THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE research

THE MOST TRUSTED SOURCE ON BECOMING A BETTER LEADER

TITLE
Exploring the Relationship between College Student Leadership Experiences and the Practice of Effective Leadership Behaviors

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OBJECTIVE
The purpose of this study was to identify out-of-classroom leadership experiences which undergraduate student leaders attribute to their own leadership development and examine the relationship between those experiences and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

METHODOLOGY
The population consisted of undergraduate student leaders at a four-year, private, liberal arts college in the Northeastern United States with a total enrollment of 2,400 students. Of the 213 eligible participants who were invited to participate in the survey portion of the study, a total of 149 responded to the request. Data from eight surveys were removed because they were incomplete in some way. The response rate was 66% (N = 141). Most respondents were seniors (52%); 81 were officers in student clubs and 32 were resident advisors. Each completed the Leadership BioData Questionnaire (LBQ; developed by the author to assess students’ out-of-classroom leadership experiences), the Student LPI, and provided demographic information.

KEY FINDINGS
Factor analysis revealed three factors from the LBQ: building relationships, member dialogue and activating members; with the latter being the most frequent. All five leadership practices were significantly correlated with member dialogue and activating members dimensions of the LBQ. Building relationships was significantly correlated with Model, Inspire and Challenge, but not Enable and Encourage.
Effectiveness categories on the S-LPI were created by those scoring in the 70th percentile (high) and those in the 30th percentile (low) and tested against the three components of the LBQ. Significant differences were found for all five leadership practices on the LBQ. Model, Inspire, and Challenge showed significant differences for all three LBQ components, while Enable and Encourage were significantly different only on member dialogue and activating members. “Those student leaders with the more effective leadership behavior scores have engaged on a more frequent basis in almost every experience measured in the LBQ when compared to their less effective peers” (p. 117).

“The researcher recommends that, in an environment that values the leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner (1987), student affairs practitioners encourage more frequent Member Dialogue and Activating Members experiences across a broad range of student leader positions. This might be accomplished by being more purposeful in the creation of student leader job responsibilities. Specifically, student affairs professional should include opportunities for each of the experiences described by these two factors to occur often. An advisor might also provide training for student leaders aimed at helping leaders successfully execute these kinds of responsibilities…. Activating Members emerged as a plentiful and powerful experience for the majority of student leaders included in this study. Perhaps this is an area where student affairs professionals could influence student leader effectiveness by ensuring solid support for these types of rich learning opportunities. The combined findings may also imply that when student affairs professionals are nominating or selecting students for leadership positions, previous experience, such as the ones defined by Activating Members, may be indicators to consider” (p. 116).

The author notes that “The experience Building Relationships belongs to the type involving interactions between the student leader and those outside the organizational membership he or she leads. Building Relationships was the only experience that did not have significance with all five behaviors” (p. 119). “In the absence of more value being placed on these types of leadership behaviors, albeit from the students, the organizations, or the institution, more experience will not likely lead to improved performance. From a practical standpoint, student affairs personal could experiment with tangible rewards, challenges combined with incentives, or visible recognition which encourages more effective leadership in these two behaviors and also serves as the impetus for higher quality Building Relationship experiences” (pp. 119-120).