College student perceptions of leadership: empowering and constraining beliefs

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College student perceptions of leadership: Empowering and constraining beliefs

by

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This first chapter will introduce the intentions of this thesis, offer the rationale and need for the study, describe the theoretical framework, identify the stated purpose of the study and research questions that guided it, and define significant terms used throughout the report.

Overview

Leadership has been a focus of higher education since the inception of colleges and universities (Astin & Astin, 2000). The earliest institutions of higher education helped prepare many of the nation's first political, social, and professional leaders (Astin & Astin, 2000). Although different people have defined leadership in various ways over the course of time, it still resonates as a principle within many institutions of higher education. While the commitment to leadership development has remained strong over the years, more recent times have brought different perspectives on leadership into the fold and with this growth, a plethora of models, perceptions, theories, and definitions concerning leadership and leadership development have emerged (Bass, 1990). Bass (1990) stated: “research on leadership and its widespread applications are coming of age” (p. 879).

This thesis has college student leadership as its primary subject, and chapter one will introduce the research. Chapter two will be a review of previous literature; chapter three will describe the methods that will be used to carry out the study; chapter four will discuss the findings; chapter five will discuss the conclusions, and their implications for higher education.
Rationale and Need for the Study

There are many good reasons for institutions of higher education to be concerned with leadership development. A renewed exploration into leadership development has been advanced by new theories and ideas on leadership, the introduction of student affairs personnel specifically charged with leadership development, and the continuous attempt to try new ways to develop leadership. When students arrive on campus they find several opportunities for involvement and leadership development. In a study of the leadership programs funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, program participants were observed to have improved in areas such as civic/social/political awareness, commitment to service/volunteerism and civic/social/political efficacy, among others (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2000). Schuh and Laverty (1983) discovered that college graduates who were student leaders reported a significant improvement in many skills such as planning, organizing, budgeting, and communication. Overall, leadership has become a major topic on many college campuses, and for this reason, any quality assessment on how colleges and universities are performing in this area has the potential to be immediately valuable.

Since leadership is a significant principle at many institutions of higher education, it could be assumed that these institutions are attempting to develop leadership in each of their students. And while this can be accomplished passively (e.g., the offering of programs), it seems that there are few deliberate attempts to reach out to students who do not seek out opportunities (Rost, 1993). This leaves the questions: are leadership development initiatives reaching the students who need them most or are they targeted towards positional leaders who are easily accessible? And, if the benefits received from leadership involvement are so profound, why do many students choose not to participate?
The ecological model for campus environments, offered by Banning and Kaiser (1974), is based on the tenet that programs within a campus, and even the campus itself, can be designed with students' needs in mind. This is opposed to traditional beliefs that students who are not "fitting in" need to be removed, given psychological counseling, or individually pushed through developmental processes. Many aspects of this model can be related to campus attitudes on leadership development. Students who get involved in leadership positions are viewed as succeeding, and thus they are supported. Students who do not get involved are thought to be apathetic and uninterested in leadership. Thus the campus would be much better if the apathetic students stayed out of the way of those who are involved. If this situation is examined with the ecological model, then a different perspective on these apathetic students can be reached. Perhaps they are intimidated by positions or titles; perhaps their perceptions of leadership fit more within non-traditional views of leadership and thus their perceptions are not valued; perhaps they feel that without the talents or skills leaders are supposed to have, they are powerless; or perhaps there are a variety of constraining beliefs with which they are struggling, which keep them from engaging in leadership opportunities.

Perhaps enhancing leadership in positional leaders is most valuable, and should be where efforts are directed. This is true if a campus is content that some of its students are leaders, while others are followers. If this is the case, then are institutions of higher education accomplishing their goals of providing society with the leaders it needs?

There is a need for a study on student perceptions of leadership, and why many do not engage in leadership opportunities. Astin and Astin (2000) argue that social change should be the outcome of leadership development efforts. Society has many problems that cannot be
addressed by a select group, but instead require collaboration, teamwork, and values-based action (Astin & Astin, 2000). If most of the students who attend a college or university simply are learning how to be followers, then higher education actually may be failing to prepare leaders for the future it hopes to develop. A good place to begin is by simply investigating how today’s college students perceive leadership. There is also a limited amount of research of student perceptions of leadership, and this study will hopefully complement current literature and add a new perspective.

**Theoretical Framework**

The major theoretical framework for this study is based on the work of Astin and Astin (2000). They assert the following assumptions about leadership: (a) “leadership is concerned with fostering change,” (b) “leadership is inherently value-based,” (c) “all people are potential leaders,” and (d) “leadership is a group process” (Astin & Astin, 2000, p.9).

Astin and Astin (2000) are very critical of more traditional approaches to leadership that are grounded in an individual’s particular traits and skills. They observe that anyone can be a leader, as long as the person is engaging in an initiative with others to bring about a positive change. Astin and Astin also believe that the leadership process is value-laden, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

Furthermore, Astin and Astin (2000) argue that leadership within higher education should have two basic purposes, which are (a) “to enable and encourage faculty, students, administrators, and other staff to change and transform institutions so that they can more effectively enhance student learning and development, generate new knowledge, and serve the community,” and (b) “to empower students to become agents of positive social change in the larger society” (p.9). They are discouraged that leadership development initiatives within
colleges and universities traditionally have been focused on empowering only a select group of students who demonstrate particular characteristics and skills. Higher education, according to Astin and Astin, is still grounded in a mentality that certain students are leaders, and the rest are followers. These student leaders have positions or titles, and are responsible for creating the goals and vision for an organization or cause. Instead, Astin and Astin believe that higher education and society would best be served if all students were empowered to bring forth positive social change, and considered themselves to be leaders in the midst of this process.

An important aspect to consider is that institutions of higher education already have the means in place to promote student opportunities to engage in social change. Most colleges and universities have many student organizations and student governments, which provide valuable opportunities for group processes and collaborative leadership. The problem is that these organizations often are within and reflect campus cultures that promote traditional, hierarchical views of leadership (Astin & Astin, 2000). Moreover, not every student gets involved in student organizations.

Thus, in order to empower more students to become involved in leadership processes, colleges and universities need to change perceptions that leadership is purely positional and empower more students to become involved. The largest obstacle to these efforts, according to Astin and Astin (2000), are student beliefs. Some of these beliefs include: (a) the only students responsible for leading change efforts are those with leadership positions, (b) some students believe they lack the necessary skills to be a leader, (c) the institution does not value student input, and (d) students do not have the time to be involved (Astin & Astin, 2000).
Astin and Astin (2000) suggest that the first step towards limiting these constraining beliefs is to make students aware of them. However, this is not accomplished easily unless administrators have a clear understanding of what the constraining beliefs are. In addition, empowering beliefs can best be instilled if administrators understand the beliefs of their students who are heavily involved in leadership and change efforts.

There are different paradigms of leadership, which will serve as theoretical frameworks for this study as well. Specifically, this thesis will focus on the industrial and postindustrial paradigms of leadership (Rogers, 1996). A significant portion of chapter two has been devoted to discussing these paradigms, so no further explanation will be included in this chapter.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to identify beliefs that constrain students from being engaged in leadership, and in addition, empowering beliefs that encourage students to be involved.

Thus, this study will attempt to understand student perceptions of leadership. More specifically, attention will be paid to both students who have lived their college lives without involvement in leadership opportunities, and those who hold or have held traditional leadership positions. The study will be centered on the following research questions:

1. How do students in traditional student leader roles perceive leadership?
2. How do these perceptions differ from students who are not in traditional student leader roles?
3. What are the constraining and empowering beliefs, if any, which limit or promote student involvement in leadership opportunities?

Definition of Terms

Several terms will be utilized throughout this study, and their definitions for the purposes of this thesis are outlined below. One notable exception to this list is the term *leadership*, since there are a vast number of definitions of this term. An exploration of the term *leadership* will be a focus of chapter two.

**Leadership development:** Placing students in an interactionist environment that allows them to work with others towards change, while struggling with an increasing complexity of situations (Roberts & Ullom, 1981).

**Traditional Student Leader Roles:** Positions on a college campus or within a student organization that are perceived to have power and influence, such as president, vice-president, and chair.

**Student Leader:** Students who currently hold, or have held, traditional student leader roles. Student leaders can also be referred to as *positional leaders*.

**Disengaged Students:** Student who do not currently hold, or have never held, traditional student leader roles.

**Constraining Beliefs:** Beliefs held by individuals that prevent them from being involved in the process of leadership and initiatives that create change (Astin & Astin, 2000).

**Empowering Beliefs:** Beliefs held by individuals that promote involvement in the process of leadership and initiatives that create change (Astin & Astin, 2000).

**Industrial Paradigm of Leadership:** A framework for perspectives on leadership that are based on the following assumptions: (a) leadership is the property of an individual, (b)
leadership pertains primarily to formal groups or organizations, and (c) the concepts leadership and management are intertwined (Rogers, 1996).

Postindustrial Paradigm of Leadership: A framework for leadership perspectives that are based on the following assumptions: (a) leadership is based on relationships; (b) leadership can be done by anyone, not just by people who are designated leaders; and (c) leadership is about change (Rogers, 1996).

Summary

Leadership development is a significant aspect of higher education, and it has always been. At the same time, leadership is a concept that has constantly changed and evolved, and scholars and professionals in higher education seem to constantly discover new questions to address about leadership. Past, present, and emerging approaches to leadership will be discussed through a review of the literature, in chapter two.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review the current literature related to college student leadership, of which there is a large amount. This chapter will be separated by discussions of literature related to: college student involvement, perspectives on leadership, college student perceptions of leadership, and leadership development in college.

**College Student Involvement**

In order for a campus to attempt to engage its students in leadership, it needs to determine ways to get them involved. Involvement, according to Astin (1999) is a key determinant of college student success, satisfaction, and persistence. Involvement helps connect students to their institution, and fosters many positive relationships and learning opportunities not available within the classroom (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Astin, 1999; Schuh & Laverty, 1983). While involvement and out-of-class experiences can include post-class interaction with faculty, collaboration on teaching and research projects, and other academic endeavors (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991), this study focuses on student involvement in such extra-curricular experiences as student organizations and campus activities.

The benefits of student involvement can be significant. Students who become involved in one organization or activity often become involved in more, and grow to develop much more pride in their institution along the way (Abrahamowicz, 1988). Student involvement also gives students chances to interact with a wide range of people, develop management skills, and enhance self-confidence (Bialek & Lloyd, 1998).

Colleges and universities that encourage student involvement find many benefits to the institution itself. If involved students are more satisfied with their college experience,
and feel more connected to the campus, as Astin (1999) discovered, then they will be more likely to want to stay enrolled. More satisfied students will most likely remain committed to their institution after graduation as well. Thus, colleges and universities try to increase student involvement through many means. Kuh et al. (1991) found several characteristics of colleges and universities that are successful in their goals of increasing student involvement, which are (a) having a clear and visible mission, (b) encouraging and valuing student initiative and responsibility, (c) recognizing and responding to the total student experience, (d) providing smaller environments and multiple subcommunities for student learning, (e) taking students and their learning seriously, and (f) generating feelings of loyalty for the institution. Whatever means may exist to promote student involvement, it is certainly a priority for many colleges and universities – for both student and institutional success.

Involvement and leadership are related and there are different perspectives on the relationship. Involvement can be viewed as a stepping-stone for positional leadership. The typical progression might be: involvement as a member, involvement as a committee chair, and involvement as an organization officer. This view of involvement is hierarchical, and rewards motivated students with both natural and learned skills. Involvement can also be seen as synonymous with leadership. According to this perspective, an individual has demonstrated leadership simply by being involved. Any member of an organization can be a leader in any particular situation. Titles and positions may exist, but they are not given the same amount of power and influence found in traditional views of leadership.

Perspectives on Leadership

Defining leadership is a difficult task since several different definitions, models, and theories attempt to describe this phenomenon. Bass (1990) states: “There are almost as many
different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p.11). Thus, trying to make sense of leadership is a challenge, since as James MacGregor Burns (1978) observed: “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p.2). Rogers (1996) described two different paradigms of leadership: the industrial paradigm and the postindustrial paradigm.

The Industrial Paradigm of Leadership

The industrial paradigm contains many conventional views of leadership that have dominated leadership perceptions throughout most of the twentieth century (Rogers, 1996). The first assumption of the industrial paradigm is that “leadership is the property of an individual” (Rogers, 1996, p.302). In other words, leadership is about one person (a leader) influencing others to accomplish the goals he/she sets (Rost, 1993). The followers are to do what the leader wants, and they do not possess any power or influence. Other theories and models relate to this assumption, including the Great Man theories (Bass, 1990). These theories are based on the notion that leadership rests within the hands of one person. Leaders often inherit their abilities, and thus have different degrees of intelligence, energy, and moral force than their followers (Bass, 1990).

The second major assumption of the industrial paradigm is that “leadership pertains primarily to formal groups or organizations” (Rogers, 1996, p.302). In this view, leaders must lead an organization or a group. In addition, leadership is largely positional, with those holding a higher rank or title within an organization having the power and influence. Thus, an officer of a student organization, a military general, and the President of the United States are considered leaders. Those who are subordinate to the positional leaders usually are not considered leaders, and fall into the role of a follower (Rogers, 1996). Gardner (1997) agrees
with this assumption: "Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (p. 374).

Bass (1990) also discusses what he terms *situational theories*. In these theories, situational factors determine who will emerge as a leader. Leadership resides in the group, and is given to those who put forth a vision that the group is willing to follow. While these thoughts are not as limiting regarding who can be a leader, they still place the power into the hands of a few individuals. The only difference is that different individuals can emerge depending on the situation. Situational theories are also focused on formal groups and organizations.

The third major assumption of the industrial paradigm is that the terms leadership and management are intertwined (Rogers, 1996). Like conventional views on leaders, managers often have a title or position, and possess power over subordinates. In addition, managers possess particular skills and traits, which set them apart from others, and leaders are often viewed as having similar characteristics (Rost, 1993).

Trying to determine the necessary skills for leadership is as difficult as finding a definition for leadership. Many leadership scholars and theorists have tried to determine what the necessary skills are. For instance, Barsi, Hand, and Kress (1985) report that leaders need to possess both personal traits and technical skills. The personal traits that they believe to be important are (a) having a values system, (b) human relations skills, (c) flexibility, (d) insight, and (e) self-concept; the technical skills include delegation, goal setting, and evaluation (Barsi et al., 1985). Barsi et al. (1985) also comment that student affairs should
attempt to identify students who "possess the basic personality traits, character, integrity, and values system that are necessary for effective leadership" (p. 27).

Bennis (1989) observed that there are four different management competencies for good leadership. The first, *management of attention*, refers to a leader’s ability to set forth goals and visions that attract followers. *Management of meaning* is the second competency, and means that the leader has the ability to communicate his or her vision to others. The third competency is *management of trust*, with a good leader making decisions congruent with a set of values, and acting with a high degree of constancy. The final competency offered by Bennis is *management of self*. This refers to a leader’s awareness of his or her own strengths, and knowing when to use them.

Many of the popular books and theories on leadership support the industrial paradigm. One of the most common books people refer to when addressing leadership development is Stephen Covey’s, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989). While the term leader is not in the title, it is found throughout the book, and the assumption can be made that the seven habits for personal effectiveness that Covey provides are also habits for leader effectiveness (Rost, 1993). The habits which Covey (1989) describes (in his terms) are (a) be proactive, (b) begin with the end in mind, (c) put first things first, (d) think win/win, (e) seek first to understand, then to be understood, (f) synergize (refers to building relationships), and (g) sharpen the saw (refers to personal well-being).

Another example of popular leadership theory is the five exemplary practices of good leadership, offered by Kouzes and Posner (1992) in *The Leadership Challenge*. According to these authors, the five practices for creating leadership are (a) challenging the process, (b)
inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act, (d) modeling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1992).

The Postindustrial Paradigm of Leadership

The postindustrial paradigm has emerged from more recent literature and thoughts on leadership, as well as through criticism of the traditional paradigm (Rogers, 1996). Like the industrial paradigm, the postindustrial paradigm has a few assumptions, which are described below.

The first assumption of the postindustrial paradigm is that leadership is based on relationships, and does not belong to any individual (Rogers, 1996). Rost (1993), for example, defined leadership as a process involving collaborative relationships that affect change. Rost (1993) elaborated on this in the following way:

The leadership relationship is multidirectional. The relationship involves interactions that are vertical, horizontal, diagonal, and circular. This means that (1) anyone can be a leader and/or a follower; (2) followers persuade leaders and other followers, as do leaders; (3) leaders and followers may change places in the relationship; and (4) there are many different relationships that can make up the overall relationship that is leadership. (p. 105)

Burns (1978) said largely the same thing in his transformational leadership model, which described leadership as a relationship that elevates both the leader and the follower. In his view, leadership is based on the shared goals and the common purposes of leaders and followers. Astin and Astin (2000) believe that there are values that emerge during the process of leadership. These values include consciousness of self, congruence, commitment,
collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship (Astin & Astin, 2000).

A popular perspective on the leader/follower relationship, which Rogers (1996) lists in the postindustrial paradigm, is Greenleaf’s model of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1996). In this model, the role of leader is described as meeting the needs of others. Thus, the leader is a servant to his or her followers. The followers’ needs determine what the leader does, and what the goals of a group or organization should be. A servant leader is selfless, and assumes his or her role for the benefit of others. This is opposed to the industrial notion that leaders are all-knowing and all-powerful (Rogers, 1996).

The second major assumption of the postindustrial paradigm is that “leadership is about change” (Rogers, 1996, p.305). While management often carries with it the notion of keeping things the same, leadership should be about change (Rost, 1993). Astin and Astin (2000) had change in mind when they developed the Social Change Model for Leadership Development. For them, "leadership implies a process where there is movement - from wherever we are now to some future place or condition that is different" (Astin & Astin, 2000, p.8). Astin and Astin believe that society is dealing with some major problems that cannot be addressed by a few individuals or by those with titles and positions, but instead can only be solved by groups empowered to create change. Thus, they also believe leadership is based on collaboration and relationships, since those are inevitable when people are involved (Astin & Astin, 2000).

The third major assumption of the postindustrial paradigm is that “leadership can be done by anyone, not just by people who are designated leaders” (p.305). Astin and Astin (2000) believe that leadership is not for the chosen few, and is instead a capability of anyone
who wants to make a positive social change. Rost (1993) feels that anyone can be a leader and disagrees with the notion that leaders are people who possess particular skills and/or traits. He argued that there are not particular leadership skills because there is no consistency. Some individuals who possess many of these supposed skills are not considered leaders. At the same time, there are many who are considered leaders that do not possess any of the skills.

While the industrial paradigm has dominated leadership perceptions in society (Rogers, 1996), and quite possibly on college campuses as well, some signs of the postindustrial paradigm are present. For instance, research has demonstrated that women tend to perceive leadership in a more non-traditional way (Kezar, 2000; Romano, 1996). In a study of women student leaders, Romano (1996) noted that women use words such as, “nonhierarchical, interactive, accessible, one-to-one, equality, and team member” (p. 679).

Kezar (2000) believes that the same can be true for people of color, who also tend to view leadership as non-hierarchical. In addition, Kezar states that: “white women and women of color tended to describe leadership as collective, collaborative, empowerment based, nondirective, process oriented, facilitative, team oriented, and characterized by equal power relations” (p. 8). Thus, the postindustrial paradigm of leadership is alive on college campuses.

**College Student Perceptions of Leadership**

One major study concerning student perceptions of leadership was found in reviewing the literature. The study, conducted by Wielkiewicz (2000), sought to create a measure for student perceptions of leadership, which resulted in the *Leadership Attitudes and Beliefs Scale*. The researcher found that student perceptions could be placed into two dimensions:
hierarchical thinking and systemic thinking. Hierarchical thinking refers to beliefs that leadership is power-based, and those with positions at the top exert the most influence. Systemic thinking refers to the notion that anyone within a system can exert influence.

As addressed in chapter one, Astin and Astin (2000) believe that the industrial paradigm can promote constraining beliefs that limit student participation in leadership experiences. This is because when students believe that certain traits or characteristics are required of leaders, and that leaders must have a title or position, none of which they possess, they do not feel empowered to engage in the leadership process. They do not feel connected to leadership, and their talents and abilities go unrecognized. These beliefs can result in external actions such as students being disengaged in campus life, being passive learners in the classroom, and students self-selecting out of leadership opportunities (Astin & Astin, 2000). Many students may be unaware that they possess these limiting beliefs. Astin and Astin (2000) also believe that the goal of leadership development initiatives should be to instill empowering beliefs in college students. Empowering beliefs encourage students to become involved in multiple ways on campus and in the community. Students who have traditional leadership roles may be the only ones who currently have empowering beliefs.

An assessment of current student involvement in leadership experiences can be helpful to this study. Levine and Cureton (1998), in their study of the contemporary college student, found that while opportunities for student influence in institutional governance has increased, student desire to be involved in governance has decreased (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Student government is still seen by most college students as a powerful group on college campuses, despite the fact that college students are determining who comprises this group in fewer numbers with a general decrease in participation in student elections since
Student organizations are becoming larger in number on college campuses as they become more specialized towards specific student needs. However, student involvement in clubs and organizations is not increasing, which means groups are smaller (Levine & Cureton, 1998). In addition, more groups mean more competition for campus resources.

Leadership Development in College

Leadership development is a challenge for higher education. Many colleges and universities have leadership development as one of their principles, and this is realized in several different ways. Posner and Brodsky (1992) observed that most of the leadership programs in higher education are created using the same conceptual basis as non-educational environments such as business. Some of the most common methods of leadership development include: student organizations, leadership conferences, leadership seminars, and educational programs (McIntire, 1989). Student Affairs has typically been the locus of leadership development initiatives on college campuses, although some institutions offer academic courses on leadership, many of which are for credit (McIntire, 1989). External leadership initiatives also have found presence on college campuses, including LeaderShape, Inc. and specific Greek organization programs, IMPACT and UIFI (Undergraduate Interfraternity Institute). A large number of motivational speakers and presenters exist and provide programming for colleges and universities. Thus, discussions of leadership are present in some way at many institutions of higher education.

Many of the aforementioned leadership development initiatives fall within the industrial paradigm, and are focused on skills, traits, and positions. However, the approaches often are very different, and leave no consistent view or belief of how to develop student
leaders. Roberts and Ullom (1989) offered a framework in which to place leadership initiatives, and stated that there are differences between leadership training, education, and development. *Leadership training* means improving the performance of an individual in the role he or she presently occupies. Thus, officer training workshops and organizational retreats are considered leadership training. *Leadership education* takes training to the next level by offering broader lessons in leadership and how to apply them in settings other than the role the student presently occupies. Thus, leadership education can contain theory and reflection. *Leadership development* is defined by Roberts and Ullom as placing students in an interactionist environment that allows them to work with others towards change, while struggling with an increasing complexity of situations. Leadership development, in other words, occurs because of the experiences that students have. As they are challenged, and as they work with others, leadership development happens.

Using the Roberts and Ullom (1989) model, different foci exist within each of the paradigms. In the industrial paradigm, leadership training is the focus. Students in leadership positions are taught skills and traits that will help them in their roles, and hopefully be transferred to situations beyond the campus setting. Rost (1993) is critical of this approach:

The number one problem with leadership development during the 20th century is that it - leadership development - has been equated with leader development. That is so because leadership has been understood as being that which the leader does. Leadership is synonymous with the leader. When leadership is equated with the leader, it is logical to put all of our developmental eggs in the leader basket. (p.97)
In the postindustrial paradigm, leadership development is the focus. Students are empowered to work together in challenging situations, and then learn from the process. In this situation, anyone who chooses to be involved in the leadership process can learn from the experience. Leadership education can be present in both paradigms.

Colleges and universities can use elements of both paradigms. Thus, efforts to develop leadership can vary both across different institutions and within them. However, typically one paradigm is dominant. At ISU, the programming is focused more on skill development and targeted towards positional leaders. For instance, the Leadership Enrichment and Action Program (LEAP) is divided into three sections depending on students’ experience with leadership and the topics discussed include, among others, communication skills, interviewing skills, fundraising skills, and public speaking skills (Student Activities, 2001). ISU also offers several leadership seminars, which are specifically designed to give students the tools to be effective leaders. A further discussion of ISU’s leadership initiatives is in chapter four.

A few campuses have shifted away from skill building and focus more on broader interpretations of leadership. For instance, UCLA has structured its Bruin Leaders Project based on the Social Change Model of Leadership (Bruin Leaders, 2000). The program designers felt that the Social Change Model was a good foundation for the program, because the model is “designed explicitly within the emerging postindustrial paradigm of leadership” (Outcalt, Faris, McMahon, Tahtakran, & Noll, 2001, p. 181). Thus, the model focuses more on collaboration towards shared goals; the focus is more on the group, and less on the individual. Community service is also a critical component of the Bruin Leaders Project. Miami University also incorporates community service, or service learning, into its
leadership initiatives (Miami Leadership, 2000). Miami has attempted to move away from targeting its leadership initiatives to a select group of students, and the stated mission of Miami’s Leadership Commitment (MLC) is: “to develop the leadership potential in all students for the global and interdependent world of the future” (Miami Leadership, 2000).

Summary

Overall, most of the literature on leadership development can be considered industrial. The industrial paradigm is also dominating popular leadership literature found outside the realm of higher education. At the same time, there is a sense that the postindustrial paradigm is emerging, as much of the most recent literature demonstrates. The same is true for campus leadership development efforts: most can be considered industrial in nature, while some of the more recent leadership development initiatives have been framed with the postindustrial paradigm in mind.

The one area of leadership research that has been neglected is student perspectives. Many models, theories, and conceptual frameworks have been created, but little is known about how college students simply perceive leadership and how it influences their lives. Chapter three will discuss the methods that were chosen to try to address this very concern.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of chapter three is to discuss the research methods that were used in this study. Specifically, this chapter will address the use of qualitative methods, research participants, research site, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Use of Qualitative Methods

This research involved the use of qualitative methods, specifically focus groups, interviews, and document review. Qualitative methods seek to understand how individuals determine and react to their reality. Merriam (1997) described the purpose of qualitative research in this way: “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in their world” (p. 6). Thus, individuals and the context are both important in qualitative research.

Qualitative methods were chosen for this research because the researcher sought to understand student perceptions of leadership, and how these perceptions may contribute to empowering beliefs that promote, and constraining beliefs that limit, engagement in leadership. In order to gain more in-depth and personal perceptions of leadership, understanding how students make sense of their lives related to leadership is important. One of the desired outcomes of this study was for concepts and definitions regarding leadership to emerge from the students’ stories. Questions were crafted to challenge the students to think about what leadership really means to them. Context plays a major role in these perceptions, as do the students' backgrounds and previous experiences. Essentially, a goal of this study
was to understand their experiences, how they made sense of them, and how the experiences created the beliefs and perceptions they have.

Since this study is within a bounded system, Iowa State University (ISU), it can be considered a single case study. According to Merriam (1997), when case study design is employed, "the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994): "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality...and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (p. 4). Students do not exist in a vacuum; their experiences are influenced by previous experiences. Their perceptions are shaped by a variety of factors, which need to be investigated. Thus, it was important to know the students personally, and allow them to drive the research. Qualitative methods served as an appropriate means of achieving this objective.

By utilizing focus groups, a developmental opportunity existed for the students to reflect on leadership and perhaps learn something new about themselves. Ideally, focus groups allow the students to learn from each other, and use others’ perceptions to frame their own. Fontana and Frey (1994) stated that focus groups have advantages in that they are "data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses" (p. 55). At the same time there are drawbacks. For instance, students might have shared ideas that were not uniquely theirs.

**Research Participants**

Two different sampling methods were used to obtain participants for this study: criterion sampling and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling refers to selecting participants based on predetermined criteria (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). For this study, criteria were: (a)
students who are involved in traditional student leader roles, hereafter referred to as student leaders; and (b) students who have never and are not currently involved in traditional student leader roles, hereafter referred to as disengaged students. As stated in chapter one, traditional student leader roles refer to positions on a college campus or within a student organization that are perceived to have power and influence, such as president, vice-president, and chair. Any student who currently holds, or has held, such a position was considered a potential student leader participant in the study. In contrast, any student who does not hold currently, or has never held, such a position fell into the disengaged student pool. The latter category was identified using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling means that participants identify other potential participants (Merriam, 1997). The student leaders provided names of their peers, whom they believe have been disengaged from leadership experiences.

A list of student organization presidents was obtained from the Student Activities Center at ISU. The lists were divided into 11 categories by organizational type: community service, councils and government, departmental, fraternities, sororities, honor societies, multicultural, political, recreation and sports, religious, and special interest. Ten student organizations were selected randomly from each category, and the presidents were contacted using electronic mail to determine if they were interested in participating in the focus groups. A sample contact letter for the student leaders is included in appendix A. Special attention was given to gender balance. In addition, other involved students who serve as officers within student organizations were identified due to a previous advising relationship with the researcher. In total, 24 student leaders agreed to participate. Following the focus groups, the student leaders provided names of peers who could qualify for the disengaged student
category. The references were kept anonymous, and the disengaged students were contacted by electronic mail and asked to participate in focus groups. A sample contact letter for the disengaged students is included in appendix B. Five students responded to requests to be interviewed. Thus, instead of focus groups, individual interviews were conducted with these students. A more detailed account of each participant pool follows:

The Student Leaders

The 24 student leaders who participated in the interviews represented some of the most visible and influential campus leaders at ISU. They led a variety of student organizations, such as religious organizations, student governments, departmental clubs, Greek organizations, and service organizations, among others. A list of the student leader participants, the type of organizations in which they currently hold a position, their major areas of study, and their academic classifications are included in appendix D.

Most of the student leaders were presidents or former presidents of their organizations. Although they have each belonged to, and participated in, a plethora of organizations, most of them regarded their current leadership position as the most significant, and those will be used as one of the participant identifiers throughout this report.

Of the 24 student leader participants, only two were non-white. One was an international student, and the other was African-American. A total of 11 male and 13 female student leaders participated in the study. The academic classifications of the students were as follows: 13 are seniors, 7 are juniors, and 3 are sophomores. One student leader was a graduate student. An attempt was made to interview students who were older, and had more experience with student involvement. This was based on the assumption that freshman and sophomore students still have a great deal of time to determine how they wish to engage in
leadership while in college. With the exception of the sophomores, the student leaders generally had two to three years of leadership experience. The sophomore participants should not be discounted by their age; each currently serves as the president of his or her organization.

The Disengaged Students

The five disengaged students were very active and thoughtful participants in the study. Since they were relatively uninvolved in student organizations, and seemed to discuss their college experience in terms of their academic work, their majors and academic classifications are listed in appendix D, and will be used to help identify them throughout the study. The students were each assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of this thesis and for oral presentations of this research. A further description of each disengaged student follows.

Julie has been involved with a couple of student organizations but is considered a disengaged student because she has never aspired to a leadership position. She is a senior, and studies Community Health Education. Julie is a very outgoing and light-hearted individual.

Danny is a junior in Pre-business. He joined a fraternity early in his college career, but withdrew from membership shortly thereafter. He is a strong individual, who is driven by achieving personal goals that are largely academic. Danny is very opinionated, and fairly distrustful of positional leaders.

Lawrence is a sophomore, who majors in Meteorology. He is involved with his residence hall floor, but does not intend to seek a position there or in any other student organization. Lawrence is very introverted, and has a cynical view towards student leaders.
Marj is a junior, majoring in Mechanical Engineering. She has been involved in a couple of organizations, like Julie, but has not held positions within them, nor does she plan to in the future. Marj is very determined to succeed as a woman in a predominately-male discipline.

Bill is a senior, majoring in Management Information Systems. He was involved in a fraternity his freshman and sophomore year, and also has given campus tours. His latter two years as a student have been less involved, and he feels like he would much rather relax and not have to worry about being responsible to a group or cause.

Confidentiality

During the course of the study, confidentiality was maintained through: (a) storage of data and notes in a secure location accessible only to the researcher; (b) use of personal pseudonyms in this report and oral presentations of this research; and (c) removal of personally identifiable information from field notes, transcripts, and research reports. The students’ participation in this study was voluntary and they had, and still retain, the option to withdraw at any time without penalty. Consent forms were used in order to ensure that the participants understand their rights as participants. A sample consent form is included in appendix C.

Research Site

The site for the study, Iowa State University (ISU), is a large, publicly supported institution, which serves as the Land-grant University for the state of Iowa. The enrollment exceeds 26,000, and a large percentage of students come from the state of Iowa (Fact Book, 2001). The ethnicity of the student population is predominately White, with only about 7% minority student enrollment; the international student population makes up approximately
10% of the total student population (Fact Book, 2001). While ISU offers a diverse range of majors, it is renowned for programs in agriculture and engineering. The university is classified currently as a Doctoral/Research University-Extensive, and offers a wide range of advanced degrees.

**Data Collection**

Five focus groups, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, were conducted with the student leaders. Five individual interviews, lasting about the same amount of time, were conducted with the disengaged students. The focus groups and interviews were recorded using audiotape.

Before the focus groups and individual interviews were conducted, students were asked to write a description of their definition of leadership. These definitions served as the starting point for the discussions. The focus groups and interviews consisted of a semi-structured interview protocol. Questions were asked that specifically addressed how students perceive leadership and why they have particular perceptions. The questions were constructed based on previous literature on intended outcomes for student involvement, industrial and postindustrial perceptions of leadership, and methods for leadership development. In addition, each focus group and individual interview yielded new possibilities for questions. Sample interview questions are included in appendix E.

The focus groups provided an opportunity for the students to test their perceptions with their peers, and the group interviews flowed like a conversation. At several points, students would challenge each other on their thoughts, which helped to create new questions that the researcher had not anticipated. At the close of each interview, it was typical for the
students to comment on how much they had learned through the experience, and how many new insights they had developed.

Data were collected from focus groups and individual interviews until a point of redundancy had been achieved, meaning that subsequent focus groups and interviews would have most likely not yielded new information (Merriam, 1997). Once this determination was made, one more focus group and interview were conducted to ensure that redundancy had been achieved.

An attempt to assess the institutional perspectives on leadership was also made through a review of appropriate documents. The following were reviewed: (a) the mission of the institution, (b) the mission and leadership development beliefs of the Student Activities Center (the department charged with leadership development), and (c) leadership development programs available to the students.

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the interviews, which were transcribed and analyzed immediately following each focus group and individual interview (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The transcriptions were coded and categorized using similar themes and patterns. The categories were not predetermined and emerged from the data, with the exception of the presence of empowering and constraining beliefs and what those beliefs were. The other categories were: benefits of involvement, individualistic leadership, positional leadership, skill-based leadership, collaborative leadership, motivations for leadership, and leadership development. The results of the interviews are included as chapter four and analysis and conclusions are included as chapter five.
Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to ensuring the validity of the research. Several methods can be used to achieve trustworthiness (Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1994) and the following were used for this study:

Clarification of researcher bias: During the course of the study and in this report, reflections were made on the researcher's subjectivity and how it was managed (Glesne, 1999).

Member checking: Drafts of the data analysis were shared with some participants in order to ensure that the data has been properly represented (Glesne, 1999).

Rich, thick description: This report utilizes thick description in a way that “allows the reader to enter the research context” (Glesne, 1999, p.32). Due to the high number of interviews, the best way that this can be achieved is by including the students’ own words in the form of quotations.

Peer debriefing: The data analysis was shared with peers for their feedback, suggestions, and assistance in developing conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Peer debriefers for this study included administrators in student affairs.

Triangulation: By using multiple data collection methods (including focus groups, written definitions, and document review) triangulation added to the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Audit trail: The data, including audiotapes, notes, transcripts, documents, and all other relevant materials, are available to anyone exterior to the project to review.
Summary

This study was an attempt to discover, investigate, and describe thoughts on leadership through the perceptions of college students. As an emerging study, the methods were subject to change if necessary. However, no significant changes in the methodology were necessary; the chosen methods yielded a large amount of interesting data. Chapter four will share the results, and offer discussion on the student perspectives.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This purpose of this chapter is to share the results of the focus groups, interviews, and the document review. The chapter will be divided into two sections: context and student perspectives.

Context

Overview

In order to assess the environment in which the student leaders and disengaged students live and learn, a brief document review was conducted. The mission of Iowa State University (ISU), the mission and leadership beliefs of the Student Activities Center (SAC) at ISU, and the leadership development initiatives at ISU were analyzed to glean a better understanding of the institutional perspectives on leadership. The researcher’s own subjective knowledge of the culture and climate of ISU was added to enrich the analysis.

Student involvement at ISU is a major aspect of the institutional culture. The residence hall system at ISU is renowned for its house system, through which each floor is referred to as a house, is designated with a name, and consists of a team of officers (Kuh et al., 1991). The houses develop a sense of loyalty and identification similar to the significantly strong Greek system. Over 500 student organizations exist at ISU, which cover a broad scope of interests. The SAC separates the organizations into 14 categories: community service, councils and government, departmental, fraternities, sororities, honor societies, multicultural, political, publications and media, recreation and sports, residence halls, religious, special interest, and student life (Student Activities, 2001). Some of the more visible leadership positions include Government of the Student Body (GSB) President, VEISHEA Chair, and Homecoming Chair.
Institutional Mission

The institutional mission, role, and scope statements of ISU do not contain the word *leadership*, nor do they directly address leadership development. The mission is very academic in nature, though connections can be made to the work of student affairs. One passage within the mission reads, “the University strives to instill in its students the discernment, intellectual curiosity, knowledge and skills essential for their individual development and their useful contribution to society” (Fact Book, 2001). Another passage states, “...to prepare students and faculty to be productive and responsible citizens of the world” (Fact Book, 2001). The mission discusses “changing society” several times, and it is clear that ISU hopes to give society the people it needs to change and grow. An interesting point to consider is that these people are referred to in the mission as *contributors*, and not as *leaders*.

Leadership is addressed more directly in the mission of the Student Affairs Division at ISU, which reads: “Student Affairs is committed to the concept of educating the whole student by providing leadership opportunities, personal and professional opportunities, activities, services, and experiences critical to the development of students” (Student Affairs, 2001). The Student Affairs division accomplishes this through the SAC.

The Student Activities Center

The SAC’s brief mission statement is: “The Student Activities Center exists to enhance and support holistic student development through involvement in diverse experiences (Student Activities, 2001).” Involvement is important to the SAC, because it organizes and oversees the student organizations at ISU. Clearly, the SAC is invested in the student organizations because they provide opportunities for positional leaders to emerge,
and for other students to feel connected to the institution and campus life. On the SAC’s website, the importance of leadership is addressed:

To be a part of the ISU community, it is crucial that you develop leadership skills and abilities that will allow you to become involved in what is happening on this campus. From joining a student organization to volunteering in the community, leadership skills are a necessity. The personal development and growth that you experience will make you more organized, confident and capable of handling the responsibilities of college and your career. You will greatly enhance your ability to work in a more effective and efficient manner with a broader scope of people (Student Activities, 2001).

This statement, and the institutional mission (although more broadly applied), both address developing skills. In addition, the SAC feels that it is important for leaders to be organized, confident, capable, and able to work with a broader scope of people. Each of these traits could fit into the industrial paradigm, its assumptions, and the perceptions of the student leaders.

The SAC provides several leadership development experiences. The Leadership Enrichment and Action Program (LEAP) is a student-driven programming organization that organizes leadership seminars and workshops for students who register for the program. Leadership ISU is a semester-long leadership enhancement program for first-year students. The students apply to be involved in the program, and throughout the semester attend several leadership seminars. They are also divided into smaller groups, called “clusters” that meet every other week to have a more in-depth discussion of the material presented in the seminars. Leadership to Go is a series of one-time programs that cover a broad range of
topics related to leadership. Leadership London is a study abroad program in which a small group of students travels to London and studies leadership perceptions and styles in the United Kingdom. The SAC also organizes programs such as the Multicultural Leadership Summit, and the Organization Leadership Assembly; the latter trains organizational treasurers on the university accounting procedures.

The SAC appears to be concerned with reaching out to a large number of students. Their initiatives could be considered industrial because of the high emphasis on skills and qualities, but they could also be considered postindustrial because of the perception that anyone can be involved in leadership.

President's Leadership Class

A major leadership program at ISU comes from the Office of the President. The President's Leadership Class (PLC) brings together a small and selective group of students who applied and were chosen based upon their high school involvement and academic achievement (President's Leadership, 2000). A scholarship accompanies the program. Some of the student leaders mentioned the PLC in their interviews. Erik, who currently serves as the president of a major student government council and is a junior, was involved in the program and discussed its merits:

One program is the President's Leadership Class, which I was involved with my freshman year. It's not whether the material was substantial or the program was good, but those 20 people are some of the most high-achieving leaders at Iowa State. The PLC is an empowering program that supports and encourages students who have already had numerous leadership experiences in high school. Erik's comment on the substantive value of the program can be interpreted to mean that the honor of being chosen to the PLC,
and the encouragement received from the top levels of the university administration, are enough to launch the participants into high positional leader opportunities without needing an educational or learning component. Erik’s view is single and subjective, as is the interpretation. An analysis of the PLC will be included as a recommendation for further research. However, by having the PLC, ISU sends a message to students that leadership is a privilege for a select few.

Overall, the document review provided a small, but insightful view of ISU, and institutional perspectives concerning leadership. A considerable component of any institution is its student population, and the perspectives offered by student leaders and disengaged students at ISU are discussed in the next section.

**Student Perspectives**

**Overview**

Generally, all of the students were very confident in and comfortable with their definitions and perceptions of leadership. The participants did not require much thought before stating their perceptions, and their perspectives appeared to have been formulated fairly concretely before the interviews.

The remainder of this chapter will outline the students’ thoughts on leadership, specifically related to the research questions outlined in chapter two. The chapter will be divided into the following sections: (a) perceptions of leadership, (b) empowering beliefs, and (c) constraining beliefs. Participant quotes are used liberally, since many of the insights could not be reproduced powerfully without using the students’ own voices.
Perceptions of Leadership

The students were asked a broad range of questions with the intention of discovering their perceptions of what leadership is, who leaders are, and what the process of leadership entails. A list of questions used throughout the research is included in appendix E. In addition, the participants were asked to write out their definitions of leadership, and these definitions are compiled in appendix F.

Several themes emerged through the analysis of the interviews, and each will be used as a sub-section of this section. The themes are (a) leadership is an individual possession, (b) leadership is positional, (c) leaders possess particular qualities and skills, and (d) motivations for leadership.

Leadership is an individual possession. The first assumption of the industrial paradigm of leadership, that “leadership is the property of an individual” (Rogers, 1996, p.302), found agreement from most of the student leaders inasmuch as the dominant perception was that leadership is what a single person does. While a few student leaders deviated from their peers, most seemed to believe that only certain people can be leaders. Also worth noting is that each of the student leaders who were interviewed identified themselves as leaders, and so a reason for this perception could be that the student leaders did not want to concede that others could do what they are doing. They were proud to call themselves leaders and they wanted to maintain ownership over this distinction.

An interesting component of the individualistic leader mentality was the student leader responses as to whether leaders are born or made, which is an argument that has been debated for some time (Bass, 1990). The student leader responses varied between both choices, and some found themselves in the middle and believed both were true. Gwenyth, a
senior who is heavily involved with a religious organization, believed that indeed, leaders could be born:

I think there might be certain types of people who are genetically prone for leadership positions - not that you can't fine-tune your leadership skills, but I think certain people gravitate towards that role. I don't know if that's an environmental influence, how they're brought up or if that's just how they naturally are.

Gwenyth mentioned genetics throughout her interview (which also happens to be her current major), and was the strongest believer that leaders are born. Emory, a sophomore and president of a multicultural organization, offered her insights as well: “The reason people say leaders are born is because leaders have certain characteristics like they're strong, powerful, go-getters; those are the people who are ‘normal leaders.’”

Some of the other student leaders disagreed completely, and felt that leaders are created. Todd, a junior and president of a student government council, believed strongly in the value of successful and unsuccessful experiences, and the lessons that accompany them. Leaders learn from their experiences, according to Todd, and that is where they develop the skills necessary to be a leader. Todd felt that no individual is born with these skills.

Gwenyth and Todd’s differing perceptions seemed to relate in large part to how they had progressed to their leadership roles. Gwenyth is a very outgoing individual who keeps herself busy and active at all times. Before and after her interview, she had other commitments, and she stated that it was not unusual for her to be in meetings past midnight. The key factor is that she was not able to identify when or how her active lifestyle developed: “I guess I’ve always just been psycho-involved from the womb. It’s just kind of a way of life for me and I don’t really know how it started or if it will ever end.” By not being able to
identify any external influences in how she lives her life currently, her perception is that she was born with this need to be involved and be a leader.

Todd was a very introverted and shy individual before coming to ISU. His reflection on his growth as a student leader clearly shows the foundation for his perception that leaders are made:

In high school I was extremely quiet and never said a word and just slowly through growing up here at Iowa State was I ever able to get the confidence to state my opinion or try to get some group of guys to follow me wherever I was going. As I was able to get more experience I was able to become more of a leader.

Thus, it seems that the path the students took to become leaders resulted in where they believe leaders get their qualities. However, several student leaders felt that leaders are both born and made. The born qualities related to their personality and motivation, whereas the made qualities related to skills and competencies. Although the latter was mentioned, many student leaders still seemed to favor the notion that they were born with most of their abilities. For instance, Laurie, a senior who co-chairs a large-scale program at ISU, felt that some people could learn to be leaders, while others are “natural leaders.” Jared, a former fraternity president and senior, believed that “some people are pre-disposed to learning faster how to be a better leader.” Overall, it seemed that though some were willing to allow that leaders can be created, most did not want to escape the notion that they were indeed born with some special qualities.

Bill, a disengaged student, felt that leaders are born: “A lot of the great leaders are born, and they have that mindset that that’s what they want to do.” Bill’s responses consistently indicated his belief that leadership is an individualistic phenomenon. At the very
least, he felt that leadership appears to be that way: "You can look up to a group of people, but there is always one individual who sticks out in your mind, that I think you respect more than the rest, or would follow more than the rest."

The rest of the disengaged students believed that leaders could be both born and created. Julie’s comments were similar to those of many student leaders:

I mean some people are natural leaders, because they’re extroverted and outgoing and have that type of personality – but then other people can just study very hard and learn the skills it takes to do that. It takes work for anyone to do that, but some people are more energetic and might be more charismatic by nature.

Danny, a disengaged student, felt that leaders have a personal desire to be leaders, with which they either are born, or develop early in their life. To him, this desire is a human trait and an emotion. Lawrence, another disengaged student, believed less that a person is born with leadership qualities, and instead felt that they were developed in childhood, and were based upon a person’s background and environment. This was a belief that many of the other student leaders had as well. A further discussion on the influence of environment and background will be included later in this chapter.

While the disengaged students had similar beliefs about leaders being born or created, the construction of these beliefs probably is significantly different. The student leaders developed their perceptions based upon their experiences and their path to their current student leader role. The disengaged students had not experienced a leadership role, and thus their perceptions had resulted from other experiences. All of the disengaged students believed to some degree that leaders are born, and since they did not recognize those qualities
in themselves, perhaps constraining beliefs about whom a leader is has prevented them from being one.

Leadership is positional. Related to the notion that leadership is an individual pursuit, was the dominant student leader perception that leadership is positional. Kristy, a senior and co-chair for a service organization, summarized many of the student leaders’ thoughts when she stated, “In any organization you need to have a person at the top who is making all the decisions; you need that.” Many of the student leaders equated positions with titles. And, they believed that positions are important in order to exert influence in an organization. Erik felt that a position gives a person the “authority to act.” Thus, in his perception, a leader cannot accomplish much unless they have a position. Jared agreed:

I think in order to get anything large accomplished, you need to have some sort of position, because you can just be a member and not have a position. Say you come up with this extraordinary idea and you convince your group, and inspire your group that this is the way to go. To actually get anything done along those lines you're going to have to organize, and decide how you're going to delegate. Sometimes in the end the members would be more willing to follow whatever the elected leader, appointed leader, is going to do, rather than just someone from the group who comes up with an idea. You choose your leader, you elect them, obviously you have some kind of confidence in them and they have a position that says you have confidence in them, so they're going to be more apt to follow you.

Thus, a position opens up opportunities for action, according to the student leaders. Gwenyth felt that in order for a group to accomplish goals, it needs a “point person” and someone to direct the work of the group. In addition, some student leaders felt that they were more
successful as leaders because of the perceptions that accompany a position. Laurie commented on that point: “I think sometimes it helps [to have a position], depending on the situation. When you have a title, it gives you a certain amount of respect and people will listen to you.”

Titles meant success for the student leaders, and they shared that the best way to elevate oneself in an organization is to achieve positions until one has reached the “top.” Jamie, who is a senior and sorority president, felt that she could not have attained her position without holding less significant positions first, and progressing through the hierarchy of her organization. Jack, a junior and an officer for a student government council, spoke for many student leaders when he commented on the importance of a title:

I think the title is important because you can advance yourself in the position that you have with the title that you have. People weren't going to elect me vice-president of my floor because I was a member. You need the title to keep on going. For certain leaders it's very important because without a title you can't go to the next step, because you can't prove you did anything.

Overall, most of the student leaders felt that positions are not only important, but also necessary. This is not particularly surprising, considering that the participants hold some of the most significant leadership positions at ISU. Their motivation for attaining positions of leadership varied, but the most consistent feeling expressed was that in order to have an influence, one must carry with them a sign of legitimacy, which means a title or position.

Not all of the student leaders felt that positions are necessary, or even important, for that matter. David, a junior majoring in education, and the chair of a programming board, stated the following:
I think it's who you perceive to be leaders - because many people see people in positions as being leaders. There are many people who are leaders in their own way. It's not just position.

Trevor, a senior heavily involved in new student orientation, was more directly critical of the perception that a title is necessary: “I think sometimes there is a misperception that you have to have a title to be a leader. I can think of individuals who I have the most respect for but never held a position of power.”

Danny and Lawrence demonstrated a high amount of cynicism with positional leadership. Danny stated:

I think what we see as a leader isn’t always true – it’s the people in the background running the show, not the person up front. A lot of times what we see as leaders are really just spokespersons. There’s [sic] a lot of people being leaders in smaller areas. No, I don’t think it requires a title. People who have the titles don’t always have a grasp on what’s going on.

Lawrence also felt that “positions aren’t necessarily a sign of true leadership.” He suggested that the Queen of England was a good example of a meaningless title. Just as the student leaders felt a need to legitimize their choice to attain traditional student leader roles by promoting the value of positions and titles, Danny and Lawrence wanted to ensure that just because they have not felt the need to aspire to positions, they cannot be leaders.

The contrary view to leadership being an individual’s property is that it is a group possession. Related to this is the notion that within a group, anyone can be the leader depending on the situation and the need. Many of the student leaders, as mentioned earlier, felt that leaders are born with some natural ability, or at the very least develop necessary
qualities early in their life. However, many of these same student leaders retreated from that belief when asked if anyone could be a leader. Generally, the feeling was that anyone can try to be a leader, although it was not as easy for those without natural traits, and they needed to work harder to become leaders. Gwenyth, the student who believed that genetics played a role in becoming a leader, expressed the following: “I think you could pound anyone you wanted to into a leader, but it would take a lot more work, and would be a lot more of a stretch for their personality.” Kristy felt that if individuals do not develop the necessary skills and take on leadership roles early in their life, then she felt there was not much hope for them to become leaders. Others, such as Greg, a senior and president of a campus religious organization, felt that there are different levels of leadership: “I don’t think everyone can be President of the United States, but I think everyone can lead in some aspect.” Thus in his own opinion, the higher levels of leadership are reserved for those with special qualities, while others must be resigned to a lower level.

When they were asked if a group could function without a single identifiable leader (i.e., positional leader), the student leaders could not imagine such an organization. Amir, a graduate student and the president of an multicultural student organization, definitely moved away from the typical beliefs of his peers when he commented on the possibility of a group without identifiable leaders:

If you have a group without a leader, I think that's the most ideal situation I can think of. Because the decision making is not concentrated and is more distributed - not focusing on a single leader or not depending on a single person. I cannot think of such a group, but I wish it could be that way. The group sometimes becomes too
dependent on a single person. If my objective is to push the group's objectives forward, then it is scary if I think the group is too dependent on me.

Amir, unlike most of his peers, placed the group ahead of himself. His leadership was for the improvement of the group. The first word Amir shared when he was questioned about what leadership means to him was “cooperating,” which speaks a great deal about how he carries himself as a leader. The other student leaders definitely showed that they cared for their organizations, and the people in them, but their comments and perceptions demonstrated that they did not mind having the group be dependent on them. Overall, Amir appeared to be more humble about his role.

Ally, a junior who serves as an officer in several organizations, also showed signs that she believed the same as Amir: “I thought leadership was at first unattainable, and that you had to know everything. I always revered the president, but now I realize that really you’re all one team.” It should be noted that Ally has never been the president of any organization, and perhaps she does not feel the need to be, based on her new realizations.

The disengaged students were much more open to the possibility that anyone can be a leader, since they were not in traditional student leader roles and did not feel the need to have a position. Julie felt very strongly about that notion:

Yeah, definitely. Maybe not a leader like a president and be in charge of things but a leader with the people – someone you can turn to and go to with a problem and they can take it to the right person. It can be anyone I think, anyone that steps up when they are needed.

Considering the constraining beliefs outlined later in this chapter, one might perceive that Julie’s beliefs are spoken but not necessarily internalized. Marj, also a disengaged student,
believed that some people are natural leaders, while others can learn how to be a leader. Lawrence felt that there are multiple levels of leadership: “I think most people think they can be a leader in some way, on a real personal level; maybe on a smaller scale in a classroom.” Bill’s response differed from the rest of the disengaged students, because he did not believe that anyone could be a leader. He commented that “the chosen few” already have the leadership expertise and qualities that make it easier for them to be a better leader.

Whereas the student leaders generally appeared to consider leader as a part of their identity, the disengaged students clearly did not. However, they felt that at some times, and in some situations, they have been leaders. They may not have perceived that they were leaders at the time, or consciously sought out situations in which they could be leaders; it just happens. Danny commented: “I think everyone has some leadership ability, but I at least don’t sit around and think about whether or not I can be a leader.” For Marj, leadership is simply being an example: “I’m one of those people who don’t like to be the center of attention, but I think I’m a leader in different ways – by the way I lead my life.” She doesn’t think each day that she is a leader; it is not something very important to her. But when she reflected on what a leader is, she was able to make connections to her own life.

Leaders possess particular qualities and skills. When the students were asked to consider who leaders are, the discussions often revolved around a common belief that leaders have particular qualities and skills, which set them apart from others. The students all felt very strongly that this is true. Gwenyth commented:

I think leaders…have a variety of characteristics depending on what type of group they’re leading, the style and the structure, and what goals they’re trying to accomplish. Most of them are determined, ambitious, tenacious, people who are
motivated and capable of motivating others. They also have to have the core of leadership skills, like that core is important.

Many of the qualities that the student leaders felt leaders need to have reflected their perceptions that positions of leadership favor extroverts. Mel discussed the importance of charisma, and how that often determines who is chosen to lead an organization. She also cautioned that sometimes the most charismatic individuals are not the best leaders. Mel also likened leaders to salespeople, in their ability to persuade and sell their ideas. Jack felt that leaders had a different psyche, which then caused them to be more motivated.

All of the student leaders identified themselves as extroverted, with their definition based on whether or not someone has an outgoing and gregarious personality. They believed that extroverts have an advantage over introverts in securing leadership roles and positions at ISU. Anna, a senior, helps implement a leadership training program at ISU, and she was fairly clear about the benefits of being extroverted:

I think that if you throw people together in a group and a leader hasn't been chosen, I think you get the same type of people that emerge as the leaders – the ones who don't mind being in front of the group. So when you're electing people to a position or you're conducting interviews, you know what you're looking for - you're looking for a person who's outgoing, who's going to be inspirational, motivational, and take charge of a group. You're probably less likely to give it to somebody who is less vocal because you wonder if they can really control that group.

Erik believed the same:
If you're in a group of 20 people you've never met before, you know you go to some retreat or some conference or something, the first person who speaks up or has an idea is usually considered the leader of the group.

Anna and Erik were not alone in their responses, and this issue found more agreement between the student leaders than any other that was discussed. Some of the comments included:

Robert (a sophomore and President of a sports club): I don't think you necessarily need to be extroverted to be a leader, but I think sometimes it helps.

Ally: I think extroverts get picked more often than introverts because they're able to project themselves better.

Kristy: I think it's just a different type of people [sic] that you are - I mean some people have the personality that they want to be outgoing and they want to be that leader person.

Jared: Most people would rather be with someone who is outgoing and can sit there and wants to have a conversation with them than someone who doesn't. So I think everyone naturally gravitates towards someone who is outgoing.

Some student leaders believed there was still leadership potential for introverted persons. Mel displayed frustration that introverted people do not take advantage of the spotlight when given a chance. According to her, introverts can equal extroverts as leaders. Lisa, a senior and former sorority president, was quick to downplay positional leaders, despite being one herself, and advocated for the individuals who contribute quietly:

They're the ones that get stuff done. A lot of leaders are all talk - and they have great ideas, but they don't know how to carry them through. Those people are vital in order
to go anywhere, and I think they're the better leaders because they're the ones that have the vision and they're the ones that see some place and want to go there and make that happen.

Despite Mel and Lisa's perspectives, most of the student leaders felt that those searching for a leader prefer the extroverted personality type, and it is fairly evident that most of the student leaders themselves preferred it.

The disengaged students shared more thoughts about how introverted people can be leaders without providing a strong vocal presence in the group. They believed that quieter, more introverted people could contribute in different ways, mainly as individuals who work behind the scenes. Marj, who has been involved in student organizations but has never aspired to be a positional leader, preferred to lead by example:

To me, leadership can come in different ways. There's the traditional kind of leader—you know, who can stand in front of a room and show people how to do things. I think the most effective way of leadership is by example.

Julie shared the same feelings, and so both she and Marj felt that their actions spoke louder than their words. They generalized a great deal about personality types, indicating that extroverted people always are the ones who vocally direct a group, while introverted people lead by example and in less traditional ways. While one reaction to this sentiment might be that these women have developed their thoughts to believe that positions and certain personality types are not necessary for leadership, their other perceptions that will be outlined later indicate that perhaps they are attempting to find positive reasons why they have not pursued traditional leadership roles.
Danny also felt that certain personality types are not necessary for leadership; however, he stated that extroverted people do have a distinct advantage. Danny’s personality type was not entirely evident from the interview, but generally, the student leaders were more extroverted while the disengaged students were more introverted. This conclusion was drawn from both self-disclosure and observations. The student leaders answered questions quickly and processed through words, while the disengaged students reflected before they spoke and appeared to be processing considerable amounts of information internally, which are both indications of extroverted versus introverted personality types (Evans, 1996).

While personality types were identified easily, the participants’ thoughts on which skills were necessary varied a great deal. Some of those that were highlighted included: someone who can make decisions more quickly than others, motivational skills, empathy, persuasiveness, organizational skills, networking skills, professionalism, listening skills, mediation skills, ethics and morals, vision, people-skills, and intelligence. Communication ability was the skill most often mentioned by the participants, and Lisa highlighted it in her definition: “Communication and the ability to share ideas is [sic] also essential for growth.”

Can people be leaders if they do not possess the aforementioned qualities and skills? Not according to Erik: “I don't think it's possible to be any Joe Shmoe and walk on as president - you have to have the capabilities.” Erik was not alone in his thoughts, and even found some agreement from the disengaged students; Marj felt that some skills are necessary; however, she did not identify those skills.

When asked to reflect on how they developed their leadership abilities, and where they learned to be leaders, the student leaders rarely mentioned a formal leadership training program or event. Amir commented on formal leadership programs:
Leadership programs might help already-leaders, but they don't manufacture leaders. It may help them to brush up their skills. I think it has a role, but only after you are a leader. You make mistakes and learn from them. It's not ISU leadership programs. Kristy agreed that leadership programs do not have a significant result: “I think you'd get more out of putting a bunch of leaders in a room where they can share ideas instead of something that the university would put on.” Rebecca, a junior and co-chair for a major campus event, has had experiences that would support Kristy’s suggestion: “I’ve learned a lot in conversations with other people, in other leadership positions, hearing about their experiences and how they deal with certain situations. When I go to leadership seminars, I’ve usually heard it all before.” Timothy, a senior and the president of a major student government council, and Robert agreed that leadership programs can help re-energize and motivate a student leader, but they typically do not glean new knowledge from them. Others, like Erik, found other uses for leadership programs: “I like the leadership programs because it's a good place to go headhunting and recruiting and maybe even get a little competitive and find out who you're up against.”

The student leaders simply felt that experience was the key to their success. Greg stated, “I think experience is a huge thing. You learn so much from mistakes.” Todd agreed: “Success and failure – that’s what makes a leader.” Erik still considers himself a “leader in training” because:

I look back at something I've done, and think, "That was dumb." I'll be thinking I know exactly what I'm going to do, this is going to be right, this is going to work, and the next day I'll think this is better. I think I'm a leader but I think more importantly is the ability to adapt and change.
Danny and Bill could not think of a way a leadership training program could be made to be attractive to them. Danny commented:

I wouldn’t attend, maybe because my head’s too big or whatever. If I’m a leader, it’s because I am on my own – not because someone trained me to be. Because if you’re trained to be a leader, then that’s not being original.

Overall, the students did not give any indication that current leadership programming is meeting their needs. They constantly promoted the value of experience, of trial-and-error, and of learning from their peers. Some of the student leaders had experienced times when they felt a mistake could have been avoided, but they were still thankful for the chance to learn from it.

The student leaders shared that leadership can sometimes be very difficult, time-consuming, and ends up turning into crisis management. So why do the student leaders do what they do?

Motivations for leadership: One word that was stated repeatedly throughout the interviews and through the written definitions, was motivation. The participants regarded leaders as very motivated people. Working with people, interacting with others, and making friends were all motivations that the student leaders listed as why they became involved. However, they did not connect these motivations with their philosophy or definition of leadership. In other words, working and interacting with others was a positive result of being a leader, but very few of the student leaders felt that a group working together was the best way to create leadership. They still wanted to hold on to their position, and control, and they continued to make distinctions between leaders and followers. Kristy stated, “In order to be a leader you need to have help along the way, and it just can’t be you doing it; you have other
people to help you achieve that goal.” Her use of the word “help” in this comment can be interpreted to mean that positional leaders have control of the group and its goals, and the others are there to assist the positional leader. In Rost’s (1993) thoughts on collaborative leadership, organizational leaders and members have a mutual influence over each other, and each can influence equally. The student leader comments never reflected this model, and their perception of influence tended to be linear, flowing from the top down.

Another primary motivation for being a leader, given by the student leaders, was personal development. The student leaders indicated that their college experiences have definitely been enhanced because of their leadership experiences, and they could not imagine any type of life other than the one they are leading as student leaders. The results of being a student leader, according to the participants, are almost always positive simply because of the learning that occurs. Anna felt that her experiences have helped her to mature as a person. Timothy and Robert indicated that they had learned such skills as time management and the ability to work with people. Laurie offered a strong comment on the benefits of being a student leader when asked how she plans to be a leader in the future:

I don’t know how I’ll use my leadership, but I know I will. My experiences have made me a better person – a more outgoing person – a more motivated person and so no matter what I do, it’s a part of me now. I want to change things, and make things better.

Ally stated simply: “You improve yourself every time you get involved in something.” For Jack, it was just a lot of fun, and Rory, a senior and officer for a service organization, stated, “It’s been a blast and it’s helped me learn exactly what I want to do in life.” Rory plans to pursue a degree in higher education.
Trevor also was inspired to pursue a graduate degree in higher education because of his involvement. Katie could see herself working at a university as well. For others, leadership experiences have helped prepare them for their careers and life after college. Many of the future aspirations given by the student leaders were to find positional leadership opportunities, such as a CEO in Kristy’s case, project management for Robert, and Kimberly’s desire to have a leadership role within a church. Jamie felt so much passion for her sorority that she would like to remain involved on a national level. Not surprisingly, she would consider being the national president. Rebecca wanted to find a way to contribute in her community.

In addition to personal development, the student leaders demonstrated passion for the organizations and causes they worked with. Lisa even went as far as to say that passion can create leadership: “If someone finds something that they’re passionate about, they can be a leader.” Thus, a motivation for the student leaders was, as Emory referred to it, “the love.” She continued, “It’s like my child; it’s a part of me. I love it, I spend time with it, it gives me back stuff, and it grows.” Jared listed passion as his primary motivation for involving himself in Greek life:

The first time I ever really got involved in organizations and leadership was when I joined my fraternity and found something that I really cared about and had a vision about somewhere better it could go.

The chance to create change and improve something was another major motivation to serve as a leader. Ariel, a senior majoring in education, shared that the reason she took on the presidency of her sorority was to “make something better or make people better.” Anna became involved because she did not approve of the way an organization was being managed.
and wanted to shift the group’s direction. Timothy summarized it best when he stated, “I have a burning desire to help people and to help make this world a better place.”

Another frequent response for what motivates student leaders was the need to have control over a situation, and possess some type of power. Jack’s definition of leadership reflected this: “Leadership is when, during any given situation, a person or persons assert control over the group to better attain a specific result.”

When Erik was asked to share words that he associated with leadership, his first response was “control, over decisions and thoughts.” Moreover, Mel commented, “it’s nice having a little bit of control; it can help you steer the group in a direction.” Emory reflected on why she worked to get elected president of her organization: “I felt like it was me – I had to do it and it wasn’t going to get done right if I didn’t do it, so I needed to do it.” It was very evident that the student leaders felt a great deal of ownership for their respective organizations.

The disengaged students discussed power and control as one of their frustrations with popular perceptions of leadership. Julie felt it was simply a myth that leaders need to be “controlling and powerful.” Marj commented, “I do think it is about power and control sometimes; I think that leaders who like power and control can’t stand it when someone else does something.”

Her belief that some leaders want complete control over an organization or situation raises interesting questions about group dynamics. Can a group become too dependent on one single leader? Consider the following statement from Ariel, a sorority president:

I think it's hard with a leadership position that's just for a certain amount of time, like being a sorority president is one year long, and it's hard to give up that responsibility.
It's really hard to relinquish your power. People still come to me and I can't help them like I helped them before.

When leaders have power and control as one of their motivations, like Ariel, they might find it difficult to leave that position. In addition, the group might find it difficult to carry on when that person departs, as is evident in Ariel’s sorority, whose members still rely upon her.

Student leaders have different motivations for what they do, and the ones shared by those who were interviewed are very personal. No one felt an obligation to serve as a student leader; they made purposeful choices to get involved on their own, and none of the student leaders displayed any feelings of regret. For them, involvement has been an extremely positive experience. So why do some students avoid opportunities with such positive results?

The interviews turned to this question, and empowering and constraining beliefs were discovered.

**Empowering Beliefs**

All of the students felt strongly that there are intrinsic beliefs that encourage some individuals to attain roles of leadership in any setting. In addition, many student leaders felt that extrinsic forces were at work as well. No direct questions were asked related to empowering beliefs, but the student leaders revealed several of them during the course of the interviews. The beliefs could be separated into three categories: (a) support from others, (b) opportunities, and (c) background and environment.

**Support from others.** It is clear that the student leaders have had a great deal of support throughout their experiences. This support ranged from role models, in Todd’s case, to advisors and faculty, whom Anna found to be helpful:
I just started joining things, and one thing led to another and the networking and the support you get from people. I think a lot of it has to do with advisors and faculty that I've met and that gave me a chance to meet them.

Rebecca was able to link support back to her organization:

That’s one thing I’ve seen a lot in my sorority is that if you encourage somebody or suggest things to people, they get involved and the confidence builds. It’s not that they don’t want to, it’s just that they never really thought about it.

The kind of support that the student leaders received varied. However, one constant was encouragement. Laurie shared that encouragement was something important to her: “I think part of being a leader is being encouraged, and having people tell you that you are doing a great job.” Lawrence felt the same way about student leaders: “The more respect you get, the more your ego gets boosted up. Confidence is really important.” Bill felt that some people are “almost expected to become the leaders.” Thus, they get the support that is necessary to build their confidence and assume traditional student leader roles.

Opportunities. Related to support is the large number of opportunities that are given to student leaders. Kimberly, a sophomore president of a religious organization, stated, “I get a lot of opportunities, which I offer to other people; but I get offered every single one.” In many cases, the student leaders felt that all they needed was one opportunity, and if they took advantage of that, others would follow.

Katie commented on the opportunities she got in high school: “My teacher in high school got me involved. She gave me a chance. All she needed to do was give me that opportunity and I took it.” Laurie also felt that the opportunities she was given in high school prepared her to lead in college. High school involvement played a significant role in
Ariel's life also. She felt that growing up in a small town in Iowa gave her a chance to do everything, “because that’s what you had to do when you had only 400 people in your entire high school. You were in band, and you were in sports, and you were in choir, and you did the plays.” Lisa also mentioned that having a job while in high school helped to build her confidence.

When asked to think about where leaders come from, Todd made the following observation: “Most of the time, in my experience, it's been someone who has been there and led before - that are more willing to stand out and get things going again.” Thus, based on the student leaders’ perceptions, when a leader is given an opportunity, it opens the door for other chances to lead.

**Background and Environment.** It was mentioned earlier how important some student leaders felt that background and environment were in determining who might become a leader. Mel believed there were significant reasons:

I think a lot has to do with how you grow up and the experiences and examples that you've had in your life, as you’re developing your whole mindset and forming your personality. I think a lot of it has to do with your background and the way you’re raised.

She continued on to make this account more personal: “My parents never said, ‘no, you can’t do that,’ even if I wanted to do something really outrageous. They were always there and really supportive.”

Thus, empowering beliefs can be instilled from sources like the family, which was the component of background and environment that was cited most often. Katie, a junior and
sorority president, commented, “I think my parents are leaders. I don’t think I would be where I am today without their leadership and their knowledge, or insight into life.”

The student leaders felt that a background which was supportive helps leaders develop, but Timothy felt that providing challenges was just as important: “If you weren’t challenged as a young person, then you might not look to challenge yourself in college.”

Overall, empowering beliefs were present in the student leaders’ comments and experiences. The comments from the disengaged students indicated beliefs that are more constraining.

**Constraining Beliefs**

Constraining beliefs were discussed more directly in the interviews. The student leaders shared them in relation to others, while the disengaged students were able to make them more personal. Four significant themes emerged from the constraining beliefs, which are (a) lack of capabilities, (b) lack of confidence, (c) lack of interest, and (d) lack of opportunities.

**Lack of capabilities.** The student leaders generally felt that a significant reason why some people do not become leaders or engage in leadership is that they do not think they have the capabilities. Rebecca felt strongly that this was the case:

I think a lot of people don’t think they can. It’s not that they don’t want to; it’s just that they never really thought about it. They might think, “I’m not smart enough for that.” There are all sorts of reasons, but some just don’t think they can – or it never occurred to them that they could try something new. I think they look at some people and think, “wow, how do they do that – I could never fit that into my day,” and then they don’t even try.
Ally reflected on that idea as well: "I think at Iowa State there are so many people, and some
just figure that if they don’t do it, there are 20 other people who are more qualified than I am
who could do it."

Lawrence and Julie, who have both avoided positional leadership, offered
perspectives that validate the student leaders’ beliefs. Lawrence stated, “A lot of people just
don’t have the motivation, and some feel that they don’t have the skills to do that either,
much less the desire.” Julie offered a poignant personal reflection:

I sometimes think I could do a better job than those people, but then why aren’t I in a
position? Maybe I’m afraid that other people wouldn’t want me to, or they won’t like
my ideas, or maybe some natural leaders don’t care and are gonna say, no I don’t
belong there. There are things I could have done, or I could be a better leader than I
am.

Thus, the student leaders believe that the perception about lacking capabilities is
predominant among disengaged students, and both Julie and Lawrence’s thoughts confirmed
that as true; but where does that perception come from? Anna simply shared, “I think some
of that is a sort of stereotype about what we think a leader is.” Timothy agreed that there are
stereotypes that are pervasive about leaders, and Trevor offered this comment:

I believe there are stereotypes - that "born leader" factor. I think it's also failure to
recognize the different scales of leadership; somebody can have been a leader
and accomplished something on this campus and nobody knows about it.

Laurie felt that the stereotypes and dominant perceptions about leadership create
obstacles: “I also think that there’s sometimes an invisible barrier that people perceive is
there – ‘oh well, I’ve never done that before, I can’t run for that.’” Not all of the student
leaders were so sympathetic, however. When asked why some choose to not get involved, Kimberly stated, “I think it could honestly be depression, or they’re just lazy.”

**Lack of confidence.** In addition to lacking the capabilities, the student leaders felt that some disengaged students lack the confidence to be a leader. Their beliefs that confidence is necessary to be a leader can help to perpetuate this constraining belief. Ariel shared her favorite quote, which was, “Leaders are ordinary people with extraordinary determination.” She obviously carries with her a high degree of determination, like all of the other student leaders. So, where do the disengaged students lose determination? Ariel shared the following response:

Intimidation - they [disengaged students] feel like if they're not part of a certain group or part of a certain organization, then they don't have a chance to obtain a leadership position. I know that's really evident on this campus - "I'm not this, so I'm not going to be able to get that position." There's intimidation and a lack of not having confidence in yourself to just go out and do it.

Mel felt the same way: “I think some people are afraid of what others will think. They’re afraid to come out of their shell.” The fear of failure was another major reason that some people are constrained from leadership, according to Anna. Amir offered a unique perspective on fears, which placed them into an international context:

There are a lot of fears coming because each one [international student] is coming from a different culture. What I can tell, some international students have fears because of their experiences back home; so leadership is perceived in more political ways. Fear is also whether or not they can achieve the goal or not and if not what would be the reaction of the people in the group.
The disengaged students also discussed the importance of confidence in taking on leadership roles. Marj commented:

I think some people don’t want to be in the spotlight or be up for criticism. They don’t want to fail – they don’t want to risk it. I don’t think some people have the confidence – they don’t think they could do a good job.

Julie related confidence to personality type: “Or maybe they’re just an introvert and they don’t feel confident enough in their abilities; low self-esteem maybe. Or they don’t feel confident enough and think other people don’t want to listen to them.”

Julie was asked if she ever tried to attain a leadership position, and her response revealed many constraining beliefs:

No, and I don’t know why. Maybe it is just lack of confidence – I can’t see myself doing that. Yeah, I think there are so many people smarter than me who could that. Some even think, “Why would somebody want to listen to me?” I think I have good ideas, but I don’t see myself as a leader like that.

Emory, the president of a multicultural organization, stated simply, “Some people just don’t think they can be leaders.” She continued by sharing several constraining beliefs which some disengaged students might have: “I’m not smart enough for that, I’m not a 3.5 [G.P.A.] student, no one’s gonna like me, I don’t speak loud, I hate speaking in public, et cetera, et cetera. They don’t realize that you can pick up on those things as long as you have the drive.”

Lack of interest. Perhaps the reason some students do not engage in leadership opportunities is just that they have no interest in them. Bill felt that “some people are just
happy to be followers, and have someone else tell them what to do.” Many of the student leaders certainly agreed with this. Jack commented:

I think it depends on what floats your boat. I mean, for some of us it's getting a group and working with them and for others it's playing Nintendo and beating a level. I mean, it just depends on what you're interested in and what you want to do. I mean a lot of people want to work for an engineering firm and just follow orders and just make money and they go to class and they do their work; they go to the bar and they drink and they play Nintendo all day, but they get satisfaction out of that.

Kimberly’s comments on this topic revealed frustrations: “People don’t want to accept responsibility. I’m so sick of people not accepting responsibility for what they do. Some people don’t want to speak up, don’t want to do anything – they do the bare minimum.” Kimberly is a very motivated individual, who obviously cannot relate to those who are not motivated to engage in leadership.

Bill shared that his involvement in his freshman and sophomore years caused him to “burn out,” and now he would much rather do nothing and relax. Bill did not hold traditional student leader roles during his early years, but he still felt that being involved in a fraternity was very physically and mentally draining. He further discussed how much respect he has for people who have the time and energy to devote to leadership pursuits. Perhaps his perception of how difficult it can be to hold a traditional student leader role has caused him to avoid them.

Both Danny and Lawrence felt that they did not have the time or energy to devote towards an organization as well. Danny continually repeated throughout the interview that he does things for personal reasons, and to further himself. Clearly, he does not feel that
leadership can help him reach his goals: "Here, I feel like I’d rather concentrate on myself. I’m paying for college and my future depends on it, so it’s all about me. I’d rather focus my energy on myself."

Lawrence also indicated that his decisions and choices in college are made for himself, instead of others. He also discussed the struggle to achieve in an environment with a large number of people:

Basically, in college, I just think about me and I don’t think about others too much. In elementary school, you have 20 people, in middle school 300, and high school 400 – here at Iowa State there’s 25,000 people. It’s harder to come out on top.

Personal success is important to both Danny and Lawrence, but their notions of success did not include leadership. Danny and Lawrence also demonstrated some cynicism towards student leaders and their motivation, which may explain why they do not want to be included in that category. Danny illustrated this very well:

This may be harsh, but I think the leaders here are like the girl that organized your high school prom. They do it for attention and as an ego boost. Generally, a lot of college leaders are just there for the spotlight.

Lack of opportunities. Whereas the student leaders have found that they have received many opportunities to be leaders, they do not believe the same is true for the disengaged students. Jack commented that he thinks some just do not welcome opportunities: “Some people may have gotten the opportunity to become a leader where [sic] they may have gotten one chance, something like intramural chair for their floor - and they have just passed up that opportunity.”
Jared felt that some might be constrained from leadership because they simply were not asked to contribute, "and those people don't take on the vocal leadership just cause the opportunity hasn't presented itself or no one has invited them." Gwenyth agreed, and felt empowering others was the way to spread leadership throughout an organization:

They may not have the confidence to say, "I want to lead this" but when invited to lead they will do a very good job. Like if you identify some qualities or characteristics in someone and then ask them to share those in a leadership role, they can really be on fire.

Gwenyth shares some very empowering thoughts with this comment. However, only reaching out to those students who possess identifiable qualities still can be considered constraining to the rest.

Some of the disengaged students would have appreciated more support and more opportunities that may have caused them to be more involved. For instance, Julie stated, "It would be nice for people to show that confidence in you." Bill felt that more opportunities enhance a person's confidence: "It's kind of like the first time you give a speech in speech class. You're kind of scared, and you're kind of shaky, but the more and more you do it, the easier it comes." Bill also felt strongly that some student leaders hoard opportunities:

I think sometimes the people with the power, the people who are leaders, don't give other individuals the chance, because they're scared that they might do something better than them or come up with a better way to do things. They don't want their influence over a group to diminish any. Some people never have the chance to do something, even though they'd like to.
Bill felt that some student leaders only offer opportunities to their friends, or others within their organizations, instead of allowing everyone an equal chance to take advantage of the opportunities: “Sometimes it’s who you know, and not what you know.”

Overall, the disengaged students shared many observations about their constraining beliefs. Lawrence stated it most succinctly when he said, “Personally, I don’t think I’m much of a leader at all.”

**Summary**

The perceptions of leadership offered by the participants were somewhat predictable, yet nonetheless powerful. The conviction with which each person shared his or her beliefs was unexpected since leadership is often considered to be a very fluid concept, especially for college students who are still learning about how they perceive the world around them. Yet, only a few of the participants retreated from their beliefs when challenged to consider new perspectives.

Overall, the perceptions from the students strongly reflected the industrial paradigm of leadership, and the students’ thinking was more hierarchical instead of systemic (Wielkiewicz, 2000). In addition, several empowering and constraining beliefs emerged from these perceptions and from the participants’ stories. A further discussion of conclusions and their implications is included in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will offer general conclusions, implications for higher education, recommendations for practice, suggestions for further research, and a discussion concerning the limitations of the study.

General Conclusions

The research conducted for this study yielded a large amount of data that can be analyzed to present some conclusions about the leadership perceptions, empowering beliefs and constraining beliefs of students at Iowa State University (ISU). This section is divided into sub-sections that reflect the major conclusions drawn from the data, which are (a) industrial perceptions are dominant, (b) empowering and constraining beliefs exist, (c) leadership development is experiential, and (d) student involvement is positive.

It should be noted that the researcher favors the postindustrial paradigm of leadership. Although this belief was held in check throughout the data collection process, it will be revealed through the remainder of this chapter.

Industrial Perceptions are Dominant

The industrial paradigm of leadership (Rogers, 1996), as described in chapter two, was the dominant perspective offered by both the student leaders and the disengaged students. This paradigm contains three assumptions, which were all confirmed by the participants. These assumptions are (a) leadership is the property of an individual, (b) leadership pertains primarily to formal groups or organizations, and (c) the concepts leadership and management are intertwined. The postindustrial paradigm, on the other hand, received very little attention. Two of its assumptions: (a) leadership is based on relationships; and (b) leadership can be done by anyone, not just by people who are
designated leaders, were addressed sparingly and only when directly brought to the students’ attention. However, the third assumption, leadership is about change, was expressed more often.

The student leaders observed that leadership is an individualistic phenomenon, instead of a group phenomenon. When the students were asked to define leadership, their thoughts typically gravitated towards leaders. Most of the participants did not consider leadership as a process, and rather, viewed leadership as what an individual (the leader) does. Moreover, the student leaders eagerly separated themselves from the other members of their organization, and presented a dichotomous leader/follower perspective. Instead of the relationship-based perspectives of the postindustrial leadership paradigm, which asserts that influence is multi-directional (Rost, 1993), the student leaders tended to view leadership as a leader influencing followers without any reciprocal influence from the followers.

In addition, most of the student leaders shared the industrial perspective that leaders exert power and control over their subordinates, which was surprising considering their stated desire to work with people. Their perceptions can be interpreted to conclude that they prefer people working for them. Of course, this is a generalization, as many of the student leaders also portrayed themselves as leaders wishing to serve their followers, which is more in line with Greenleaf’s (1996) Servant Leadership model, described in chapter two as a theory consistent with the postindustrial paradigm.

Leadership is not only an individual phenomenon, as expressed by the student leaders, but it also requires special individuals. These individuals need to have particular qualities, skills, and traits. In addition, an individual will have a much easier time being a leader if he or she has an outgoing, extroverted personality that allows him or her to
communicate well and speak comfortably in public. It was surprising to learn how many student leaders still believe that leaders are born, instead of created. Even those who felt that leaders could be made felt it was going to be much more difficult for those without natural talents, and they would have to work a great deal harder. The dominance of this perception signals that the participants either are convinced that their abilities are natural, or they have no idea where their abilities came from. According to Astin and Astin (2000), these students would be unaware of the number of empowering beliefs that have been instilled within them. The student leaders have been encouraged, challenged, and supported throughout at least their high school and college years, yet many of them still are convinced that they have had leadership abilities within them from the start.

The skills and competencies that the students identified as important for leadership were diverse. The participants confirmed Bennis's (1989) four competencies for management. The students identified his first competency, management of attention, when they discussed the importance of having a vision that will inspire others. Management of meaning, Bennis’s second competency, refers to being able to communicate the vision, and as was mentioned in chapter four, communication was the skill most often highlighted by the participants. Bennis’s third competency is management of trust, and he asserted that leaders need to act congruently with a set of values. This competency was not revealed very frequently in the interviews, except for the two leaders of religious organizations who both felt morals and ethics were important qualities of leadership. However, the others expressed an overall feeling that leaders need to earn respect and be trusted. The fourth competency, management of self, was discussed in terms of understanding personal strengths and limitations. The student leaders were very confident in themselves. Overall, Bennis (1989)
offered a model that is highly industrial because it limits the term leader to only those who meet his competency requirements. Since the students confirmed his competencies, and in most cases believed strongly that those competencies (and others) are necessary for someone to be a leader, their perspectives can be classified as industrial as well.

The student leaders also gave their perspectives in the context of formal groups and organizations. Their thoughts on leadership were confined to these groups, instead of discussing leadership in a global context. This is not a surprise considering that many people tend to judge the world by what they are experiencing at the time. This narrow perspective also could explain why most of the perceptions were industrial in nature. Student organizations often are structured for industrial leadership, with elected positional leaders overseeing the operations of the group. The Student Activities Center (SAC) at ISU, for example, asks for a list of officers for each organization, as part of the organization’s registration process. Thus, having positional leaders is supported and encouraged by the SAC, and an environment is created in which names on the form are those who lead the group. In addition, the administration of a college or university also is typically organized in a hierarchical manner. ISU certainly is structured this way, with a president, provost, vice-provosts, several vice-presidents, and deans of each college. In other words, the student leaders have never been allowed to experience a different approach. They do what they can to have an influence on their organization or their campus, and that often means working with the system instead of against it.

What resulted from the limited context in which students applied their perception of leadership is that students placed great importance on holding a position, and/or having a title. Few of the student leaders felt they could have a significant influence in their present
situation without holding the position that they have. Many of the students even commented on how powerful it can be when the vision and the ideas come from other members, yet they found it difficult to imagine their experiences without their position. When the student leaders commented on role models that they have had, the individuals they named were usually former positional leaders, and some even held the same position the student leader currently holds. Thus, from the very start of their involvement, the student leaders have seen a leadership position as necessary to exert influence.

The one postindustrial paradigm perspective that was addressed with some consistency was the notion that leadership is about change. Most of the students demonstrated a sincere desire to improve and change the organizations or events of which they were a part. Many of them measured their success by how much the group improved, and they all seemed to welcome challenges. However, they were focused only on the narrow picture of student organizations, and did not share perspectives that demonstrated much desire to bring about change on a broader level, such as campus-wide or societal. They were comfortable creating change on smaller levels, which could be an asset to them after their college experience. Indeed, sometimes individuals may not understand the broader context of their actions even while they are affecting the context just the same.

Empowering and Constraining Beliefs Exist

As was described in chapter four, there are several empowering and constraining beliefs that were revealed by the participants. This finding confirms Astin and Astin’s (2000) assertions that they exist. However, how significant are they in college student leadership? Based upon the interviews with the disengaged students, they are very significant.
Astin and Astin (2000) defined empowering beliefs as liberating thoughts that allow a student to believe that he or she can have an influence and make a difference. The student leaders felt quite empowered, and extremely confident in themselves. They had support from others, a breadth of opportunities open to them, and came from a background and environment that built their confidence. They also possessed the skills and qualities that they believed were important for leaders to have. The student leaders also were in positions of leadership, which contributed to their confidence and influence. Finally, the students led within an environment that is supportive of single positional leaders and recognizes the qualities that they have as requisite qualities for leadership. In other words, virtually all factors work in the favor of the student leaders. They have no need to develop postindustrial approaches to leadership, because the industrial world is their environment.

The disengaged students definitely projected constraining beliefs, and the student leaders were able to recognize that they exist. Constraining beliefs, according to Astin and Astin (2000), are thoughts of disempowerment, which limit a student's perception of him/herself as an active participant in leadership and change efforts. The disengaged students indicated that they did not feel qualified for leadership, that they were not intelligent enough for the responsibility, and that their personality limited their ability to lead.

The primary constraining belief that appeared throughout the interviews was a lack of confidence. This is a broad belief, which encompasses a variety of factors that emerged during the interviews, such as:

- Fear of criticism by one’s peers
- Fear of failure
- Perceived lack of extroverted qualities
- Perceived lack of intelligence
- Lack of self-esteem
- Diminished feelings of self-worth

The student leaders truly felt that a lack of confidence and capabilities were the primary reasons for student disengagement, and Julie and Lawrence revealed perceptions consistent with these impressions. Although purely speculation, I truly believe that Danny’s indifference and even contempt for student leaders was based upon his frustration with not being allowed to consider himself one. Many times throughout the interview, he described situations when he had most likely been a leader, though he never placed that label upon the experience. His leadership did not fall within the traditional definition, and thus he was not supported as much as someone was with a position and/or title. Much as a younger sibling feels contempt for the older one who receives more attention, Danny seemed to want to discredit his peers who received the credit and the support. He, like the student leaders, consistently spoke in the dichotomous terms of leader and follower, though unlike the student leaders, he placed greater value on the latter. Danny felt that the positional leaders assumed their positions for selfish reasons, and simply to be the center of attention. If someone had seen the potential in Danny, he, too, could have become a significant positional student leader at ISU. However, perhaps it is better for him to be where he is as a postindustrial leader, and possibly find an adviser or peer who can help him understand the power of his role.

The student leaders also felt strongly that many disengaged students simply do not have an interest in leadership. They reported that some do not have the time, the energy, or the motivation to get involved. However, the student leaders failed to consider leadership
outside the industrial paradigm. This is not their fault, nor is it entirely negative, since their experiences shaped their perceptions. They have experienced leadership in a positional sense, within the confines of a student organization, and that is what leadership is to the student leaders. While positional leadership can be a very empowering, it can also be very constraining. As was discussed in chapter four, the student leaders did not believe they could have as significant an influence in their situations without their positions and/or titles. Thus, are the positions empowering these students to be leaders, or are they actually constraining them from learning to lead in different ways?

It is certainly true that some students do not want to be the president of an organization and all of the disengaged students indicated some lack of interest in being a positional leader. Perhaps Marj said it best when she indicated her belief in different types of leaders. She does not need to hold a formal position; her perceptions directed her to simply lead by example. Of the four disengaged students, Marj revealed more signs that she considers herself a leader in certain situations, none of which are positional or highly industrial. As far as the question of time is concerned, Julie conceded, “If I really wanted to, I would make the time.” If students do not show interest in industrial forms of leadership, such as attaining a leadership position or working within formal groups and organizations, are they passed over for leadership opportunities? Unfortunately, it appears that no one has given Julie a reason to want to engage in leadership.

In summary, empowering and constraining beliefs were evident and a very real part of the students’ experiences with leadership. Some of the beliefs that Astin and Astin (2000) proposed could fall into these categories were indeed confirmed, and some unanticipated beliefs were identified as well. The underlying effect of both empowering and constraining
beliefs on the students was the degree to which the students felt leadership was relevant in their lives. Generally, the student leaders found leadership to be very relevant to their college experience and to their future beyond higher education. The disengaged students did not.

Leadership Development is Experiential

What could be considered the greatest surprise revealed through the course of the interviews were the students’ feelings on the ineffectiveness of intentional leadership programs. Only two student leaders actually named specific leadership programs that they felt had helped them learn about leadership, and only two of these programs were ISU initiatives. Student affairs practitioners and institutions of higher education dedicate considerable resources to creating and implementing leadership development programs, and according to the students, these are to no avail. As was stated in chapter four, the SAC provides numerous educational opportunities for students, only one of which was mentioned by the student leaders.

What results are two questions: (a) are these programs truly ineffective, or (b) do the students not recognize their effectiveness and applicability? While no answer can be derived from the interviews, those who design the programs are most likely hopeful that the initiatives are not useless. Even if the participants did not learn anything from these experiences, other student leaders might have. There is some value to even having the programs available, and demonstrating an institutional commitment to leadership development. If nothing else, it creates an environment in which leadership is supported and applauded. However, the question remains, is only industrial leadership given this reception?
ISU currently seems to convey a message that leadership is important. Is the message intended only for those who fall into a traditional paradigm?

The student leaders overwhelmingly believed that experience is what has taught them the most. They were very willing to make mistakes, and learn from them without much risk. This is in contrast to the disengaged students, and specifically Julie. She was afraid that others might not want her to be a leader, or would not approve of her ideas. It is obvious that support plays a big role in how able students are to learn from their experiences. The student leaders have always had support, and they felt comfortable making mistakes knowing that the support is still there. The disengaged students do not always get the support that allows them to make mistakes without damaging their confidence or fearing retribution.

Nevertheless, experience was crucial in the student leaders’ development. Roberts and Ullom (1989) believed that this would be the case, in their leadership development model. To review, Roberts and Ullom felt that leadership could be taught in three ways: (a) leadership training, (b) leadership education, and (c) leadership development. Leadership training, or assisting positional leaders succeed in their present leadership roles, was not addressed at any length by the participants. Leadership education, or providing a theoretical foundation for leadership, also was not revealed to be a practice that helped the student leaders. Leadership development was the one element that showed consistency in the student leaders’ responses, as a positive contributor to their growth. Essentially, Roberts and Ullom regarded leadership development as giving the students opportunities to work with others towards a positive change, while dealing with challenging yet educational situations. In other words, students should be provided with opportunities to lead. This could mean student organizations (as was the case with the student leaders who participated in the interviews), or
other arenas that foster collaboration and accomplishment. Even though leadership
development relies on experiences, often it is accomplished intentionally; colleges and
universities try to create experiences, and these experiences often are industrial in nature and
revolve around formal groups and organizations. The Student Activities Center at ISU
certainly regards involvement as its primary leadership development offering, and the staff
proudly promotes that over 500 student organizations are available for the students to join.
The disengaged students did not seem to be interested in these experiences at all, and so their
opportunity to develop as leaders at ISU was diminished. However, the disengaged students
have had a wide variety of experiences in which leadership development could occur.
Lawrence holds a job while enrolled at ISU, and his work experience creates some
exceptional opportunities for him to develop as a leader. Marj is very engaged with her
studies, but did not make a connection between academics and leadership. Perhaps the
answer is not to keep trying to create new opportunities, but rather to develop ways that
students can reflect on the experiences in which they are already engaged.

The fact that the students commented on how helpful the focus groups were to their
learning indicated that there is a need and a desire on the students’ behalf for more
opportunities for positional leaders to interact. They enjoyed hearing each other’s
perceptions and learning more perspectives on how to manage an organization.

Student Involvement is Positive

The interviews revealed the general conclusion that student involvement is positive,
which after reviewing the literature, does not come as a surprise. The student leaders shared
several benefits of being involved, including acquired knowledge not available to them
within their majors or a classroom setting in general. Involvement also has contributed
positively to their self-confidence, and self-esteem. Several responses indicated a higher level of affiliation to ISU, and a greater feeling of ownership over the future of the university. The student leaders also were able to make easy connections between their collegiate leadership experience and their future career goals. Overall, engaging in leadership has enhanced the student leaders’ undergraduate experiences.

The disengaged students did not demonstrate a lack of affiliation to ISU, but showed a more narrow connection to only their college, academic major, or place of residence. In other words, they did not demonstrate the overall pride in ISU, and all its aspects, which the student leaders did. There also appeared to be a lack of confidence and self-esteem within a few of the disengaged students. Their future goals were tied directly to their academic work, with little interest in contributing their talents to the advancement of society. It still appears, however, that the disengaged students have had a quality undergraduate experience – a conclusion that could be challenged, since the measure of quality is entirely subjective.

**Implications for Higher Education**

Although the results of this study are not generalizable, they still raise some interesting questions for higher education, and student affairs specifically. As was stated in chapter one, leadership is an important principle for many institutions of higher education, as is leadership development. If any campus is concerned with developing its students into leaders, the research questions given at the outset of this thesis should be of interest as well. Some implications for student affairs in general will be shared in this section; however, any institution of higher education is encouraged to conduct a similar study since both student and institutional perspectives of leadership can be relative. The rest of this section will be organized by a series of questions that were raised based upon the results of this study.
Does Higher Education Create Environments that Constrain?

This study revealed that disengaged students believe they are constrained from serving as leaders. In addition, the fact that the industrial paradigm dominated both the student perspectives and the context in which the students practiced their leadership, suggested that environment can influence perceptions. ISU, although displaying a few signs of postindustrial perspectives, is highly industrial in nature. The structure of the university, the selectivity of some of the programs, and the high levels of formality within its organizations create an industrial environment (probably much like many other institutions of higher education). This environment is perfect for students with traditional leadership skills and extroverted personalities, who prefer structure, formality, and designated leaders. This environment supports those students, and favors their contributions. Other student contributions also are appreciated, but to a lesser degree.

Banning and Kaiser’s (1974) ecological model for campus environments suggested that institutional approaches to programming, and the institution itself, could be designed with student needs in mind. Perhaps ISU could use the Banning and Kaiser model to determine how disengaged students can find their place within the institutional environment. Currently, it seems evident that empowered students find the campus ecology at ISU to be in their favor. How many awards programs exist for disengaged students that strive to lead by example like Marj? How often are followers discussed in the campus newspaper? When the time has come to establish a university committee, how many disengaged students are asked to serve? Generally, the same student leaders participate repeatedly, and dominate campus life. They are relied upon, and in turn feel encouraged and supported.
Why does this occur? It is simply easier to locate student leaders, and in the busy day of a student affairs professional, he or she can spend only so much time helping individual students develop. The student leaders generally will emerge without needing to be “tapped,” and they can be trusted to serve in their roles without much supervision because they have served previously. In addition, student affairs divisions and student activities departments have a finite amount of financial and human resources. They cannot always seek out disengaged students and encourage them to get involved. Student leaders are easy targets for developmental initiatives and to take on an empowering role within a college or university.

If student affairs cannot reach out to students in the breadth that is needed to empower them, then two possibilities exist: (a) increase the number of resources granted to student affairs, including paraprofessional staff and student staff, so that more programs can be created and more professionals will be available to students; or (b) shift the campus environment to a more postindustrial perspective that welcomes and encourages student initiative from any level, and operates in a more collaborative and less hierarchical sense.

Much like individuals can empower and constrain others, so can the environment. The student leaders reflected this in their perceptions, as did the disengaged students.

Are Practitioners’ Perceptions Confined within the Industrial Paradigm?

If all students are to be encouraged and empowered to be leaders, then those charged with developing college students into leaders need to shift to a new paradigm as well. Of course, just as the students had their own individual perceptions of leadership, so do student affairs practitioners. Many practitioners have held student leader positions in their undergraduate and graduate years, and thus were developed in an environment that most likely was industrial, and at the very least traditional. It could be possible that these
practitioners, who would consider themselves to be leaders, have the same amount of pride in
and ownership over the leader distinction as the student leader participants in this study.
Indeed, it takes a great deal of selflessness to shift from the view of “leadership by the chosen
few,” to “leadership by all.”

If practitioners are locked into the industrial paradigm, then these perceptions most
likely influence their approach to leadership development. On a more personal level, their
perceptions probably are passed down to the students they advise. The student leaders
commented a great deal on the advisors, mentors, and role models they have had in their
lives, and how much these individuals have influenced the way they view their world.
Student affairs practitioners often are role models and mentors to student leaders.

In addition, if practitioners are confined to the industrial paradigm, then they are less
likely to empower students who do not fit the traditional student leader mold. Some of the
disengaged students either directly stated, or implied, that if given more opportunities and
more support, their college lives could be different.

Is Higher Education Inheriting the Industrial Paradigm?

One point that was considered before the interviews was that the students’
perceptions were not created in college. They might have been enhanced, challenged,
confirmed, or shaped differently, but they most likely were developed at an earlier stage in
the students’ lives. This point was confirmed for the most part. Some of the student leaders
discussed their high school experiences, and the involvement in which they engaged. These
experiences were not discussed in detail, but the students’ roles usually were positional.
Thus, these students could be bringing industrial perspectives with them to college. At the
same time, many of the student leaders discussed how much they had grown and changed while in college, which indicates that high school experiences had less of a role.

In addition, where are empowering and constraining beliefs instilled? A couple of the student leaders identified high school teachers as the ones who gave them their first opportunity for leadership. Other student leaders commented on the value of high school athletics in building their confidence and ability to work with others. This certainly is not a high school issue alone; individual backgrounds, home environments, parental influences, and life experiences are all areas that can shape perception, and areas that this study was ill equipped to discuss in the detail they warrant.

This issue could have implications, because from where are institutional perspectives on leadership created? The mission of the institution and the philosophy of the department charged with leadership development can play a role, but do they play a role as large as the underlying beliefs and assumptions of the human aggregate? In other words, does the environment shape the people, or do the people shape the environment? This is a difficult question, for which this study can offer some perspectives. However, this study cannot provide a complete answer.

Are Leadership Development Efforts Meeting the Needs of Students?

Anyone who wishes to make a career of designing and implementing leadership programs would be disheartened by the students' apparent lack of need for them. Experiences were the key according to the student leaders. Thus, higher education and student affairs should focus on building the opportunities for these experiences, and as was mentioned earlier, develop ways to help students who cannot or will not participate in
traditional campus life to learn from their other activities (e.g., employment, academics, sports, etc.).

While an easy way to provide arenas for leadership development is through student organizations, institutions of higher education also should investigate how often they provide students with an opportunity to make decisions that affect the institution. This can be on a large scale, such as developing a new standards document for Greek organizations, or on a small scale, such as allowing residence hall floors to determine their own noise policies. Empowering students in this way can help to establish an environment that is supportive of student initiative and leadership from sources other than selected positional leaders.

There is still a need for leadership programming. As Roberts and Ullom (1989) stated, positional leaders still require some structured training to help them in their roles. For instance, organizational treasurers should know the university’s accounting procedures; social chairs should be familiar with risk management policies, and so on. This type of programming often is where colleges and universities stop, which is why many of the student leaders complained that they hear the same things repeated in the programs they attend. The juniors and seniors who participated in the interviews certainly do not need to attend another program on parliamentary procedure; and, when that is the only level of programming that is offered, they develop a false sense that they know everything they need to know about leadership.

One aspect of leadership that was not revealed at all in the interviews was leadership theory. The students developed their perspectives entirely from experience. While they considered themselves fairly effective leaders, potentially they could be more effective if they learned about the foundations from which concepts of leadership have been built. This
approach also would be necessary if a campus tried to shift institutional perspectives on leadership. For instance, if students and others were asked to accept postindustrial perspectives, it would serve them well to learn about the value of these perspectives in a theoretical sense.

**Is the Industrial Paradigm Negative?**

Thus far, the implications of this study have been shared with a bias for postindustrial perspectives, and this bias was identified at the beginning of the chapter. However, does the industrial paradigm have negative effects on leadership? Colleges and universities, such as ISU, certainly have operated under these principles for many years. Many students have left ISU with self-confidence and with enhanced leadership skills. ISU demonstrated some measure of success through the 24 extraordinary students who participated as student leaders in this study. Despite these successes, the industrial paradigm still presents some limitations if an institution of higher education is committed to leadership development. Colleges and universities need to determine if their commitment is to develop only a select group of students as leaders, or as many students as possible. While this reflection is relative to each institution, one question can remain consistent for all: is higher education building the leadership society needs for the future?

As a qualitative study, the intention of this thesis was to provide an understanding of student leader perceptions at a large state institution at the beginning of a new century. Each institution needs to examine its own perceptions on leadership, and its commitment to developing students into leaders.
Recommendations for Practice

What follows are some recommendations for practice at ISU. Although this study is a case study of student leaders and disengaged students at one institution, some of these recommendations could be transferable to institutions similar in nature to ISU. The implications will be discussed in relation to campus environment and leadership development. While these recommendations are broad, individual support to disengaged students could be most valuable.

Campus Environment

- Provide staff development opportunities so that practitioners can be educated on emerging perspectives of leadership, such as the postindustrial paradigm. Such programming would be invaluable for staff members who have direct daily contact with students, placing them in the best positions of empowerment, such as Resident Assistants and Greek house resident advisors.
- Develop an institutional leadership statement, which outlines the university’s fundamental beliefs on leadership development.
- Develop an ongoing recognition process for students who make small contributions to campus and community life.
- Discontinue the use of the word follower in any public statement and/or approach to leadership.
- Further assess leadership attitudes and perceptions to gain a sense of the current paradigms under which the institution operates.
Leadership Development

- Develop programming initiatives that are divided into stages of student leader development. As students complete one stage, they can progress to the next.

- Implement student leader forums, in which no intentional programming is designed, but rather an opportunity for positional leaders to share ideas is provided.

- Encourage practitioners to have meaningful dialogue with their student employees about how leadership is being practiced in their situation.

- Provide undergraduate credit classes on leadership, and possibly allow for an academic minor in leadership studies.

- Provide outreach to leadership educators in high school, and invite high school students to participate in leadership development initiatives on campus.

- Develop a peer education network, which allows student leaders to promote the benefits of involvement and leadership to their peers.

- Discontinue leadership programs that are selective. Make opportunities available to every student.

Suggestions for Further Research

The research conducted for this study produced ideas for other research studies in the realm of college student leadership. This study covered a very broad topic, which has many parts that deserve more attention. Many more voices need to be heard in greater detail. Amir’s perspective on the fears that many international students have concerning leadership creates interesting questions that can be explored. In addition, most of the study’s participants were white, traditional-aged students. Students of color, students with disabilities, non-traditional students, and LGBT students have dealt with constraining forces
throughout their lives, and how this effects their perceptions of leadership and engagement in the leadership process would be an invaluable addition to contemporary studies of leadership. How their perceptions differ from students in the majority population could be insightful as well. In addition, although this study did not yield significant differences in leadership perceptions of men and women, research more directly focused on this question could be very helpful.

One specific program at ISU that deserves more attention is the President’s Leadership Class. A case study of this leadership experience could help evaluate the program as well as its influence on the campus environment.

This research relied on students’ verbal expressions of their leadership perceptions. An excellent follow-up would be a study that uses observation instead of interviews to assess leadership. Watching student leaders in their environment possibly could give a more realistic account.

Institutional environment is not a concept that can be addressed using only document review, since environment encompasses many more factors, such as the human aggregate, institutional policies and practices, an institution’s physical features, and the institutional culture (Kuh et al., 1991). Designing a study to assess an institution’s leadership environment would be an excellent contribution to both leadership theory and college environment theory. An aspect of this inquiry would be to assess how student affairs practitioners perceive leadership, and how these perceptions influence student perspectives.

Lastly, a quantitative study that seeks to assess leadership perceptions and attitudes on a broader scale could be a good complement to this inquiry.
Limitations of this Study

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, caution should be exercised when generalizing results to other students or institutions. A small group of participants was chosen purposefully, based on their level of involvement in leadership, and the participants are not necessarily representative of other college students at ISU. Only one site was chosen for the study, further limiting its generalizability. Overall, conclusions are limited to this case study and further studies would be needed in order to generalize beyond this case.

The number of disengaged student participants also limits the study. This number was disproportionately smaller than the student leader sample. While many disengaged students were identified, these students were less motivated to participate in the study, which is understandable considering their lack of interest in leadership.

Summary

Studies on leadership seem to discover more questions than they answer, demonstrating the depth and intricacies of this concept. There is no right or wrong approach to leadership, but rather, different perceptions that can create different approaches. With the emergence of new ideas, it is doubtful that the term leadership has seen its finest days.

Institutions of higher education, with their focus on theories, models, frameworks, and structure, need to remember that the strongest voices concerning leadership do not always come from a book, or from the past. Instead, the strongest voices live in the present, and live within the institutions. These voices are the students, and they certainly have a considerable amount to share.
From: Shertzer, John
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2000 9:26 PM
To: Leadership Focus Groups
Subject: Leadership Focus Groups

Greetings from the Higher Education Program here at ISU! As you know, I am a graduate student doing research for my Masters thesis. My research is focusing on college student perceptions of leadership.

You have been identified as one of a select group of student leaders at Iowa State. I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group to discover your perceptions of leadership. The focus group will last for no longer than 90 minutes.

I hope that you will consider participating, as your perspectives will lend valuable insights into studies of leadership. Your experiences as a student leader, and your perspectives on leadership will help direct future leadership development and education initiatives.

If you would like to participate, please select one of the following focus group times:

January 8, 2001 - 9:00p.m.
January 9, 2001 - 8:00p.m.
January 10, 2001 - 8:00p.m.
January 11, 2001 - 8:00p.m.
January 12, 2001 - 11:00a.m.

If none of these times work for you, please let me know and I will attempt to make other arrangements.

Thanks for considering my request, and I look forward to hearing from you. You may reply to this e-mail or call me at 294-8655.

Sincerely,
John Shertzer
Graduate Student
Higher Education
Iowa State University
APPENDIX B

DISENGAGED STUDENT CONTACT LETTER

From: Shertzer, John
Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2001 3:57 PM
To: Leadership Focus Groups

Greetings from the College of Education! My name is John Shertzer and I am a Masters student in higher education here at ISU. I'm conducting some research on college students' perceptions of leadership. You were identified as a potential participant in a focus group.

You might be wondering, "why would I want to participate in this study?" Well, first of all, you would be helping to redefine how leadership development is approached at Iowa State. The results of my research will be shared with the Student Activities Center. Secondly, you will get a chance to reflect on your own perceptions of leadership, which will help you grow as a person.

All I need is almost an hour of your time. Please look over the potential meeting times below, and let me know which ones work for you. If you don't want to participate, that's fine - thank you for at least considering this.

Monday, January 22: 9-10pm
Tuesday, January 23: 5-6pm, or 8-9pm
Wednesday, January 24: 1-2pm, 5-6pm, or 8-9pm
Thursday, January 25: 11am-Noon, or Noon-1pm

Thanks!

Sincerely,
John Shertzer
Graduate Student
Higher Education
Iowa State University
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM
College Student Perceptions of Leadership: Empowering and Constraining Beliefs

You are invited to participate in a research study on the leadership perceptions of students at Iowa State University. This research is a study undertaken as a requirement for a master’s thesis in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Data collection for this research will begin on December 5, 2000, and will conclude on March 1, 2001.

For the purposes of data collection, you will be asked to participate in a group interview, scheduled at your and other participants’ convenience. This interview will be documented through the use of researcher notes and audiotape. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes. You will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on preliminary research results.

Your participation is confidential, and this confidentiality is maintained through: storage of data and notes in a secure location accessible only to the researcher; use of personal and organizational pseudonyms in written reports and oral presentations of this research; and removal of personally identifiable information from fieldnotes, transcripts, and research reports submitted to the researcher’s Program of Study Committee.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you as a participant in this research. Benefits to be gained from your participation include a deeper understanding of your understanding of leadership. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and the data pertaining to your participation will be destroyed or returned to you.

If at any time you have questions about this research or your participation, you may contact me at jshertz@iastate.edu, or 294-8655. You may also contact Dr. John Schuh, my Major Professor, at N243 Lagomarcino Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, 50011; 294-6393; jschuh@iastate.edu.

I consent to participate in the research study named and described above:

Name (printed) ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Signature ___________________________

Researcher Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________
## APPENDIX D

### PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

#### Student Leaders

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Org type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>Junior</td>
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<td>Amir</td>
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#### Disengaged Students

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<td>Julie</td>
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<td>Lawrence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marj</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
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APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

General Questions

1. When you hear the word, *leadership*, what are your perceptions?
2. What is a leader?
3. Are there certain qualities that leaders must possess? What are they?
4. Do you believe that a certain personality type is favored for leadership?
5. How important is leadership in your life?
6. Would you consider yourself to be a leader? Why or why not?
7. Do you feel that you have been involved in leadership experiences at Iowa State?
8. How important is leadership development on a college campus?
9. What do you feel are some myths about leadership?
10. What are the motivations for student leaders?
11. Who is the greatest leader that you have ever known?
12. How do you plan to engage in leadership in the future?

Specific Questions for Student Leaders:

A. Why did you seek the position you currently hold?
B. Do you feel that you need this position to exert influence?
C. What has been the biggest challenge for you as a positional leader?
D. What do you feel you have learned from your leadership position?

Specific Questions for Disengaged Students:

A. Do you wish that you held a leadership position?
B. What factors have limited your desire to hold a leadership position?

C. Do you feel that you have had a similar amount of leadership development compared to a positional leader?

D. What frustrates you about student leadership?
APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT DEFINITIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Student Leaders

Ally: Taking initiative and encouraging others to perform to their best abilities. Helping people to process and formulate ideas to improve the group as a whole. Being there when people have questions or just want to talk through a problem. Bringing the group together as a whole.

Amir: To organize a group’s activities effectively. That may involve (a) dividing the responsibilities regarding an event/activity; (b) following up; and (c) to take a part of the job by yourself too.

Anna: Leadership is a willingness to serve others and to be a leader is having people follow you.

Ariel: Leadership is taking the initiative to create or help others while looking towards a future goal together. Leadership doesn’t have a definite definition to me because leaders are so different and have different styles of leading, not allowing one set-in-stone criteria. People who are perceived as leaders are dedicated and believe in their own destiny.

David: My definition of leadership would be the power of influence. I believe from past
experiences and training that you cannot control behavior; that is discipline. You must lead by example and instill in others the inclinations you have.

Emory: Leadership is service. Any and every aspect of leading a group of people to a better place in their physical, mental, or emotional mind is doing them a great service. Being a scapegoat for all inequities and still being a pillar to uphold the community are qualities leaders must acknowledge and accept also. Leadership is heart.

Erik: Leadership is motivating people to get things done, making the right choices to accomplish objectives and working as a role model while accomplishing those objectives.

Gwyneth: Leadership is a guiding, motivating, and visionary source of progress. Leaders are people who possess a variety of characteristics depending on the type, style, structure, and goals of what they are leading. Most are determined, ambitious, tenacious, and motivated. They are engaging and capable of projecting enthusiasm on others. Leadership is what results from the efforts of leaders. They pave the way, take a stand, use creativity, and demonstrate a genuine care for others.

Greg: Service and oversight. You as a leader are constantly asked to serve and in leading are serving those you lead. As you lead you must constantly be overseeing where the people you lead should be and are going.
Jack: Leadership is when, during any given situation, a person or persons assert control over the group to better attain a specific result.

Jamie: A way of succeeding in life through learning about yourself and your interactions with others to create change or enhance an organization to better achieve its goals.

Jared: Helping others recognize their full potential, and organizing and focusing the group’s members towards accomplishing specific goals. Motivating others to reach places they may not have otherwise reached without that leadership.

Katie: A leader is a person who can interact with a diverse group of people, who has respect for others’ thoughts, needs, and wants, but does things to improve the majority of the group. A leader listens to everyone and is always looking for ways to improve the direction of the group. A leader must be able to step back and follow others. You can’t please everyone unless you have been in a position similar to theirs and understand their viewpoint. They don’t say “why”, they say “why not.”

Kimberly: Leadership is taking responsibility for making decisions for a group of people. A position of leadership will sometimes need a title, or can be unannounced by being the “strongest voice” in the group. A person holding this position must hold an interest in the genre of the group and want to further it in all aspects. Otherwise,
this person is not a leader.

Kristy: Any activity that involves any type of motivation to achieve a high goal. A leader is one that puts direction on attaining that goal and leading people in the right direction to achieve that goal.

Laurie: Organizing and carrying out constructive activities that promote participation and advancement among the members or followers of that leader.

Lisa: Motivating toward a common goal or purpose. Leadership is typically a volunteer opportunity, therefore delegation is absolutely necessary in order to receive optimum performance, enthusiasm, and following. Communication and ability to share ideas is also essential for growth.

Mel: The ability to calmly and efficiently oversee and direct a group of people to meet a common goal.

Rebecca: Leadership is the art of guiding, managing, and motivating people towards the achievement of a common goal. Leadership is best displayed through the actions (as opposed to the words) of a leader. Effective leaders empower their followers to achieve their goals. They act more as a mentor instead of a master. Styles of leadership need to be dynamic and at times creative to fit with current situations.
Robert: Leadership is being able to actively communicate the vision of an organization or idea through general organization and direction, but also through being a role model for that vision, thus giving those you are trying to lead the necessary guidance. A leader needs to stand by the vision of the group and also their actions. Again, a leader needs to be the role model.

Rory: The process of a person or persons motivating others to accomplish a task.

Timothy: Leadership is the learned or trained ability to help a team function. It is defined by the ability to build consensus, come to decisions, and achieve goals in the context of a group. A leader fulfills these leadership roles in all aspects of life ranging from domestic to business, from spiritual to a community environment. Leaders lead by action and definition by setting examples and following them and by encouraging others to achieve their full potential.

Todd: Leadership is the process of organizing an organization and by helping others work towards improving the organization and meeting its goals.

Trevor: The act of coordinating and organizing programs or individuals for a specific goal or purpose by utilizing specific personal skills, traits and talents.
Disengaged Students

Bill: Getting people to follow you and doing it in an ethical way. How you present yourself and the things you do for others. A leader is someone that people like and will follow.

Danny: Someone who takes charge and gets things done. Leadership is a quality that a leader has.

Julie: Leaders are very well-rounded, knowledgeable people that look at everyone’s opinions, and don’t necessarily think they’re always right. They’re very willing to listen to others’ thoughts and ideas, and very willing to work with people to get things accomplished.

Lawrence: Having the ability to take charge as well as being generally outgoing and being able to get along with lots of different people.

Marj: Leadership can come in different ways. There’s the traditional kind of leader who can stand in front of a room and show people how to do things. The most effective way of leadership is by example.
REFERENCES CITED


Wielkiewicz, R.M. (2000). The leadership attitudes and beliefs scale: An instrument for evaluating college students’ thinking about leadership and organizations. Journal of College Student Development. 41, 335-347.

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My Program of Study Committee consisted of Dr. Eric Hoiberg, the Associate Dean of the College of Agriculture; Dr. Nancy J. Evans, Associate Professor in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies; and my Major Professor, Dr. John H. Schuh, Chair of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University. This committee both challenged and supported me throughout the process of this thesis, and their wisdom and insights enriched this report. Simply, this report could not have been completed without them. Dr. Schuh deserves special recognition for guiding me throughout this research, and allowing me to learn from him, while granting me autonomy in completing this work. I can only hope to someday become the researcher and scholar that he has proven to be.

My passion for leadership has been fostered by many individuals throughout my collegiate experiences. Some of these individuals include: Dr. Richard Nault, Dean of Students at Miami University; Brian Breitholz, Director of Advancement at Miami University; Vernon Wall, Director of Student Activities at Iowa State, and Pete Smithhisler, Director of Leadership Education at the North American Interfraternity Conference. Dr. Dennis Roberts, Associate Vice President of Student Affairs at Miami has served as my chief mentor in the area of leadership, and I would like to thank him for teaching me some of the most valuable lessons I have ever learned.
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The final and most deserving acknowledgements go to those who taught me new perspectives on leadership, while showing me the power of human expression: the 29 wonderful students who participated in this study. I hope that they always find the ability to empower themselves and others to discover the leaders within.