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LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE FRATERNITY EXPERIENCE AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO CAREER SUCCESS AFTER GRADUATION

Danny R. Kelley, Ph.D.

Promoting student leadership development has been an objective of higher learning since the inception of colleges and universities and is also a major tenet espoused in the mission statements of inter/national fraternities. The aim of this study was to evaluate the leadership impact that service as a fraternity chapter president has on students' self-perceived leadership development. More specifically, this study addressed the self-perceived leadership impact the fraternity experience has on students' careers.

To conduct this evaluation, participants submitted a basic demographics questionnaire, the Leadership Acquisitions Form (LAF), and the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI; Kouzes & Posner, 2001). While participants rated themselves high on the LAF and indicated a strong belief that the leadership skills they developed as chapter presidents were useful in their careers, participants did not have high scores on the LPI as compared to the normative sample.

Historically, higher education has prepared students to be future leaders and informed citizens. Changing times throughout the history of American higher education have impacted the role of student development. While dynamics of college life have changed over the years, leadership development has always been a positive value associated with higher education. Today, the focus on developing students' leadership potential has remained a primary university mission. With an increase in student interest in leadership development over the past two decades, colleges and universities have placed more emphasis on programming related to leadership. Out of classroom experiences, such as involvement in fraternities, have often been the vehicles to provide students with leadership opportunities, and new generations of college students have been able to mold these experiences to fit their needs. While promoting student leadership development is an important objective that universities and fraternities share, little is known about the extent to which fraternities are useful in developing leadership skills in chapter officers over the long term after graduation.

Review of Literature

Defining leadership and the characteristics and traits an individual must possess to be considered a leader is a challenge because of the many theories and definitions of leadership that have been developed. Yukl (1994) suggested that no general leadership theory adequately explains this concept. Rost (1991) reviewed over 200 definitions of leadership, but was unable to uncover one definition he believed comfortably defined leadership. Komives, Lucas, and McMahon's (1998) review of leadership research yielded similar results.

Astin (1991) contended that students can and do learn and develop leadership abilities through their involvement with extracurricular activities. Kuh (1995) estimated that over 70 percent of what students learn occurs through their out-of-class experiences. Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt's (2001) study of the influence of leadership involvement on student development revealed that students who engage in campus leadership activities demonstrate improved leadership skills, increased civic responsibilities, and clarified societal values. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reported that undergraduate leadership involvement has modest implications for one's career; however, alumni consistently report that their college leadership experience significantly enhanced the interpersonal and leadership skills critical to future job success. A study by Schuh (1983) concluded that students who engaged in college leadership activities had more positive perceptions regarding their abilities to make future career choices as compared to students not involved with leadership activities. Additionally, fraternity/sorority leadership roles have been positively related to personal growth opportunities and leadership training (Astin, 1991, 1996; Winston & Massaro, 1987).

Kouzes and Posner (1987) developed the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) as a tool for businesses to use in creating employee leadership development programs. The instrument is comprised of five functional areas based on behaviors and actions managers reported they exhibit when at their personal best. The five functional areas are Challenging the Process (Challenging), Inspiring a Shared Vision (Inspiring), Enabling Others to Act (Enabling), Modeling the Way (Modeling), and Encouraging the Heart (Encouraging). The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) has been used in a number of studies for a variety of purposes, some of which are the identification of effective leaders, the educational curriculum necessary to train effective leaders, and the validity of the instrument itself, including its applicability across cultures and gender.

Posner and Brodsky (1992) adapted the instrument for use with college students, and it was validated in a survey of one national fraternity and its chapter officers on 100 college campuses. Slater et al. (2002) investigated the cross cultural effectiveness of the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 1995) by administering the LPI to 28 graduate students studying educational administration at a Southwestern university in the United States and 28 graduate students studying at a university in Mexico. Their results revealed that the American students scored significantly higher than their Mexican counterparts on all five of Kouzes and Posner's (1995) leadership practices. In addition, the rank order of the five dimensions was relatively distinct. The authors concluded that the leadership behaviors measured by the LPI seemed to be firmly rooted in American culture, but not in Mexican culture. As a result, they suggested that the LPI may not have universal application across cultures because successful leadership may be defined differently in different cultures. Different leadership practices may succeed in different cultural contexts.

Leadership practices of students have also been the subject of research. Posner and Rosenberger (1997) examined the leadership of students who worked as orientation advisors at a higher education institution. Enrolling university students were asked to complete both the 1995 Student LPI Observer and a second assessment of the behavior of their orientation advisors. The authors pointed out (a) that the students and their orientation advisors only functioned together for a few days, and (b) that the leader (orientation advisor)/subordinate (new student) relationship was not due to self selection. However, the results of the study indicated that the effectiveness of the

orientation advisors was strongly correlated with the degree to which the advisors' behavior matched the five leadership practices. The self perceptions of the student leaders also demonstrated a strong positive relationship between their view of their own efficacy and the amount of times they reported practicing the leadership behaviors.

Other studies have examined the way in which leadership practices might be impacted by several elements of the group or situations in which students participate. For example, Posner and Rosenberger (1998) found that student compensation did not affect the results of the LPI. In addition, Posner and Rosenberger noted that student leaders who collaborated with colleagues in a non-hierarchical situation did not exhibit these leadership practices more or less than those students who were elected by their peers to be leaders or held an official post like the presidency of a student organization. Regarding other student characteristics, Edington's (1995) research revealed that the behavior of student leaders was not correlated with gender, race, age, employment, full- or part-time attendance at an educational institution, or semester in college.

Posner and Rosenberger's (1998) research also demonstrated that student leadership practices were not affected by whether the student participated in a short, one-time leadership program or one with the duration of a whole academic year. Nevertheless, students who began a second year as a leader exhibited the five practices more frequently than those who were beginners in the same position (Posner & Rosenberger, 1998). The results of Baxter's (2001, cited by Posner, 2004) study that compared students who were Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) unit instructors with other students at the same school supported Posner and Rosenberger's (1998) conclusions. The ROTC students had better LPI scores than the other college students. Thus, longer time spent as a leader may be correlated with more frequent use of the five leadership practices.

Adams and Keim (2000) examined leadership practices of fraternally-affiliated student leaders at three public, Midwestern universities and measured their effectiveness as determined by chapter presidents, executive council members, and general members of fraternities and sororities. Participants completed the Student Leadership Practices Inventory and the Leadership Effectiveness Survey (Posner & Brodsky, 1992). The results of their study showed that women rated their chapter presidents as more effective leaders than the men did for their chapter presidents. However, both men and women agreed that presidents effectively represented their organizations to external groups.

More recently, Kouzes and Posner (Posner, 2004) tested the psychometric elements of their newest version of the Student LPI-Self (SLPI) instrument using information obtained from 604 fraternity chapter leaders in more than 200 American colleges and universities. The one international fraternity chosen was the same as the subject of the original study (Posner & Brodsky, 1992). Similar to the original study (Posner & Brodsky, 1992), many of this international fraternity's chapters were chosen to lessen the possible impact of diverse institutional policies and procedures as well as variations in the quality of student services among campuses. The fraternity selected seemed representative of the largest inter/national fraternities in terms of scope of services provided and membership size.

The SLPI was given to each of the chapter leaders participating in one of six area leadership programs held throughout the academic year. These leaders represented more than 75 percent of the chapter leaders in this international fraternity (Posner, 2004). After completion of the leadership program, all surveys were collected and scored. The self report scale contained eight standards of efficacy on which each fraternity leader rated his performance (Posner, 2004).

Analysis of the responses demonstrated that the presidents perceived themselves as using the five leadership practices more frequently than did the other chapter leaders. The distinction was statistically significant for the practices of Modeling, Enabling, and Encouraging, but was not significant for Inspiring and Challenging. For all leaders, Enabling was most often practiced, followed by Encouraging, Inspiring, Modeling, and Challenging. In addition, chapter officers who saw themselves as more effective also told of using each of the five leadership practices more than their peers who saw themselves as less effective.

Like Posner and Brodsky (1992), who developed the SLPI for use with college students, the researcher in the present study developed the Leadership Acquisitions Form (LAF) to measure 14 areas of leadership—Goal-Setting, Delegation, Motivating Others, Decision-Making, Problem-Solving, Organizational Skills, Meeting Management, Financial Management, Risk-Taking, Presentation Skills, Teamwork, Conflict Management, Social Skills, and Interpersonal Skills—in two separate scales, effectiveness and usefulness. Because the LAF is a new test, no reliability or validity information is available. However, the identification and legitimacy of the leadership behaviors included in this instrument are supported in the literature. For example, Yukl and Fu (1999) verified the importance of leadership behaviors such as delegation and consultation. Decision-making skills were confirmed by House and Aditya (1997), in addition to high achievement motivation. According to their findings, McClelland (1985) confirmed that leadership success is affected by the extent to which leaders effectively delegate, motivate, and coordinate subordinates in organizations. Archer's (2005) study supported the ability of leaders to manage differences between and among subordinates, signifying the need for ability in conflict management.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the self-perceived impact that serving as a fraternity chapter president has on one's leadership development ten years after the experience. It was believed that while much research shows that leadership development can be acquired through the fraternity experience, there has been a dearth of research on the relationship between leadership development through the fraternity experience and leadership skills and career success after graduation. This study was guided by five research questions: (1) Does serving as a fraternity chapter president have a self-perceived, positive impact on specific leadership skills?; (2) Are the leadership skills utilized in one's fraternity chapter presidency subsequently useful in one's career?; (3) To what extent do former chapter presidents perceive that they currently exhibit Kouzes and Posner's (1995) five leadership practices (Enabling Others to Act, Encouraging the Heart, Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, and Challenging the Process) more frequently than others?; (4) What are the relationships between length of service and time since service as a fraternity president and scores from the LAF and LPI?; and (5) What

are the relationships between scores on the LAF and LPI? Specifically, do scores on the effectiveness and usefulness dimensions of the LAF predict scores on the LPI?

Method

Procedures

Individuals who served as chapter presidents of three international fraternities at different institutions between 1991 and 1993 were invited to participate in the study. Data was obtained through mailing the instruments to participants, whose names and contact information were obtained through each inter/national fraternity headquarters. Participants were asked to complete a packet of survey questionnaires that included a background questionnaire to provide information about demographics, the university the respondent attended, fraternity service, and current occupation; the LAF; and the SLPI.

Participants

A total of 134 former fraternity presidents participated in this study. The majority of respondents (56.7%) held a bachelor's degree; just over three-quarters of the sample attended public institutions. Respondents came from 105 different colleges and universities. Most of the respondents indicated that they were either juniors or seniors when they held the position of fraternity president. Respondents had held a variety of positions within the fraternity prior to the presidency, with the most common being vice president, social director, and rush chairman. Similarly, there were a variety of positions held after the presidency, with president or vice president of the interfraternity council being most common. The most common current employment categories were managers, attorneys, vice presidents, and CEOs/owners/presidents. Respondents' companies were distributed across a wide variety of industries; the most common were finance or banking, law or law enforcement, and medicine or pharmaceuticals. Most of the respondents were initially hired by someone who did not share their fraternal affiliation. Almost 80% of the respondents were currently in supervisory positions, and almost all reported that they had some leadership responsibilities in their current position.

Instruments

Participants completed the 30-item SLPI and the 28-item LAF. The SLPI measures leadership practices in five areas: Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Enabling Others to Act, Modeling the Way, and Encouraging the Heart. The instrument contains six items in each category and uses a 5-point Likert scale (rarely to very frequently). Scores can range from 6 to 30 on each of the five areas. The LAF measures Goal-Setting, Delegation, Motivating Others, Decision-Making, Problem-Solving, Organizational Skills, Meeting Management, Financial Management, Risk-Taking, Presentation Skills, Teamwork, Conflict Management, Social Skills, and Interpersonal Skills in two separate scales: effectiveness (on a four-point scale from very effective to very ineffective) and usefulness (on a four-point scale from not useful to very useful).

Findings

The results of the study showed that respondents perceived having served as a fraternity chapter president did have a positive impact on their leadership skills. Table 1 presents the percentage of

responses in each of the four categories, as well as the χ^2 values and associated p -values. As can be seen, the distributions of responses for each of the 14 items were not uniform, as each of the significance tests was associated with a p -value less than .05.

Table 1
Specific Responses to the Effectiveness Items of the LAF

	Response				χ^2
	Very Ineffective	Not Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Very Effective	
1. Delegation	.0	4.5	43.3	52.2	51.82
2. Motivating Others	.0	3.0	35.8	61.2	68.48
3. Decision-Making	.0	3.0	38.1	58.2	63.26
4. Problem-Solving	.8	7.5	41.4	50.4	96.02
5. Goal-Setting	.7	14.2	50.7	34.3	78.00
6. Organizational Skills	.7	6.7	42.5	50.0	99.43
7. Meeting Management	.0	1.5	29.9	68.7	91.40
8. Financial Management	2.3	27.1	45.1	25.6	49.29
9. Risk-Taking	1.5	29.1	40.3	29.1	43.97
10. Presentation Skills	1.5	14.9	45.5	38.1	66.78
11. Teamwork	.0	.7	37.3	61.9	76.22
12. Conflict Management	.0	2.2	29.1	68.7	89.75
13. Social Skills	.0	7.5	29.9	62.7	62.03
14. Interpersonal Skills	.0	3.7	31.3	64.9	75.51

All responses were significant at the $p < .0005$ level

Respondents perceived the leadership skills they had learned as fraternity chapter president to have been useful. Table 2 presents the results of this analysis and shows that the tests were significant.

Table 3 indicates respondents did not have particularly high scores on the SLPI scales compared to the normative sample. Kouzes and Posner (2001) provided the percentile rank for each of the five leadership practices scales for their database, which includes more than 18,000 respondents. They further indicated that scores at or above the 70th percentile should be considered high, while scores at or below the 30th percentile should be considered low. Table 3 presents the average scores on each of the five dimensions of the SLPI. In no case did the mean score from the respondents in this study exceed the 70th percentile score.

Table 2
 Specific Responses to the Usefulness Items of the LAF

	Response				χ^2
	Not Useful	Not Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Very Useful	
1. Delegation	.0	10.4	37.3	52.2	36.06
2. Motivating Others	.0	9.0	26.9	64.2	63.82
3. Decision-Making	.0	.0	14.2	85.8	68.78
4. Problem-Solving	.0	.7	14.9	84.3	160.85
5. Goal-Setting	.7	4.5	35.1	59.7	124.09
6. Organizational Skills	.0	1.5	23.1	75.4	115.99
7. Meeting Management	3.7	5.2	38.8	52.2	95.19
8. Financial Management	3.7	19.4	31.3	45.5	50.66
9. Risk-Taking	3.7	25.4	35.1	35.8	35.97
10. Presentation Skills	.0	2.2	29.9	67.9	87.42
11. Teamwork	.0	4.5	25.4	70.1	90.51
12. Conflict Management	.7	9.7	26.9	62.7	120.39
13. Social Skills	1.5	3.0	27.6	67.9	154.66
14. Interpersonal Skills	.0	3.0	18.7	78.4	127.18

Table 3
 Descriptive Statistics for LAF and SLPI Scales

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Reliability
LAF					
Effectiveness	35.00	56.00	47.78	4.54	.78
Usefulness	32.00	56.00	49.75	4.77	.81
SLPI					
Challenging the Process	19.00	56.00	43.39	7.46	.72
Inspiring a Shared Vision	17.00	59.00	41.19	9.40	.82
Enabling Others to Act	23.00	59.00	48.22	5.69	.64
Modeling the Way	18.00	60.00	48.15	6.13	.66
Encouraging the Heart	14.00	60.00	44.67	8.13	.82

In terms of the relationship between length of service and time since service as a fraternity president and scores from the LAF and SLPI, there was only one statistically significant correlation. Length of service was positively correlated with the Inspiring a Shared Vision scale from the SLPI. The Pearson correlations between length of service and scores on the LAF and SLPI are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Correlations between Length of Service and the LAF and SLPI Scales

	Length of Service
LAF	
Effectiveness	.16
Usefulness	.16
SLPI	
Challenging the Process	.06
Inspiring a Shared Vision	.24*
Enabling Others to Act	.12
Modeling the Way	.10
Encouraging the Heart	.08

* $p < .01$

The effectiveness and usefulness scales from the LAF were predictive of each of the scales on the SLPI with one exception. Effectiveness scales were not predictive of Enabling Others to Act scores. Results of the regression analysis are contained in Table 5.

Table 5
Results of Regression Analysis with LAF Scores Predicting SLPI Scores

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE_B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Challenging the Process					
Effectiveness	.37	.14	.22	2.56	.012
Usefulness	.54	.14	.34	3.94	.000
Inspiring a Shared Vision					
Effectiveness	.47	.19	.23	2.51	.013
Usefulness	.56	.18	.29	3.17	.002
Enabling Others to Act					
Effectiveness	.21	.12	.16	1.72	.088
Usefulness	.26	.11	.21	2.25	.026
Modeling the Way					
Effectiveness	.25	.12	.18	2.00	.048
Usefulness	.38	.12	.29	3.19	.002
Encouraging the Heart					
Effectiveness	.45	.16	.25	2.71	.008
Usefulness	.38	.16	.22	2.43	.016

In the regression analysis with Challenging the Process scores from the SLPI as the outcome variable, both the effectiveness and usefulness scores from the LAF were statistically significant predictors, and the model was also statistically significant, $R^2 = .24$, $F(2,131) = 21.06$, $p < .0005$. In the analysis with Inspiring a Shared Vision scores from the SLPI as the outcome variable, both scores from the LAF were again statistically significant, as was the model as a whole, $R^2 = .20$, $F(2,131) = 15.89$, $p < .0005$. When the Enabling Others to Act scores from the LPI were examined as the outcome variable, only the usefulness scale from the LAF was statistically significant, but the model as a whole was also significant, $R^2 = .11$, $F(2,131) = 7.80$, $p = .001$. Using Modeling the Way scores from the SLPI as the outcome variable, both scores from the

LAF were statistically significant, and the model as a whole was statistically significant, $R^2 = .17$, $F(2,131) = 13.48$, $p < .0005$. Finally, when Encouraging the Heart scores from the SLPI were employed as the outcome variable, both the effectiveness and usefulness scales from the LAF were statistically significant, and the model as a whole was statistically significant, $R^2 = .17$, $F(2,131)=12.97$, $p < .0005$.

Discussion

The respondents in this study indicated they perceived having served as a fraternity chapter president did have a positive impact on their leadership skills. While there are many opportunities for undergraduate students to serve in co-curricular leadership roles, serving as a fraternity chapter president can provide unique leadership benefits that are not available to other student leaders. Participating in out-of-class experiences was advocated by Astin (1991) and Kuh (1995) as important to student learning and for achieving a balance between academics and co-curricular activities.

For presidents who live in their fraternity houses, there is the responsibility of running the day-to-day operations of the chapter house. In many cases, this involves managing food service, house maintenance, collecting room and board payments, ensuring house fire codes and safety requirements meet local standards, and establishing and maintaining business relationships with various contractors. It is common for a fraternity president to be responsible for the oversight and management of hundreds of thousands of dollars. In addition, there is an immediate access to the membership. In some cases, this allows for more interaction with members and officers of the organization and opportunities to impact the development of members in their living environments, which is uncommon in other student organizations.

While respondents in this study indicated that they perceived that the leadership skills they learned as fraternity chapter president were useful, being a fraternity chapter president is not a guarantee or prerequisite for success in one's post collegiate career. Undergraduates can be successful even if they do not serve in such a position, but the experience does provide a certain amount of focus. A fraternity chapter president is provided an opportunity to embrace several leadership roles that are not available to other student leaders, simply based on the uniqueness of fraternities.

This perception is consistent with the views of a number of researchers. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), for example, noted that undergraduate leadership involvement, while having only modest implications for one's career, did enhance interpersonal and leadership skills that were critical to future job success. Schuh (1987) and Cress et al. (2001) also reported that undergraduate leadership experiences helped students learn leadership skills such as teamwork and communication skills that added to post-graduate career success.

Respondents in this study indicated that the leadership skills at which they felt most effective were meeting management, conflict management, teamwork, and interpersonal skills. Skills at which they felt least effective were financial management, risk-taking, goal-setting, and presentation skills. Leadership skills at which respondents felt most competent in their current positions were decision-making, problem-solving, interpersonal skills, and organizational skills,

while they felt least competent at delegation, meeting management, financial management, and risk-taking skills. This suggests that college and university administrators, as well as inter/national fraternity leaders, have an opportunity to build structures and programs in fraternities that will enhance the likelihood of leadership learning taking place. Both can tailor opportunities for fraternities to build skills in the areas identified as least effective based on the needs of their specific population and climate. Partnerships among universities, inter/national organizations, local fraternity alumni boards, and fraternity chapter advisors in creating intentional leadership development opportunities for fraternity members could assist in meeting this objective.

As colleges and universities focus more attention on preparing students for leadership roles in society, fraternal organizations have an obligation to think about the role they need to play in the lives of their undergraduate members to assist in meeting this objective. In order to present fraternity membership as an attractive option to undergraduate students and colleges and universities, fraternities need to be intentional about providing strong leadership programming for their undergraduate members and demonstrating that membership provides opportunities for leadership development that will position their members to be successful in their post-collegiate careers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations for further study are made. This study examined fraternity leadership. It is recommended that further study be conducted comparing and contrasting leadership practices of fraternity presidents and sorority presidents to build on the existing literature that examines the influence of gender on leadership and leadership development.

The LAF and SLPI survey results provide insight into the leadership strengths and challenges that respondents self reported. It is recommended that further research be conducted to determine precise ways in which the LAF and SLPI can be used by university administrators, fraternity personnel, and alumni boards in devising leadership programming that will enhance these skills in future fraternity members. Since the LAF results report on how useful or not useful specific leadership skills are to one's career, this information can further enhance the development of leadership programming. Additionally, since the SLPI assesses respondents' current leadership practices, other possible approaches can be gleaned from these survey results. For example, many fraternities host alumni associations in cities across the country and, in some cases, internationally. These associations and local fraternity alumni in general have opportunities to assist in the leadership development of their undergraduate members in structured ways. Opportunities could include developing summer intern programs at their places of business, establishing mentoring programs between alumni and undergraduates, assisting undergraduates in career searches, and hosting networking receptions to connect undergraduates with fraternity alumni who work in fields that the students are pursuing after graduation.

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