to the LeadNow[®] program staff. Students will meet with the same Leader Mentor as they complete each certification.

Personal Perspectives: The first certification students can earn in the LeadNow[®] program. This certification focuses on the student as an individual and how they are alike and different than others.

Group Perspectives: The second certification students can earn in the LeadNow[®] program. This certification focuses on the skills needed to be an effective leader or member of a group.

Global Perspectives: The third and final certification students can earn in the LeadNow[®] program. This certification focuses on the skills needed to think strategically and create change in the broader community.

Session: A workshop in the LeadNow[®] program focusing on a specific leadership topic.

Data segment: A response from study participants relating to a particular topic. Each data segment was made up of several words or one or more sentences.

Group Perspectives Learning Outcomes: The LeadNow[®] Group Perspectives certification contains seven key learning outcomes (Almlie, 2010) as referred to by the first research question. Those learning outcomes are:

- Realize that consciousness of self is necessary in order to lead effectively within a group
- Clearly define non-negotiable personal values
- Recognize conflict within a group as beneficial and necessary
- Identify collaborative groups as those in which all members contribute in meaningful ways
- Utilize elements of effective group facilitation
- Define the concepts of power and privilege
- Achieve personal growth through self reflection based on experiences

Organization of the Study

In order to provide complete description and background for the study, the next chapter will include a review of current literature and research surrounding college student leadership development as well as an overview of the program and information about current practice. Chapter 3 will detail the methodology and design used in the study

including an explanation of the purposeful sampling, data collection through focus groups, and data analysis processes. Chapter 4 will describe the study results and analysis of findings and Chapter 5 summarizes the study with a discussion of the results, implications of findings, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review provides context and background for the LeadNow[®] program. An explanation will be given for the context of student learning within institutions of higher education, followed by a discussion of the industrial and post-industrial leadership paradigms and key studies verifying leadership can be taught. Next, a summary of the LeadNow[®] program will be provided including an outline of the corresponding theoretical components, program values, and a brief overview of logistics for student participation.

Student Learning Context

Kuh (1993, 1995) established that student learning occurs both inside and outside of the academic classroom. Kuh and his team of researchers interviewed college seniors from twelve institutions. The interviewers asked questions about significant learning experiences and personal changes that occurred in the students' lives throughout college. "Students found it difficult to bifurcate their college experience into two separate categories of learning; that is, one linked to experiences outside the classroom and the other a function of the formal curriculum" (Kuh, 1993, p. 279). Kuh (1995) concluded, "although knowledge is acquired primarily through the formal academic program, most participants in this study viewed their life outside the classroom as the 'real world' laboratory" (p. 145). He determined that "out-of-class experiences influence student learning and personal development" (p. 124).

Learning Reconsidered

With the realization that learning occurs outside of the classroom, student affairs professionals created two landmark documents, *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006). These documents redefined learning as "a

comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates *academic learning* and *student development*” (Keeling, 2004, p. 4). This definition indicated, “such an approach to teaching and learning must include the full scope of a student’s life. It cannot be accomplished in the classroom alone – or out of the classroom alone” (Keeling, 2004, p. 11). The documents called for student affairs professionals to “see themselves as educators who possess the knowledge and skills necessary to design, implement, and assess learner-centered approaches in collaboration with faculty and students” (Keeling, 2004, p. 25). Furthermore, as student affairs professionals design, implement, and assess programs in accordance with this approach, they must ensure intentionality with a link to the mission and goals of the institution, clear learning outcomes, and a plan to assess those outcomes (Keeling, 2006).

Leadership Reconsidered

In an evaluation of twenty-two leadership programs in colleges and universities across the country, Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (1999) found evidence to support the hypothesis that college students are able to learn leadership. The programs evaluated were among 31 organizations to receive grant funding from the W.K. Kellogg foundation for the purpose of leadership development. The evaluation utilized eight data collection strategies: (a) a panel of experts to review each program, (b) interviews with program directors, (c) a review of program documentation, (d) the creation of a relational database and corresponding information survey to classify information from all programs, (e) site visits, (f) a grantee networking conference where a list of best practices was created, (g) a pre- and post-experience survey of student participants to collect quantitative data, and (h) a long-term impact analysis in collaboration with the University of California – Higher

Education Research Institute's (HERI) college student assessment. After considering all data collected, it was determined that "college students who participate in leadership education and training programs do develop knowledge, skills and values that are consistent with the objectives of these programs" (p. 63).

Further research on this topic emerged in the form of a quantitative study conducted by Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt (2001), which assessed the effect of formalized leadership development training on college students. The study included 875 students from across 10 colleges and universities. Of those students, approximately 49% included in the study self-identified as participating in leadership development programs and the other 51% self-identified as non-participants. The study was conducted longitudinally over a period of four years in which students were surveyed during their first-year and subsequently during their senior year of college.

It was found that students who self-identified as participating in leadership development programs were more likely to report growth in "commitment to civic responsibility, conflict resolution skills, ability to plan and implement programs and activities, and willingness to take risks" (p. 18) as well as an interest in developing the leadership skills of others. Researchers were confident that "the leadership program made a direct impact on student development" (p. 22) and that "all students who involve themselves in leadership training and education can increase their skills and knowledge" (p. 23). Further, "leadership potential exists in every student and that colleges and universities can develop this potential through leadership programs and activities" (p. 23). Although the learning of leadership skills was determined to be a viable result of participation, the researchers did not study the application of these skills.

A. W. Astin and Astin (2000) placed the responsibility of developing future leaders with institutions of higher learning. They defined leadership as “a process that is ultimately concerned with fostering change” (p. 8) and leaders as the change agents. In order to create this change, leadership must be a “group process which is predicated on group values such as collaboration and shared purpose” (p. 18). As leadership skills can be learned and developed, A. W. Astin and Astin (2000) identify the college experience as rich with opportunities for student growth in leadership throughout the curricular and co-curricular domains.

Industrial vs. Post-Industrial Leadership

Over the past several decades, there has been a paradigm shift surrounding the concept of effective leadership (Brungardt, Gould, Moore, & Potts, 1997; Komives, Lucas, McMahon, 2007; Rost, 1993; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). The older, *industrial* perspective defined leadership by power and position. It is characterized by a hierarchical structure of leaders and followers and generally succumbs to the belief that certain individuals are destined for leadership based on traits, personality, and charisma. In contrast, the newer *post-industrial* perspective describes leadership as a process that is collaborative and relational. Power is shared and the ultimate goal is to pursue and create change (Rost, 1993).

LeadNow[®]

Program framework

The understanding that learning occurs throughout the college experience, the evidence that leadership can be taught, and the knowledge of post-industrial leadership concepts provided initial rationale for the development of the co-curricular LeadNow[®]

program. As student affairs staff began to envision the creation of the LeadNow[®] program, they also turned to the college's mission statement, the college's Goals for Liberal Learning (Concordia College, 2004), and the Student Affairs Division Mission and Goals (Concordia College, 2007) which all either imply or overtly state the importance of developing Concordia College students as leaders. Three models of leadership development were also integrated to create the general program framework: The social change model of leadership development (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996), the leadership identity development model (Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mainella, and Osteen, 2005), and the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993). After assimilating all of these factors, staff wrote overall LeadNow[®] program values, followed by learning outcomes and three incremental certifications: Personal Perspectives, Group Perspectives, and Global Perspectives.

Concordia College mission statement

The mission of Concordia College, "...to influence..." etc. (Concordia College, *Concordia College's Mission*, n.d. para. 2) identifies three core themes that ground the LeadNow[®] program. The first is "...to influence the affairs of the world..." Post-industrial definitions of leadership point to influence, relationships, and the intention of creating change in the world as the components of leadership (Rost, 1993). The second theme of "...thoughtful and informed men and women..." refers to the idea of leaders as informed citizens (HERI, 1996). The third theme, "... dedicated to the Christian life..." incorporates the concept that leadership is grounded in values and ethical practice (HERI, 1996).

Social Change Model of Leadership Development

The social change model of leadership development (HERI, 1996) originated from an effort between colleagues in multiple institutions throughout the country. The model was developed specifically for the college student population and assumes that leadership is driven by the desire to create change. It also assumes that developing core values is critical to the leadership development process. These values are categorized into three distinct areas: individual, group, and society. Each of these value areas then are broken down into seven values, informally called the “7 C’s”. The area of individual values includes development in *consciousness of self*, *commitment*, and *congruence*. The area of group values includes learning *common purpose*, *controversy with civility*, and *collaboration*. The area of community/societal values includes *citizenship*. The model suggests that as development occurs within each of these areas, each area is influenced by and in turn influences the other two. The result of this development is the successful creation of positive change in the world.

The LeadNow[®] program uses the social change model of leadership development as the primary framework for the certification process. The first certification, Personal Perspectives, focuses on the area of individual values within the social change model of leadership development. Likewise, the second certification, Group Perspectives, focuses on the area of group values and the third certification, Global Perspectives, focuses on the area of community/societal values. Each certification in the LeadNow[®] program builds on the values found in the previous certification, pulling them all together in the Global Perspectives certification.

Leadership Identity Development Model

The leadership identity development model was developed in an effort to “understand the processes a person experiences in creating a leadership identity” (Komives et. al., 2005, p. 594). After conducting a qualitative study in which 13 diverse participants were interviewed to the point of saturation, researchers determined students develop their identity as leaders by progressing through six stages. Each stage begins with an active period and then proceeds into a time of reflective transition prior to progression into the next stage.

The first stage, labeled *Awareness*, is a recognition that leaders exist in the world. Students do not understand leadership and do not see themselves as leaders or as individuals with leadership potential. After this stage, students progress to a time of *Exploration/Engagement* in which they will try different involvement experiences, gradually taking on small amounts of responsibility. The LeadNow[®] program aligns the first certification, Personal Perspectives with these first two stages of development. In Personal Perspectives, participants are generally freshman and sophomore students who are building self-awareness and experimenting with involvement opportunities on campus. With the focus on self, Personal Perspectives is one manner in which students can begin this development of a leadership identity while at college.

In the third and fourth stages, *Leader Identified* and *Leadership Differentiated*, students identify themselves as leaders in relation to others. In the *Leader Identified* stage, a student will see him or herself as a leader in charge who takes full responsibility for group outcomes. Leaders are seen as people who hold titles and are elected or appointed to their positions. It is not until the fourth stage, *Leadership Differentiated*, that students see

leadership as a process between people. Instead of someone who gives orders from the top down, those in positional leadership roles have “a commitment to engage in a way that invited participation and shared responsibility” (Komives et. al., 2005, p. 606). These two stages naturally correspond to the second LeadNow[®] certification, Group Perspectives, as the sessions and experiences aim to move students from understanding group leadership as positional to understanding it as a collaborative shared responsibility.

The fifth and sixth stages in the leadership identity development model continue to turn the concept of a leadership identity outward to the greater community. In the fifth stage, *Generativity*, students become “actively committed to larger purposes and to the groups and individuals who sustained them” (Komives et. al., 2005, p. 607). They seek to identify a personal passion which is “explicitly connected to the beliefs and values they identified as important in their lives” (Komives et. al., 2005, p. 607). They also see themselves as responsible for encouraging and mentoring others to take on leadership roles. Then, in the sixth and final stage, *Integration/Synthesis*, students are confident in themselves as individuals who can exercise leadership from any place within an organization or group. They also see leadership as a lifelong process that requires learning and continuous improvement. The outward focus of community and vocational passion within these final two stages are integrated into the third and final LeadNow[®] certification, Global Perspectives.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) “posits a continuum of increasing sophistication in dealing with cultural difference, moving from ethnocentrism through stages of greater recognition and acceptance of difference” (p. 22).

This model also includes six developmental stages. The first three stages are considered to be ethnocentric in which an individual perceives the world according to his or her own cultural context. Bennett (1993) explains “ethnocentrism parallels ‘egocentrism,’ wherein an individual assumes that his or her existence is necessarily central to the reality perceived by all others” (p. 30). The stages associated with ethnocentrism are the denial, the defense, and the minimization of other cultures. The LeadNow® program integrates these three stages into the first two certifications, Personal Perspectives and Group Perspectives through the use of specific sessions, community service experiences with culturally different populations, and appropriate reflection. The final three stages: acceptance, adaptation, and integration, are characterized by Bennett (1993) as “ethnorelative.” Ethnorelativism assumes “cultures can only be understood relative to one another” (p. 46). The LeadNow® program touches on these stages in the program’s third certification, Global Perspectives.

Leadnow[®] program values

The values grounding the LeadNow[®] program incorporate key concepts from the post-industrial paradigm of leadership, the idea that leadership can be learned, the social change model of leadership development (HERI, 1996), the leadership identity development model (Komives et. al., 2005), and the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993). They also relate intentionally to the Concordia College Mission statement (Concordia College, n.d., *Concordia College’s Mission*). The five core values central to the LeadNow[®] program are as follows (Concordia College, n.d., *LeadNow[®] Program Background*):

Value 1: Every person has a unique capacity for leadership. If leadership can be learned (Brungardt, Gould, Moore, & Potts, 1997; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt, 1999), then individuals can learn leadership. This value is also backed by the social change model assumption that leadership is accessible to all (HERI, 1996) and the leadership identity development model which suggests all students can develop their own leadership identity (Komives et. al., 2005). The LeadNow[®] program employs this value by allowing any student to participate by their own choice. Participation is not limited to students who are selected, appointed, or elected.

Value 2: Leadership is both positional and non-positional. This value reflects the post-industrial paradigm that leadership does not need to be hierarchical in nature (Rost, 1993). LeadNow[®] recognizes that leaders can hold formal positions, but also understands leadership can come from anywhere within an organization or group (Komives et. al., 2005). Because leaders are people who foster change, “leaders, then, are not necessarily those who merely hold formal ‘leadership’ positions; on the contrary, all people are potential leaders” (A. W. Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 8).

Value 3: Leadership is collaborative and service-oriented. The post-industrial paradigm that leadership is collaborative (Rost, 1993) is reflected in this statement. Also, “the concepts of ‘leadership’ and ‘leader’ imply that there are other people involved, leadership is, by definition, a collective or group process” (A. W. Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 8). The social change model references the service-oriented portion of this value through the idea of citizenship (HERI, 1996). Bonnet (2009) described citizenship within the Social Change Model as centered “on active community participation as a result of a sense of responsibility to the communities in which people live” (p. 150). In addition, the Concordia

College mission statement, calls for a dedication to the Christian life (Concordia College, n.d., *Concordia College's Mission*), interpreted as an expectation that graduates will embody the Christian values of service to others.

Value 4: Leaders effect change and work for the common good. As A. W. Astin and Astin (2000) stated, LeadNow[®] succumbs to the notion that “Leadership is a process that is ultimately concerned with fostering change” (p. 8). Change implies a reason for leadership. “Change is the ‘hub’ of the Social Change Model and focuses on making a better world and a better society for self and others” (HERI, 1996, p. 21). The notion of change and working for the common good is again implied in Concordia’s mission statement, “...to influence the affairs of the world...” (Concordia College, n.d., *Concordia College's Mission Statement*) as “influence” implies an impact that makes a difference.

Value 5: Leadership requires intercultural competence. Concordia College’s mission statement points to influencing “the affairs of the world” (Concordia College, n.d., *Concordia College's Mission Statement*). Because “the world” is made up of different cultures, part of influencing the world incorporates an understanding of these cultures. For this reason, the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) is also woven into the structure and values of the LeadNow[®] program to build the intercultural competence of students.

Participation in LeadNow[®]

Involvement in the LeadNow[®] program is varied in time commitment and included activities. Because the program is co-curricular, student participation is voluntary. Students decide not only whether or not to participate, but also to what extent. A student could choose to participate in one or two sessions, to complete the requirements for one of the

certifications, or to continue through all three certifications. Each certification includes a series of 90-minute sessions, experiential learning through community service or project work, and culminates in a discussion with a leader mentor (Concordia College, n.d., *Certification Requirements*). The program recognizes that leadership develops over time (Posner, 2009) and therefore is purposefully designed to allow for completion throughout the college student experience. Completion of any certification takes no less than one academic year. The certification requirements include many of the hallmarks of effective leadership development programs (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999) such as a wide range of activities (workshops, service-learning, and mentor relationships) and student involvement in running the programs (student committee, student administrative staff, and student volunteers). Also, each session, service experience, project, and leader mentor discussion was developed in accordance with defined learning outcomes (Almlie, 2010).

Summary

With documented evidence that student learning happens throughout the college experience (Kuh, 1993, 1995) and the subsequent redefinition of learning as transformative across the curriculum (Keeling, 2004, 2006), student affairs professionals were empowered to take responsibility for intentional student learning experiences outside of the classroom. When it was determined students can learn leadership skills by participating in leadership development programming (Cress et. al., 2001; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999), institutions of higher education were called to take responsibility for developing future leaders (A.W. Astin & Astin, 2000). By integrating the understanding of a collaborative post-industrial paradigm of leadership, college mission statement and goals, and three models of leadership development (Concordia College, n.d., *LeadNow[®] Program*

Background), student affairs staff created the LeadNow® program. Students participate in this co-curricular program as their schedule allows. They can attend a few sessions or opt to earn up to three successive leadership certifications. It has been determined that students are learning leadership in programs such as LeadNow[®], however research that explores student application of leadership concepts and behavior change as a result of their participation in such programs is currently non-existent.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the procedures used in this descriptive research study. Included in this chapter are: explanation of the methodology and design, details of the study's purposeful sampling, summary of data collection and data analysis procedures, and description of strategies used to ensure validity.

Statement of the Problem

Through a number of assessments, it was determined that students participating in LeadNow[®] are learning in accordance with the desired program outcomes. However, an assessment has not been conducted to determine student application of leadership skills and resulting behavior change. Therefore, the questions remained as to whether students are applying skills learned and if so, where are they applying their knowledge of these skills.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore students' application of leadership concepts and corresponding change in leadership behavior after attending LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives sessions at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota.

Research questions.

1. Are students applying knowledge of leadership concepts as defined in learning outcomes from the leadership program?
2. In what situations are students applying their knowledge of concepts learned in the leadership program?

Methodology and Design

Because the purpose of this study was to explore students' application of leadership concepts and corresponding change in leadership behavior, descriptive methodology was

utilized. This approach attempted to “explore and understand a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2005, p. 134) by asking participants to share their ideas openly and with minimal structure. This allows for a deeper exploration of the subject, where participants’ individual views are expressed. In contrast, the quantitative approach seeks to measure specific trends through the use of fixed structures and statistical analysis (Creswell, 2005).

This approach would be too limiting for such an exploratory study. Consider the following:

Some survey results consist primarily of numbers because the respondent is requested to select a number on a scale that represents his or her point of view. The number then becomes a symbol of reality and the basis of analysis. The researcher might not know if the respondent really understood the question or if the available response choices were applicable or appropriate to the individual. In some situations, the respondent might find that none of the response choices is exactly on target or that the choices apply only in certain situations. When these situations occur, the reliability of the results are jeopardized. (Krueger, 1988, p. 108)

When speaking with Concordia College administration, it became clear that they desired to understand more about student application of program learning than a multiple-choice survey or quantitative approach would offer (Lyons Hanson, November 22, 2010, personal conversation). A descriptive design offered the depth of information desired.

In order to collect rich, in-depth information, a focus group design was used. The focus groups allowed for “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger, 1988, p. 18). It was a socially-oriented process in which group members influenced each other, and could build off one another’s statements, thus leading to depth of data. In addition, focus

groups offered the benefit of providing clarity of thought because the moderator was able to probe for further information as needed (Krueger, 1988).

Sample

Thirty-four students were invited to participate in the study via purposeful sampling techniques. In an effort to include participants who had the knowledge needed to apply concepts learned or, in other words, “information rich” participants (Patton, 1990 as cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 204), only students who had completed all six of the Group Perspectives sessions prior to January 18, 2011, were considered. These sessions included: (a) Radiate-An Introduction to Group Perspectives, (b) Small Group Facilitation, (c) Shared Leadership & Collaboration, (d) The Necessity of Conflict, (e) Living with Congruence, and (f) Power and Privilege. As of the January 18, 2011 deadline, 281 students had completed at least one of these sessions. Thirty-four students (12%) had completed all six of the sessions and thus, were eligible to participate in the study.

On January 20, 2011, approximately two weeks prior to the first focus group, students were sent an e-mail that explained the purpose of the study and invited them to participate. The e-mail included a link to a short online form. Students were asked to fill out this form within three days, to indicate their interest in participating. The form asked for their contact information and the date(s) they were available to attend a focus group. In addition, the form asked the students to list their major, minor, and co-curricular activities. All of the information on the form was designed to assist the researcher in forming effective groups.

According to Krueger (1988), focus groups are most effective when they are “composed of people who are similar to one another” (p. 28). Participants in groups that

are similar are likely to engage more and be more cooperative (Creswell, 2005). Because the study focuses on participants in a co-curricular program at Concordia College where involvement is voluntary, no matter which students participated in a group, all of the groups would contain similar students with plenty of commonalities.

Even though similarities in focus groups can be positive, there is also danger when participants know each other well. Krueger (1988) states that a “focus group is ideally composed of strangers” (p. 25). Those who do not know each other often reveal more about themselves. Also, a group that knows each other well may respond in a way that is influenced by “past, present, or the possibility of future interaction with other group members” (Krueger, 1988, p. 29). In the case of this study, which took place on a small college campus and involved students who were all taking part in the same co-curricular program, LeadNow[®], it was challenging to create groups of students who were, and who will remain, strangers. In order to minimize this interaction bias, an effort was made to create diverse groups based on the information provided in the online interest form related to majors and co-curricular involvement.

Six students responded to the initial e-mail invitation by filling out the interest form. A second e-mail was sent three days later to the members of the sample who had not responded, asking them to please consider participating. This second request yielded an additional six responses. Three days later, a final e-mail was sent to the remaining members of the sample again asking them to participate in the study. Another three students responded. This brought the total participants to 15 students or 44% of the sample. The researcher reviewed the interest forms and placed the students in to four different focus groups based on their availability as well as their majors and co-curricular involvement. An

effort was made for the groups to be balanced in number, so each group contained three or four participants.

Next, a confirmation e-mail was sent to all 15 students indicating their assigned focus group date and location. The e-mail also included a listing of the questions that would be asked and a PDF attachment containing brief overviews of each of the six Group Perspectives sessions they had attended (Appendix A). Because students in the LeadNow^x program attend sessions as their schedules permit, some complete requirements faster than others. Therefore, it was likely that several participants had not attended at least one of the sessions for quite some time. The attachment provided a brief description of the session and the activities that were included, without detailing the learning outcomes.

Only one of the 15 students who responded was unable to attend a focus group due to scheduling conflicts. Actual participants in the focus groups included 14 students. Of these students, eight were seniors, five were juniors, and two were sophomores. There were no first-year students included. The participants included 13 females and one male student.

Procedures

Prior to inviting students to attend a focus group, IRB approval was gained from NDSU. While IRB documents were submitted at Concordia College as well, IRB chair at that college indicated in a personal conversation that because approval had been gained at NDSU, approval was given at Concordia College as well.

Four focus groups were scheduled on different evenings within the first two weeks of February. Two days prior to each scheduled focus group, participants were sent an email reminder. The reminder again included the date, time and location of each group, along

with a list of the questions that would be asked and the PDF attachment containing descriptions of the six Group Perspectives sessions (Appendix A).

Each focus group was conducted in a conference room at the Concordia College student center that was large enough to allow for comfortable discussion. When participants arrived, they were provided with pizza in exchange for their time and participation. They were also able to place their name in a drawing for a \$10 iTunes gift card. The drawing was held from all names at the conclusion of the discussion. A total of four gift cards, one per group, were given out to participants.

While they were enjoying dinner, the participants were given a copy of the informed consent document as well as the handout containing the brief description of the Group Perspectives sessions that had been originally attached to the previous e-mails. The researcher then followed a protocol form including an introductory welcome and thank you for participation, an explanation of the reason students were invited to participate, and the reasons for the study. The researcher reiterated that although the discussion would be recorded, names would not be attached to any of the written reports and so students could be assured of complete confidentiality. It was also stressed that all comments were welcome. The participants were also informed that the discussion would last approximately one hour. Then, participants were asked to read through the statement of informed consent and ask any questions they may have. After all questions were answered, they were asked to sign the statement of informed consent. The forms were then collected and signed by the researcher before the commencement of the discussion.

Each discussion was digitally recorded. In addition, a member of the Concordia College Student Leadership and Service department staff was present as an assistant and

took notes on a laptop computer. This allowed the researcher to focus on the conversation and also served as back-up data in the case of any technical difficulties with recording equipment.

Once each participant signed the statement of informed consent, the researcher started the recording device and followed the protocol by asking four key questions. The researcher used probes when necessary to elicit and clarify thoughtful responses from group members. The key questions were:

1. To begin, please tell us what groups you consider yourself to currently be part of?
2. How has your experience in LeadNow[®] Group Perspectives sessions influenced the way you practiced leadership? *Probe: Can you explain a specific situation where that happened?*
3. Take a moment to write down the skills you believe you developed as a result of participating in Group Perspectives sessions. Tell us about a time when you recently used at least one of those skills.
4. Think back to the last time you participated in a group that experienced some tension or conflict. How did you apply principles from Group Perspectives sessions to address that situation?

After all questions were asked, along with appropriate probes, the focus group discussion was considered complete. At this point, the recording device was stopped, the drawing for the gift card was conducted, and the participants were again thanked for their participation.

Data Collection

A total of four focus groups were conducted. Each group contained three to four student participants. Focus groups were to be conducted until the point of saturation was reached. In other words, the point at which new ideas ceased to be presented by the participants. Krueger (1988) advises that the point of saturation generally occurs after the facilitation of three to four groups. By the fourth focus group, it was obvious that the point of saturation had been reached. Student participants were no longer sharing new ideas or new input.

As mentioned previously, focus groups were digitally recorded by using an audio recording device. The recording from each group was subsequently transcribed in detail by the researcher. There was no need to use the back-up notes taken by the assistant during the discussions. Upon transcription, the names of each of the participants were removed. Each participant was given an alias for the sake of confidentiality. Data was stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office and in a password protected electronic file. Audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of this thesis.

Data Analysis

After transcription was complete, a combination of electronic and manual methods were used to code the data. Coding was completed by the researcher and two other Concordia College Student Leadership staff members by following a technique that eventually reduced many pages of text to several themes. The researcher trained the staff members in coding techniques as described by both Creswell (2005) and Foss and Waters (2003). Staff members were instructed to first read through the transcripts to get a sense of

the data as a whole, and then to read each transcript more carefully while considering the research questions:

Research questions

1. Are students applying knowledge of leadership concepts as defined in learning outcomes from the leadership program?
2. In what situations are students applying their knowledge of concepts learned in the leadership program?

Staff members were asked to look for items related to the research questions in each transcript, highlighting them in the text. Staff members were also asked to write the meaning of each highlighted item in the margin. The researcher originally followed the same procedure and utilized the same techniques. All three coded a duplicate copy of the same data. The coding on all three documents was then compared as a test for consistency. All topics that were coded consistently by at least two of the team members were considered a segment to be analyzed further. Thus, reducing the number of codes.

Next, the researcher loaded electronic copies of the data transcripts into NVivo8, a Microsoft® certified software published by QSR International. This software was not used to code the data itself, but instead to enter and organize coded data segments into the categories that emerged through the coding process. Once sorted, each category was printed and examined separately according to the questions, “What is this person saying about this category?” “What does it mean to them?” The researcher made notes in the margins in response to these questions. It was then determined that several of the categories could be combined, reducing them to seven theme areas. Five of these were major theme areas, meaning that participants talked about them with more frequency and depth than the

other two minor theme areas. The researcher then summarized each theme area according to the text segments and combined them all into one document.

Next, the summary document was presented to two additional staff members who frequently work with the LeadNow[®] program. The staff members were asked whether the findings seemed to be a logical representation of the LeadNow[®] student participants based on their personal experience. These staff members, as LeadNow[®] program experts agreed that the findings did indeed seem logical and plausible based on their interactions with student participants.

Finally, the summary document was presented to seven of the focus group participants as well as the assistant moderator who was present during the focus groups to check for accuracy. Each of these individuals were asked whether the themes were accurate, fair, and representative of the group. Participants responded positively to the data and determined the findings to be accurate, fair, and representative.

The researcher then compared each of the theme areas to existing theory as well as LeadNow[®] learning outcomes and program values to determine where overlap may or may not occur.

Validity

According to Krueger (1988), “focus groups are valid if they are used for a problem that is suitable for focus group inquiry” (p. 41). Because it was established earlier that a focus group would garner the most in-depth and informative data in accordance with the purpose of the study, some level of validity is assumed. However, additional validity issues were addressed utilizing several strategies.

In order to create the most effective questions, a thorough process was used as suggested by Krueger (1988). Brainstorming sessions were held with LeadNow® experts including the LeadNow® program coordinator, the Director of Student Leadership and Service who oversees the LeadNow® program, the Concordia College assessment director, and three undergraduate students employed by the LeadNow® program. After forming an exhaustive list of potential questions, the researcher identified those critical to the purpose of the study. Then, these questions, along with possible probes were returned to the group of LeadNow® experts for further review. These experts were asked to review the “logical and sequential flow of questions and the ability of probes to elicit the information desired” (Krueger, 1988, p. 67). The graduate advisor and committee were also asked to review the questions as outside experts. Only after review by all of these experts, and incorporating suggested changes, were the four questions utilized in the study determined.

The first focus group discussion was treated as a pilot test, per Krueger (1988). After this discussion was complete, the researcher reflected on the effectiveness of the questions and determined that they had been effective. No changes were made and the focus groups continued as originally planned.

As mentioned previously, members for each group were carefully selected in an effort to include a diverse group and avoid interaction bias as much as possible. This was done utilizing the online interest form prior to the focus group discussions. All efforts were made to form balanced groups. In all but one group the participants reported that they did not know all of their fellow group members.

Data analysis procedures were performed by a team that consisted of the researcher and two LeadNow® staff members. Each of these three individuals coded duplicate copies of the transcribed data. After initial coding, a coder consistency test (Richards, 2009) was conducted. The records were held side-by-side to determine whether or not coding was consistent between individuals. Only those codes that were found to be the same by at least two of the team members were included in the next step of analysis.

After seven theme areas were identified through further analysis, the researcher utilized both expert checking and member checking (Creswell, 2005). In this process, program experts were asked to review the results for plausibility. Then, focus group members were contacted and asked to read through the results to confirm fairness and accuracy. Seven of the members responded with a positive confirmation. The assistant moderator, the staff member who took notes throughout the focus group process, was also asked to check the results. All results that were interpreted as plausible based on expert feedback and fair by the group members were included in the study.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

This chapter details the findings of the study as related to the purpose of the study and research questions. The research questions are answered and an overview of the five major themes and two minor themes that emerged as a result of the study will be provided. As a reminder, the purpose of this study was to explore students' application of leadership concepts and corresponding change in leadership behavior after attending LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives sessions at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. The aim of the study was to find out if students were applying knowledge of leadership concepts as defined in learning outcomes from the leadership program and, if such application was occurring, in what situations?

Application of Leadership Concepts

In the process of coding, data segments were separated into two categories in effort to answer the research questions. The *general* category included segments that referenced learning but did not indicate a concrete application of the concept. Alternately, the segments that illustrated application of the leadership concept in a specific situation were placed in the *specific application* category. After placing all of the data segments into either the general or the specific application category, it was found that the segments were fairly evenly split between the two. Out of 177 data segments identified, 87 referred to general concepts without specific application and 90 referred to specific situations where an application of the learning took place. Thus, the data indicated that students are applying leadership concepts learned.

Students applied leadership concepts related to the following five of the seven Group Perspectives learning outcomes:

- Clearly define non-negotiable personal values
- Recognize conflict within a group as beneficial and necessary
- Identify collaborative groups as those in which all members contribute in meaningful ways
- Utilize elements of effective group facilitation
- Define the concepts of power and privilege

Students did not address concepts related to the remaining two Group Perspectives learning outcomes:

- Realize that consciousness of self is necessary in order to lead effectively within a group
- Achieve personal growth through self reflection based on experiences

For those leadership concepts that were applied to specific situations, the data segments detailed a variety of settings (Table 1). Most frequently, skills were applied in the context of student organizations, class groups assigned to complete a particular project together, and in residence life situations in which the student was serving as the resident assistant. Illustrations of all three of these situations were presented equally throughout the focus groups. Combined, these three situations accounted for over half of the examples provided. Additionally, students reported applying leadership concepts learned in their employment opportunities, including both paid and unpaid jobs and internships located both on and off campus. Students also provided examples of skills used within their family or friend groups, with roommates, and in athletic teams.

Table 1

Coded Data Segments Referring to Specific Application of Leadership Concepts

Situation	Segments	Percent
Student Organizations	24	27%
Class Work Groups	21	23%
Residence Life (Student as R.A.)	17	19%
Jobs/Internships	16	18%
Family/Friends	4	5%
Roommates	3	3%
Athletic Teams	2	2%
Interviews	2	2%
Life Decision Making	1	1%

Note. Percentages based on total number of coded data segments. n=90

Major and Minor Themes

Through the process of combining repetitive coded data segments, five major themes and two minor themes emerged as prominent throughout the focus group discussions. The five major themes identified as concepts applied by students were:

1. Addressing and managing conflict
2. Utilizing collaboration
3. Facilitating small groups
4. Appreciating and valuing diversity, and
5. Accepting shared leadership.

The minor themes were living with congruence and defining power and privilege. These themes emerged in instances of both general learning and specific application (Table 2).

Table 2

All Coded Data Segments (General and Specific Application) Referencing Themes

Themes	Segments	Percent
Addressing and managing conflict	44	25%
Utilizing collaboration	34	19%
Facilitating small groups	28	16%
Appreciating and valuing diversity	24	14%
Accepting shared leadership	21	12%
Living with congruence	11	6%
Defining power and privilege	9	5%
Unrelated segments ^a	6	3%

Note. Percentages based on total number of coded data segments. n=177

^aUnrelated segments were separate comments related to different leadership topics that did not match any of the themes

When data segments were separated into the two categories of *general learning* (Table 3) or *specific application* of learning (Table 4), the order of the themes mentioned most frequently varied only slightly. The five major themes still contained the majority of the data segments in each category followed by the two minor themes.

Table 3

General Coded Data Segments Referencing Themes

Themes	Segments	Percent
Utilizing collaboration	23	26%
Addressing and managing conflict	15	17%
Accepting shared leadership	13	15%
Appreciating and valuing diversity	11	13%
Facilitating small groups	11	13%
Living with congruence	7	8%
Defining power and privilege	2	2%
Unrelated segments ^a	5	6%

Note. Percentages based on total number of data segments coded in the general category (without reference to specific application). n=87

^aUnrelated segments were separate comments related to different leadership topics that did not match any of the themes

Table 4

Specific Application Coded Data Segments Referencing Themes

Themes	Segments	Percent
Addressing and managing conflict	29	32%
Facilitating small groups	17	19%
Appreciating and valuing diversity	13	15%
Utilizing collaboration	11	12%
Accepting shared leadership	8	9%
Defining power and privilege	7	8%
Living with congruence	4	4%
Unrelated segments ^a	1	1%

Note. Percentages based on total number of data segments coded in the specific application category. n=90

^aUnrelated segments were separate comments related to different leadership topics that did not match any of the themes

The five major themes related to three of the Group Perspectives learning outcomes: (a) recognize conflict within a group as beneficial and necessary, (b) utilize elements of effective communication and, (c) identify collaborative groups as those in which all members contribute in meaningful ways. The two minor themes related to two additional Group Perspectives learning outcomes: (a) define concepts of power and privilege and (b) clearly define non-negotiable values. Of the seven learning outcomes, two were either never specifically mentioned in the data or were mentioned so infrequently that they could not be linked to a specific theme. Those outcomes were: (a) realize that consciousness of self is necessary in order to lead effectively within a group and (b) achieve personal growth through self reflection based on experiences.

Major theme: Addressing and managing conflict

The theme of addressing and managing conflict was the most prominent throughout all of the focus group discussions. Thirty-two percent of the coded data segments referred to specific situations referenced conflict.

Students referred to a past fear of addressing conflict that had changed to an understanding that addressing conflict through direct communication is important and necessary, even when it is uncomfortable to do so. They credited their experiences in LeadNow[®] for this change. For example, Kendra (all names were changed for confidentiality), a senior, mentioned, "another huge skill I learned is managing conflict. I am like the most conflict avoidant person ever. I hate conflict." But then, when it came to a conflict about household chores with her six roommates, she recognized "the importance of communication and not ignoring the conflict." Kristi, a sophomore, stated: "Before LeadNow[®] ...I just thought of conflict as a bad thing. I just, I did not like conflict. I didn't like confronting situations with conflict, I just tried to avoid it at all costs." After her experiences with LeadNow[®], she shared her new insight regarding her role as an R.A. "...well, if we don't talk to each other about it, obviously you're not going to know about it and obviously you can't do anything to fix it and make things better and you both know that there's something going on."

Students also expressed an understanding that conflict results from natural differences between people. Regarding her role in a student organization, Maddie, a senior talked about conversations with other group members. "...our personalities might not mesh very well or our styles of doing things might not match and so it's understanding where they're coming from so that we can be helpful to each other." Jill, a junior, described viewing conflict as an

R.A., when conflict arises on her floor, “when we’re all disagreeing, understanding that, like, we all have different personalities.”

Students saw these natural differences between people’s perceptions and personalities as the reasons conflict was inevitable. They did not see conflict as negative or as a personal attack. Rather, they reported an understanding that others may approach conflict differently. This knowledge allowed them to step back and view the situation outside of their initial emotional reactions. Consider how Maddie talked about the differences in her view of conflict prior to her participation in LeadNow[®] as opposed to afterwards.

If you are leading with a team or a partner and you like have a conflict, you can still do your job effectively, but would your personal relationship still be the same after that conflict? For me, I would have said no, but now I would say yes. (Maddie, senior)

Amy, a senior, reports on how her understanding of conflict has changed to be less personal, “Even in my friend group I have to remember that things are not always said in the way in which I take them.” Or Meg, who stated,

...don’t be so offended if people are calling you out on something they think is wrong, it’s not that they don’t like you. It’s most likely that they just see it and they don’t know if they say it bluntly that it’s going to hurt your feelings.

As a demonstration of thinking about conflict in a more logical way, Betsy, a sophomore, reported this experience from a class group,

just kind-of taking a step back from the situation and being able to look at it rationally and just, you know, saying ‘o.k., you know if this wasn’t us, if this wasn’t the group, how would someone handle it to get our desired results?’

Due to this new understanding regarding conflict, students reported taking the lead to initiate the conversation that could ultimately result in a solution. Because they recognized the importance in hearing from all sides due to natural differences, they talked about playing the role of facilitator to ensure that all were able to contribute. Kendra talked about initiating a conversation with her roommates by finding a time when all of them could be around the same table. Sally, a senior, talked about one student organization where, “the discussions can become quite heated and so in my role it was just to make sure everybody has the ability to talk and that everybody feels they could speak up.”

Overall, students reported an enhanced understanding of the importance of addressing and managing conflict. The concept of addressing and managing conflict as it relates to leadership is defined in the following LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives learning outcome, “recognize conflict within a group as beneficial and necessary.” Specific situations referenced in association with the theme of addressing and managing conflict included class groups, R.A. in residence life, student organizations, employment experiences, roommates, friends and family.

Major theme: Facilitating small groups

Students also spoke frequently of applying skills to facilitate small groups, the second major theme to emerge in the study. Students referred to facilitation in regards to both recognizing group processes as well as effectively facilitating group discussions. They considered both of these interpretations of facilitation to be important when working with a group.

Regarding group processes, students referred to Tuckman’s four stage model (1965), (as cited in B. M. Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 762) and were able to identify the stages as a

normal pattern for group functioning. As she reflected on a class group, Jill, a junior, referred to "...norming and forming, all the stages and everything, like remembering that and knowing that the stages we were going through in a group were normal." Betsy, also a junior, noted that she had "...seen that storming, norming, like I've kind-of seen it working" in her class group. Tanya, a senior, recognized the following regarding her class group, "I am actually in a group right now that we are in the storming phase. It's very time consuming. So, it's not fun. So, I'm really trying to use the skills that I've learned." However, Tanya was the only student to mention using skills learned to assist a specific group in a particular stage. Other students who talked about moving groups through stages, as opposed to simply recognizing the existence of group stages, talked in generalities.

Students recognized the need to prepare for group meetings in advance but only talked about applying this in one instance. Jack, the one male participant and a senior, talked about remembering "everything that should happen in a meeting with your group" but did not mention a specific example. Kendra talked about her LeadNow[®] experience as helping her with the need to facilitate group meetings in her internship. "it's like how to set up a group meeting and how to run that effectively. I've learned it all from LeadNow[®], basically."

However, the interpretation of group facilitation referenced most often by the students was the facilitation of discussion within a small group. Specifically, creating an atmosphere where everyone has a chance to talk and share their opinion. "I think it was good to create an atmosphere that you're listening and you do want people to talk." Said Meg in relation to her class group and then mentioned, "if you can ask the right questions, you can really get the ball rolling." In relation to her experience as an RA in Residence

Life. Jill referred to her floor meetings and “just feeling more comfortable like leading a group discussion and being able to like draw other people out into a conversation.” Several students talked about learning the importance of silence within group discussions. Kendra referred to this with her comment, “If you ask a question and someone doesn’t answer right away. You don’t have to rephrase the question or make sure people understood. Just let it sit for a little while. It will be o.k. and people will answer.” She then continued with a specific example where the three captains of her athletic team were planning a banquet,

I said something right away, and the other captain said something right away. We just have 30 seconds of thinking and then the third captain said her ideas so then we got all the ideas on the table. I think that if I hadn’t learned that in LeadNow^R [to wait in silence], I just would have gone with the first two ideas and that wouldn’t have been fair.

Students reported an increased comfort level with facilitating small group discussions and also recognized that groups go through stages of development. The concept of facilitating small groups as it relates to leadership is defined in the following LeadNow^R: Group Perspectives learning outcome, “Utilize elements of effective group facilitation.” Specific situations referenced in association with the theme of facilitating small groups included class groups, R.A. in residence life, student organizations, employment experiences, and athletic teams.

Major theme: Appreciating and valuing diversity

Students described diversity as encompassing more than skin color or ethnicity. Specifically they talked about diversity in relation to personality and background. Kristi talked about diversity in her Residence Life experience,

The differences that we have aren't just, you know, skin color or your race or anything like that. There's just so much that makes people different and so much of that leads into who they are and how they interact in a group and how they interact with other people.

Overall, diversity was seen as a positive attribute that added to the value of groups and can make them more effective. They believed that it was better to have diversity than similarity.

I think the biggest thing that I have learned from LeadNow[®] in general is just like an appreciation for a diverse background. Bringing that into a group and understanding that everyone has different points of view and that everyone can contribute to the group in a different way. (Jill, junior in her role as R.A.)

Amy also expressed a similar view,

Everyone is different and everyone does things in different ways and views things in different ways and so, like as a leader or just a group member, realizing that I can't just think about what I think, I have to remember that there are multiple ways in the room.

And finally, Betsy noted the following,

If everyone is the same, it's almost more difficult... before I always thought, like, we all kinda need to have the same personalities to agree on the same things, but through LeadNow[®], I've realized now that diversity is more important.

Interestingly, the concept of appreciating and valuing diversity as it relates to leadership is not explicitly defined in any one of the LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives learning outcomes, although it is implied in the following, "Identify collaborative groups as

those in which all members contribute in meaningful ways.” Specific situations referenced in association with the theme of appreciating and valuing diversity included roommates, class groups, student organizations, employment experiences, R.A. in residence life, and family.

Major theme: Utilizing collaboration

As defined by the social change model of leadership development (HERI, 1996), collaboration refers to a group process that “capitalizes on the multiple talents and perspectives of each group member” (p. 48). Because individual talents and perspectives are valued and utilized, group members are empowered through collaboration. The process requires that the group reach a level of trust and understanding in order to be effective.

Students in the focus groups reported a beginning trust in other group members, especially in relation to completing tasks. They also associated collaboration with allowing them to accomplish something that they could not have done on their own. A senior, Lisa talked about her new view of collaboration after attending LeadNow[®]. “Collaboration isn’t backing down. It isn’t a form of like quitting or something like that, you know, it’s improving on something that you wouldn’t have been able to do in the first place on your own.”

Students realized collaboration means everyone has something to contribute and all bring value to the group. “Everyone can contribute to the group in a different way,” stated Jill. Several students talked about collaboration as recognizing and utilizing the strengths in others for the benefit of the group, like Betsy, a junior, who referred to, “being able to look for talents in other people, some of the strong talents that they possess and using them for

our group's benefit". She then continued to talk about how the concept of collaboration was used in a student organization preparing to take a service trip over spring break,

We all divided into different groups to work on different projects for the trip and so like we have a group of people who are going to make the t-shirts for the trip because they're artistically strong and people who are going to lead devotions because they're personable and relatable, and so I feel like in many ways, I've been able to pinpoint what people's talents are and use them to the best benefit of the whole group.

The students reported they were the members in a group that recognized and suggested utilizing the strengths or skills of others. For example, Lisa reported now starting most group experiences with collaborative tactics such as in a recently formed class group. "I was in a marketing group and I was like, 'o.k. guys, let's go around and introduce ourselves and make a list of things we're really really good at and we can really use these skills."

Major theme: Accepting shared leadership

Although students did not use the term, *shared leadership* in their comments, they reported an understanding of this type of leadership. They talked about not always needing to take on a leadership or non-leadership role, but changing their approach depending on what is needed and who else is present at the time. Essentially, this is the concept of shared leadership as defined by Burke, Fiore & Salas (2002) (as cited in B. M. Bass & Bass, 2008). Shared leadership occurs when,

...any member who sees a need by the team for a leadership role to be played, and believes she or he is competent to do so, calls attention to the problem and attempts

to enact the leadership role or encourages other members with more knowledge and expertise to do so. The leadership function is transferred to take advantage of the different team members' competencies, perspectives, attitudes, contacts, and available time. (p. 783)

Amy expressed her thoughts on shared leadership in reference to her on-campus job,

One of the things I've learned is that being in a group I'm obviously very much a leader and I have to remember that I can't always be the leader... when you get in a group of all leaders, you kinda sometimes have to take a step back and figure out like, what else you can do in a group.

Jill also talked about shared leadership in relation to her role as an R.A. on campus,

I don't always have to take the leadership role. Sometimes it's better just to step back and let somebody else do it because I might not know as much as them or they might have a stronger gift than me in that area. I think especially being it's my first year on the RA Staff and that was something I had to learn.

Kristi said, "I think Group Perspectives, as well as teaching me to be a leader, has also taught me to be a really good group member and kind of supporting the leader if in a position you're not the leader in a group."

Again, this concept is not explicitly defined in one of the LeadNow^x: Group Perspectives learning outcomes. However, shared leadership is implied in the following: "Identify collaborative groups as those in which all members contribute in meaningful ways." Specific situations referenced in association with the theme of accepting shared

leadership included employment experiences, R.A. in residence life, and student organizations.

Minor themes: Defining power and privilege and living with congruence

Both of these themes were touched on throughout the focus groups, but students did not talk about them in a manner that was as in depth as the five major themes. Students recognized that both power and privilege exist within our society and that these concepts should be discussed. They cited a few examples where they applied knowledge of power and privilege, but they utilized the concept only on a surface level. For instance, Tanya referred to talking about power and privilege in class and feeling more comfortable with the concept because she had been introduced to it during LeadNow^R. Jack took a different approach, mentioning his job as a student manager on campus and “what I’m doing in my position of well, not a whole lot of power, but a little bit of power, affects others and that is important to remember.” He also noted the need to be empathetic in a position of power.

The concept of defining power and privilege as it relates to leadership is included in the following LeadNow^R: Group Perspectives learning outcome, “define the concepts of power and privilege.” Again, there weren’t many concrete examples shared, but those that were mentioned related to employment and class groups.

The theme of living with congruence refers to living life in such a way that words and actions are consistent with personal values. Students mentioned this concept several times, but did not have many concrete examples of application to share. They talked about “another important thing that Group Perspectives has taught me is how you can stick to your values and how you can follow your own beliefs” (Meg, sophomore) “I’ve really stuck to standing up for what I believe in now.” (Tanya, senior).

The concept of living with congruence as it relates to leadership is included in the following LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives learning outcome, “clearly define non-negotiable personal values.” Again, the majority of comments related to generalities but the few specific applications mentioned related to decision-making and an athletic team.

Summary

In conclusion, it was determined from the data provided by the focus groups that students are applying leadership concepts identified by five of the seven LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives learning outcomes to their everyday lives in a wide variety of situations.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study explored students' application of leadership concepts and corresponding change in leadership behavior after attending LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives sessions at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. This chapter will provide a summary of the major findings of the study related to the two research questions as well as the discovery of five major themes and two minor themes. Applicable connections with theory, past research of the LeadNow[®] program framework will be discussed. This chapter will also present limitations of the study, implications of the findings on practice, and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

Overall, this study confirmed students are learning leadership concepts through participation in the LeadNow[®] program. In addition, they are utilizing the skills learned by applying them to a wide variety of situations. When students were asked to describe how their participation in LeadNow[®] has influenced the way they practice leadership, they spoke in generalities about concepts related to the learning outcomes. However, when asked to name specific situations that illustrated the generalities, students provided multiple scenarios of application. The situational examples given were not limited to one specific area of their lives, but instead across a full spectrum of experiences. Although over half of the examples related to more formal groups such as student organizations, class work groups, and residence life situations in which the student was serving as the R.A., students also talked about applying concepts in more relationship-driven or informal groups such as with roommates, families or friends. Jobs both on and off campus as well as internships,

and athletic groups were also included as situations where the learned leadership concepts were applied.

Students spend substantial time interacting with others in all aspects of their lives, providing a myriad of opportunities to practice leadership skills (A. W. Astin & Astin, 2000). They also see the different contexts of their lives, the social, the academic and the institutional, as integrated and interactive (Keeling, 2004). Each of these domains provides opportunities for engagement and application of learning from the other two.

Major Themes

Each of the five major themes presented in this study (Addressing and managing conflict, facilitating small groups, appreciating and valuing diversity, utilizing collaboration, and accepting shared leadership) can be associated with existing theory, LeadNow[®] framework, and/or the other themes which lead to issues worthy of consideration.

Addressing and managing conflict

Much of the student insight regarding the most prominent major theme, addressing and managing conflict, related to the value placed on *controversy with civility* in one of the grounding theories for the LeadNow[®] program, the social change model of leadership development (HERI, 1996). Controversy with civility, "...requires a belief that there is not just one 'right' point of view, but that everyone will see an issue differently, depending on his or her background and previous experiences" (Alvarez, 2009, p. 270). Students in the study expressed similar understanding in their view of conflict as a natural occurrence based on differences in personality, opinion, background, etc.

In 2001, Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt collected data relating to specific leadership outcomes from students when they were freshman and again when they were seniors. Of the students who indicated participation in leadership development programs, 91.7% reported an increase in their ability to resolve conflict between their freshman and senior years, as opposed to 85.3% of the nonparticipants.

Additionally, data referring to the correlation between student participation in a leadership development program and their conflict resolution skills was also collected in the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), administered to all Concordia College students in spring 2009. One of the custom questions in this survey asked students to identify, "To what extent has your participation in LeadNow[®] (i.e., sessions like "Crucial Conversations", etc.) equipped you to effectively resolve conflict?" Students responded based on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). Those students who participated in LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives sessions averaged a 4.58 as opposed to students who had only participated in the introductory LeadNow[®] session during freshman orientation, who averaged 3.11. Thus, students who participated in LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives self-reported a significant increase in their ability to effectively resolve conflict, as compared to those who had only participated in one session of the program during freshman orientation. (Sethre-Hofstad et. al., 2009).

Students participating in leadership development programs report an enhanced ability to utilize conflict resolution skills, per the study by Cress et. al. (2001) and at Concordia College, students participating in LeadNow[®] Group Perspectives reported an increase in their ability to resolve conflict (Sethre-Hofstad et. al., 2009). The results of this study took the results from earlier studies one step further. Students in the focus groups

articulated specific situations where they applied the conflict resolution skills they had learned, thus indicating a change in behavior.

However, when considering the theme of conflict as compared to the related LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives learning outcome, “recognize conflict in a group as beneficial and necessary,” an inconsistency was exposed. Students in the study did not allude to conflict as beneficial or necessary. They accepted conflict as inevitable and uncomfortable, and were convinced that direct and open communication was the necessary means to airing differences and resolving conflict. They also viewed themselves as the primary initiator or mediator regarding such communication within groups. However, students did not directly state or allude to conflict as either beneficial or necessary.

Facilitating small groups

Findings from this theme directly relate to the LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives learning outcome in which students will be able to “utilize elements of effective facilitation.” Students reported an understanding of strategies used when facilitating group discussion. The importance of hearing from all group members, waiting for or encouraging others to speak, and asking good questions were all expressed as learned skills that made facilitating discussion effective. Students reported the application of this particular theme to more formalized group situations such as classes, student organizations, residence life instances where they were serving as the R.A., athletic teams, and employment related scenarios. However, facilitating small groups was not mentioned in connection to more informal roommate, family or friend groups. For students, this technical view of facilitation did not apply to informal conversation without a task to be accomplished.

If there is more to facilitating small groups than discussion, the students did not report applying additional principles. Several mentioned an awareness that groups go through stages, but did not talk about assisting groups in progressing through these stages. This is one instance where knowledge did not transfer to application.

Appreciating and valuing diversity

The theme of appreciating and valuing diversity was not specifically mentioned in any of the LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives learning outcomes. Although, it is included in both the Concordia College Student Affairs Division Mission and Goals as well as one of the LeadNow[®] program values.

The Concordia College Student Affairs Division Mission and Goals, specify that students will “develop the ability to respectfully engage differences,” and to “experience and contribute to a community that values diversity”. The students in this study consistently referred to diversity as difference that encompassed a wide range of factors. More than race or ethnicity, they referred to diversity in opinions, personalities and backgrounds. Overall, they viewed diversity as a positive and something that was to be appreciated and valued within a group. Students talked about utilizing individual strengths and listening to the opinions of all as a way of engaging diversity.

“Leadership requires intercultural competence” is one of the LeadNow[®] program values. While students in this study did not specifically refer to an intercultural competence as it relates to world cultures, they did refer to a competence again regarding differences in opinions, backgrounds and experiences. Concordia College, as a whole, is fairly homogeneous, so students may not have had experiences related to world cultures.

However, they indicated an openness to difference in many other ways which could lead to increased sophistication in intercultural competence as growth continues.

Overall, the students indicated they had developed the ability to respectfully engage differences and they valued diversity. This aligned with the desired outcome from the Student Affairs Division Mission and Goals. This openness and respect for difference suggested a connection to the LeadNow[®] program value related to leadership and intercultural competence.

Utilizing collaboration

“Leadership is collaborative and service-oriented” is one of the LeadNow[®] program values. It is also a core value within the social change model of leadership development as it is essential to the leadership process. “...collaboration underscores the importance of relationships, the need for shared responsibility, authority, and accountability, and the benefit of having multiple perspectives and talents in the group” (England, 2009, p. 195). Students articulated collaboration in a manner similar to this definition and they described it as something that groups should aspire to utilize. However, a disconnect existed in this theme between the generalities that students spoke of and their ability to cite specific examples of concept application. In fact, although students talked about principles of collaboration as influencing their understanding of leadership, they were only able to name a few specific examples of application.

Accepting shared leadership

This theme related directly to two of the LeadNow[®] program values. It also correlated with one of the founding theories of the program, the leadership identity development model (Komives et. al., 2005). Two of the five LeadNow[®] program values

relate directly to shared leadership. The first is, "Leadership can be positional and non-positional," referring to the idea that leadership does not need to be associated with title and position alone, but that any member can step up to take the lead when needed. (Burke, Fiore & Salas, 2002, as cited in Bass, 2008). Secondly, "Every person has a unique capacity for leadership." referring to the idea that all bring strengths to the group which can be utilized in the form of leadership as necessary. Students understood that individuals can take a leadership role at different times, depending on what was needed from the group.

Even though students subscribed to the idea that leadership is shared; they still articulated that leadership was initiated primarily from one person in the group. This is consistent with the leader identified and leadership differentiated stages in the leadership identity development model (Komives et. al., 2005). In the third stage of this model, *leader identified*, a student who is immersed in this stage "moves in and out of leadership roles and member roles but still believes the leader is in charge" (Komives et. al., 2009, p. 18). A student who is immersed in the fourth stage of the model, *leadership differentiated*, is "effective in both positional and non-positional roles" and "practices being an engaged member" (Komives et. al., 2009, p. 19).

The LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives certification level was designed to align with these two stages of student leadership development. Therefore, those students in the focus group, because they have all participated in the Group Perspectives sessions, indicated a developmentally appropriate understanding of the concept of shared leadership.

Minor Themes

The two minor themes found in the study, defining power and privilege and living with congruence, each reflected a separate learning outcome from the LeadNow[®]: Group

Perspectives certification. Outcomes were to “define the concepts of power and privilege” and to “clearly define non-negotiable personal values,” respectively. It is troubling that each of these learning outcomes, although addressed, were done so on a relatively surface level. Students mentioned these concepts from time to time, but their responses were generally short in length and illustrated little depth.

Theme Connections

Although students spoke of an understanding and application of the five major themes, they made relatively little connection between each theme. For example, they saw both diversity and collaboration as positive, but did not explicitly connect the two. The social change model talks about collaboration “as being most centrally about how people value and relate to each other across differences in values, ideas, affiliations, visions and identities” (HERI, 1996, p. 49). Collaboration utilizes “the power of diversity to generate creative solutions and actions” (HERI, 1996, p. 48). When students in the focus groups articulated their understanding of diversity, they talked about recognizing and understanding that others may have different views, personalities, and needs. However, they did not include individual strengths or talents in their definitions of diversity. Likewise, when they spoke of collaboration, they primarily defined this concept as utilizing the various strengths and talents of others to benefit the group. But, they did not talk about differences in viewpoint, identity or personality as part of the collaborative process. Thus for the students, their understanding of diversity and collaboration was one of two separate concepts, where diversity related to differences in personality, identity, needs and opinions, and collaboration related to differences in strengths and talents.

Another disconnect lay between the theme of addressing and managing conflict and the theme of appreciating and valuing diversity. Again, students reported viewing diversity as a positive. They viewed conflict as inevitable, but uncomfortable. They did not appreciate conflict as a means to effective dialogue. They indicated an understanding that conflict must be addressed through open communication from all parties and felt a responsibility to facilitate that communication. However, they still noted that they would rather avoid conflict all together. They did not make the connection that some of the reasons behind a conflict may be related to the very diversity in opinions, views, etc. that they held in positive regard.

Finally, a disconnect existed between the theme of addressing and managing conflict and the theme of facilitating small groups. Again, students understood the need to facilitate open communication regarding conflict and felt they should take the responsibility to do so. They also indicated an understanding that groups go through stages and that one of those stages is a storming stage that encompasses conflict. However, there was no connection made between facilitating open communication in a conflict with others and facilitating groups that are storming or that are currently characterized by some conflict or controversy between members. Students talked about these two concepts in separate instances.

Learning Outcomes

In relation to the seven key learning outcomes for the LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives certification, the five major themes related to three of those outcomes. The two minor themes each related to one of the outcomes. Two outcomes, therefore, were not

addressed by study participants, or were addressed so infrequently that they could not be considered in relation to any of the discovered themes.

The three outcomes that received the most focus were: Recognize conflict within a group as beneficial and necessary, identify collaborative groups as those in which all members contribute in meaningful ways, and utilize elements of effective group facilitation. The minor themes touched on the learning outcomes of: Define the concepts of power and privilege, and clearly define non-negotiable personal values. The outcomes that were not addressed were: Realize that consciousness of self is necessary in order to lead effectively within a group, and achieve personal growth through self-reflection based on experiences.

Clearly, participants are remembering and utilizing some of the LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives learning outcomes more frequently and with a greater understanding than others. Or, they are simply able to articulate their learning in those areas with more depth and specific examples.

Limitations of the Study

The LeadNow[®] program was developed specifically for use at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN. Although the skills taught in the program are not unique, the learning outcomes are specific to the program. Therefore, these results may not transfer to other institutions.

The LeadNow[®] program is co-curricular. There is no course credit earned for participation and students choose to participate voluntarily. Therefore, those who participated in the study have self-selected to learn about leadership. Study results, therefore, are applicable only to students who are intrinsically motivated to attend

leadership development workshops and programming, as opposed to those who are required to attend or are motivated by course credit, etc. The focus group attendance may indicate an even more motivated sample as only 44% of those asked to participate obliged. This 44% could be even more intrinsically motivated.

The focus group participants included a vast majority of females. Only one male participated. Thirty-eight percent, or 13 members of the original sample group invited to participate were male. Thus, the male perspective may not be accurately portrayed.

The sample group, and therefore the focus group participants, were selected because they had completed the six required, non-elective sessions in the LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives certification. Because the program is co-curricular and students are allowed to attend at their own pace, students participating in the focus groups may have completed these sessions recently or they may have completed them several months to a year beforehand. Because they may not have remembered these sessions, a handout with a brief description of the sessions and the activities used was provided to enhance their memory (Appendix A). The handout did not include information about the program or session learning outcomes, but did help students to remember their experience. However, because sessions were listed individually, it may also have led to their thinking about the experience in terms of separate events and not connecting them as a whole.

The four main questions that were asked in the focus group were selected previously and confirmed by a number of individuals. The first three questions were quite general in their approach, leading participants to choose their answers based on what stood out from their own experience. However, the fourth and final question focused specifically on the concept of conflict. Many students addressed this concept earlier in the discussion,

before the specific question was asked. However, asking such a specific question about one concept could be why the theme of addressing and managing conflict was so prominent in the results.

The researcher's role in the focus group discussions was that of moderator. Because the researcher plays a large role in the coordination, implementation, and design of the LeadNow[®] program, she had previously engaged with each of the focus group participants in at least one workshop. Concordia College, where this study was conducted, is a small institution where students and staff are familiar with one another. Therefore, the participants knew the moderator and likely felt comfortable in conversation with her. It is possible that one of the deciding factors for some of the participants in the focus groups was this comfort level in discussion with the moderator. The researcher did attempt to mitigate bias in the focus group discussions by following strict moderator protocol including encouraging all types of comments, both positive and negative and being "careful not to make judgments about the responses and to control body language that might communicate approval or disapproval" (Krueger, 1988, p. 25).

Implications for Practice

The positive outcome of this study is that students were able to articulate an application of leadership concepts learned in a wide variety of instances throughout their daily lives. Specifically they applied those concepts related to the five major themes of addressing and managing conflict, facilitating small groups, appreciating and valuing diversity, utilizing collaboration, and appreciating shared leadership. Students did not indicate application in one specific area of their lives over another, but instead reported utilizing skills learned in both formal classroom or leadership experiences as well as in the

more informal scenarios with roommates and family or friends. Students would benefit then, from more collaborative approaches to learning between student affairs professionals and academic faculty. An atmosphere where, as Keeling (2004) described, “teaching and learning must include the full scope of a student’s life. It cannot be accomplished in the classroom alone – or out of the classroom alone” (p. 11).

One area that would be most applicable to this idea is in the realm of class group projects. Students frequently mentioned group projects as areas where they applied knowledge and skills learned throughout the focus groups. To effectively work in groups, some knowledge of group process, communication, and leadership is beneficial. Students are learning these skills in LeadNow[®] and applying them in their classes, but the collaboration could be more explicit. For example, if faculty were to utilize the LeadNow[®] program as a tool to help equip students who are required to work in class groups, the results would be better projects, more satisfying group experiences for students, and ultimately enhanced learning.

There is need for the LeadNow[®] program coordinators to revisit the learning outcomes of the program related to Group Perspectives. As only three of these outcomes were addressed by the five major themes that emerged from this study.

The outcome related to “recognizing conflict within a group as beneficial and necessary” was questioned as students realized conflict was inevitable and uncomfortable, but did not see it as beneficial or necessary. The program either needs to focus more on the benefits of conflict, or change the language used in the learning outcome. In regards to the outcome in which students “utilize elements of effective group facilitation,” the LeadNow[®] program would benefit from a more intentional look at what strategies constitute effective

group facilitation. Does it include facilitating discussion, which students are doing, or does it include facilitating group process through stages of development, which they are not doing. Perhaps this learning outcome needs to be bifurcated into several facilitation strategies.

Four of the seven outcomes were only touched upon in a surface manner or were not addressed by the participants in the study. The LeadNow[®] program should revisit the sessions and experiences designed to address these outcomes to determine what else may be necessary for a more in depth student understanding.

Finally, The LeadNow[®] program should consider the inability of students to make connections between theme topics within the study. The final component for each certification is a discussion with a leader mentor. This is a faculty or staff member, trained to have a reflective discussion with the student focused on the learning outcomes for that certification. It is unclear whether or not these discussions assist students in making connections between topics for the certification overall. All but two of the students participating in the focus groups had completed their LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives leader mentor discussion. The LeadNow[®] program should examine additional strategies to assist students in making connections between topics.

Suggestions for Future Research

As explained in the limitations of the study, the vast majority of participants were female. More research is needed to determine whether or not differences exist between the application of concepts learned for men versus for women.

Another suggestion would be to conduct more in depth research surrounding each topic within the learning outcomes, specifically those that were only mentioned on a

surface level, or those that were not mentioned at all. More information about how students understand power and privilege and how they understand and apply living with congruence to their daily lives could be ascertained through specific questions aimed at these topics. Also, questions about the two outcomes which were not addressed by the focus group participants regarding growth through self-reflection and the need for consciousness of self to lead within a group.

Additional research regarding differing situations could lead to a greater understanding of which leadership concepts are the most helpful in specific situations. For example, which concepts specifically help in class group work and which help in conversations with roommates or in student organizations? This knowledge could again lead to effective collaboration opportunities between leadership development programming and other student leadership training or academic faculty assignment of group work.

Finally, it would be interesting to conduct similar studies at alternate institutions. Focus groups for students participating in leadership development programming at other colleges and universities could be conducted to determine whether application of knowledge would be similar, even if sessions, experiences, and learning outcomes were different.

Final Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore students' application of leadership concepts and corresponding change in leadership behavior after attending LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives sessions at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. The study determined that students are applying knowledge of leadership concepts as defined in three of the learning outcomes and thus changing their leadership behavior in those areas. This

application of concepts related to five major leadership themes: (a) addressing and managing conflict, (b) facilitating small groups, (c) appreciating and valuing diversity, (d) utilizing collaboration, and (e) accepting shared leadership. Students applied their knowledge of these concepts in situations throughout their lives in both formal and informal scenarios including class work groups, student organizations, residence life situations in which the student was serving as the R.A., job and internship experiences both on and off campus, athletic teams, roommates, and with family or friends.

The application of leadership concepts over such a broad spectrum of situational types, suggests that more collaborative approaches to learning between student affairs professionals and academic faculty would be beneficial; especially regarding the effectiveness of class group projects. In all, it is clear that those students who participated in the LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives sessions at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota have benefited from their experience. They have the ability to apply concepts learned thus positively changed their leadership behavior.

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APPENDIX A. FOCUS GROUP HANDOUT

LeadNow[®] Group Perspectives Sessions

Radiate: An Introduction to LeadNow[®]: Group Perspectives

This session bridges the Personal and Group Perspectives certifications. Participants explore their own strengths in a group as well as areas for improvement.

Session Activities: Personal inventory to self-rank group skills; Speed lines – talking about group process while standing in two lines; overview of social change model.

Small Group Facilitation

An overview of four tips for facilitating groups effectively.

Session Activities: Discussion on group stages; “Shaped Conversations” role-play wearing shape nametags; case study of a group discussion; practice time to facilitate discussion.

The Necessity of Conflict

This session focuses on defining group conflict and strategies to use in managing that conflict.

Session Activities: Role-play difficult behavior types; Worksheet on what conflict means to you; Thinker or Feeler? Different ways of defining conflict; What would you do? Practice managing conflict.

Shared Leadership and Collaboration

Discovering what constitutes true collaboration and what does not.

Session Activities: Exchanging information with expertise cards; Putting together a puzzle as a group; Hula hoop around the circle; Coming up with a collaborative project idea.

Power and Privilege

Create a definition of power and privilege, discuss inclusion, exclusion and marginalization, understand your role in these systems and how they impact you.

Session Activities: String circle of inclusion/exclusion; overview of “The Invisible Knapsack”; mapping identities discussion.

Living with Congruence

Create your own list of non-negotiable values and discuss how to build them into your life even in situations where they may be questioned.

Session Activities: “Walk the Talk” video; create personal list of non-negotiable values; case studies looking at situations where values are questioned.