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PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN UNDERGRADUATE FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

P.D. Harms, Dustin Woods, Brent Roberts, Ph.D., Dan Bureau, and A. Michelle Green

An essential component of the culture and stated purpose of fraternities and sororities is their commitment to leadership. This is highly espoused as a prerequisite to joining and an outcome of membership. With this in mind, it is important to evaluate what leadership means in the context of a fraternity or sorority. This article concludes that leadership can be perceived as exercising power, holding formal positions, and serving as a positive role model for other members. Through understanding the multiple approaches to leadership, the culture and effectiveness of undergraduate fraternal organizations can be evaluated to verify the authenticity of claims of leadership development.

Many contend that leadership is important to the health and functioning of college and university student organizations (Komives, Casper, Longerbeam, Mainella & Osteen, 2004; Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 1998). It is therefore meaningful to not only ask the question "Who shall rule?" but also consider the issue of "Who should rule?" (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). To this end, when considered in the context of college and university fraternities and sororities (hereafter referred to as "undergraduate fraternal organizations"), two questions arise: who are the individuals who attain power and status in these organizations and are these persons the same individuals engaged in formalized positions of leadership?

Review of Literature

Examining models of leadership

Much of the literature in leadership studies explores the trend of viewing leadership as something accomplished when people act with attention to a moral or ethical foundation: leaders are individuals behaving in good and positive ways as determined by the norms of not only the organization but of society (Block, 1993; Covey, 1991; Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 1996). Another theoretical paradigm, transformational leadership, has been described as essential to creating positive culture in dynamic organizations. Bass (1990) described transformational leaders as inspirational individuals who elevate and empower their followers. Finally, leadership identity development is a growing field of study asking, "how does leadership shape the identity of people, both their own identity and how others view them" (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Dugan, 2004; Komives et al., 2004)?

The literature on leadership provides an important framework for students to create intentional learning experiences to expand their leadership knowledge. Literature indicates that leadership in student organizations can be defined in a number of ways. Three notable paradigms are called the objective, the subjective, and the positive approaches to leadership. The objective approach defines leaders in organizations as individuals who hold formal positions in the hierarchy of power. Oftentimes, persons move into positions of leadership due to their credentials and

previous job performance (Dugan, 2004; Komives et al., 2004). This notion can be applied to undergraduate fraternal organizations, as it is common for persons who accept leadership positions to have established their credentials through a previous organizational position prior to serving as an executive officer.

Another way of conceptualizing leadership in an organization is as raw influence. This is the subjective approach to leadership. Power, influence, and the capacity to impact decisions in undergraduate fraternal organizations do not lie solely with members of the executive board or those holding chair positions. They can be held by influential members, regardless of formal position. This type of leadership has to do with an individual's reputation more than their leadership abilities in an official role. In fact, in some organizations the influence of dynamic voices may outweigh the authority of those in official positional power (Neill, 2006). An example of how this may manifest itself in fraternal organizations relates to how decisions, such as to whom membership is offered, can be determined by a majority vote of current members. This makes it possible for outspoken or domineering members to possess a great deal of influence in the organization and exert such influence without holding formal positions of power.

Finally, the positive approach to leadership involves determining the characteristics that make someone a good and effective leader. These characteristics include the ability to initiate structure and show consideration for others, possession of personal charisma, articulation of a compelling vision for the organization, and actions that make others proud to be associated with the individual (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Komives et al., 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Stogill & Coons, 1957). This approach embodies characteristics of both the objective and subjective paradigms for leadership achievement.

Psychological examination of personality in relation to leadership

A wide variety of sources, from both the popular press and the scientific literature, indicate that the link between personality and leadership is salient. The positive personal qualities of leaders have been described at length in any number of popular books on the topic of leadership (Buckingham, 2001; Covey, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Furthermore, the academic literature on the topic of relating leadership to personality is substantial (Bono & Judge, 2004; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002).

A review of the links between personality and leadership revealed that each of the major aspects of personality, as defined by the Five Factor Model (Digman, 1990), were related to leadership effectiveness and leadership emergence (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Aspects of Extraversion, Sociability and Dominance, have been linked with self and peer ratings of leadership (Gough, 1990). Emotional Stability, which is linked with confidence, is also often linked with leadership qualities (Bass, 1990). Conscientiousness, which reflects persistence and hard work, has been linked with both job performance and leadership outcomes (Judge et al., 2002). Agreeableness, which is linked with both modesty and cooperativeness, has an ambiguous relationship with leadership depending on the aspects of the trait that are considered (Judge et al., 2002). Finally, Openness, which is closely linked with originality, has been shown to be predictive of leadership performance (Bass, 1990).

Beyond the role of personality in determining leadership achievement and success in the corporate world, longitudinal research on status attainment demonstrates that personality serves as a major contributor to achieving positions of prominence over time in other life domains (Caspi, Elder, & Bem, 1987; Helson & Roberts, 1992). However, while it may be true that a variety of traits have been shown to be responsible for coming to positions of power and being respected as a leadership, very little is known about what characteristics predict social influence.

In a recent study of social status, it was demonstrated that both Extraversion and Emotional Stability have been linked with achieving prominence in fraternities (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001). Similarly, it has been demonstrated that Extraversion predicts wielding influence in sororities (Anderson et al., 2001). However, these student organization studies were not directly comparable in terms of leadership and status outcomes and reflected the results of single organizations. Consequently, the general relationship between personality, positional power, social influence, and leadership in student organizations has not yet been explored.

Fraternities and sororities as a forum for leadership development

Many fraternities and sororities currently state the development of leadership skills as a primary outcome of membership (Beta Theta Pi, 2006; National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2006; Pi Beta Phi, 2006). A review of fraternity and sorority mission and purpose statements allows for insight into how values oftentimes associated with leadership are integrated into the functions of these organizations. For example, Pi Kappa Phi includes immediately in its mission statement "We will lead" (Pi Kappa Phi, 2006b). This type of rhetoric is prevalent in much of the materials fraternal organizations provide to potential members and other interested parties.

Historical accounts of the fraternal movement also highlight efforts to advance leadership development through membership. Anson and Marchesani (1991) write, "…fraternities and sororities offer students opportunities for personal development unmatched in most campus organizations (p. ix)." Leadership development has been long touted as a primary impetus for the fraternal movement as well as a reason for maintaining these organizations at institutions of higher education.

The Research Examined

Purpose of the study

This study approaches the issue of the relationship between personality and leadership from the neo-socioanalytic framework (Roberts & Wood, in press). This theoretical framework states that the core aspects of personality consist of traits, motives, and cognitions about the self. Traits, or stylistic patterns of behavior, are best understood using the Five Factor Model framework (Dingman, 1990; Wiggins, 1996). In this model, a catalog of five dimensions is used to describe the range of behavioral styles seen in individuals. These dimensions are Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect. Together, these traits are referred to collectively as the "Big Five." Trait Dominance, a sub facet of Extraversion, was included in the model as it had previously been demonstrated to be the single highest trait predictor of leadership outcomes (Judge et al., 2002). Trait dimensions are separate from motives, which represent the underlying, and often unexplored, desires of the individual.

The motives most relevant for the analysis of leadership are Hope for Power and Fear of Power (Winter, 1973). These can be thought of as representing the approach and avoidance systems most related to hierarchy striving in social systems (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). In previous research, they have been linked to the attainment of status in student organizations (Winter, 1973). Hope for Power can be considered one's own emotional drive for positions of leadership, while Fear of Power is linked to the anxiety that is experienced when considering the possibility of failing when in a leadership role. It is possible to be high or low on both of these motives simultaneously.

Finally, cognitions about the self-represent the conscious identity an individual believes best describes his or her values and behavior. These beliefs develop over time as new experiences and achievements are integrated into the sense of the self (Roberts & Wood, in press). While initially forming from the motives and traits an individual possesses, these identity beliefs become crystallized over time and individuals begin to act in ways that protect and project this image of them. Each of these aspects of the self, traits, motive, and self-cognitions are believed to be important and unique contributors to life outcomes such as attaining positions of prominence.

The aim of this research has been to show the relationship between personality and leadership in undergraduate fraternal organizations. We demonstrate how utilizing alternative approaches to understanding leadership offers unique insights into the individuals commonly thought of as being leaders. In order to explore the consequences of using these different definitions in the study of leadership in undergraduate fraternal organizations, we investigated the personality characteristics that facilitate the recognition and attainment of these types of leadership. Furthermore, we illustrate the importance of various aspects of personality in the process of leadership development in undergraduate fraternal organizations. We believe these analyses will illustrate the importance of choosing an appropriate model for the study of leadership development in undergraduate fraternal organizations.

Research Methods

Participants

366 participants (203 women) were recruited from four fraternities and three sororities at a large, state university in the Midwest with approximately 20 percent of the student population listed as members in undergraduate fraternal organizations. Participants were compensated for completing the two-hour survey. The coordinating student organizations were organizationas also compensated for their assistance with the study. The average age of the participants was 19.6 years old (SD = 1.1). Over 90 percent of members identified as Caucasian.

Materials and Method

Big Five Personality Traits. A 53-adjective measure of the Big Five personality traits (Goldberg, 1992), first used by Walton and Roberts (2004), was employed in the assessment of general personality traits. This measure was chosen for ease of use by participants and the ability to measure several personality traits in a short period. Participants rated how much they agreed the adjective described them using a five-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Alpha reliability coefficients ranged from .77-.83.

Dominance. A measure of trait dominance (Harms & Roberts, 2005) making use of seven dominance-related adjectives (e.g. dominant, powerful, forceful) was embedded in the Big Five inventory and was rated using the same scale. The alpha reliability coefficient was .78.

Power Motive. Two six-item self-report measures of power motivation were used to assess independently Hope for Power and Fear of Power (Harms & Roberts, 2005). Participants rated items on a five-point scale according to how much they agreed with the description of their thoughts about power and status. An example item for Hope for Power is "I want to have power in every aspect of my life." An example item for Fear of Power is "The thought of being put in a position of authority scares me." The alpha reliability coefficient for the Hope for Power scale was .80 and for the Fear of Power scale was .79.

Leadership Identity. A 6-item measure of leadership identity (Chan & Drasgow, 2001) was used to assess self-reported leadership identity. Examples of items include "I usually want to be a leader in the groups that I work in" and "I am definitely not a leader by nature" (reverse-scored). Participants rated the items using the same rating scale as they did for the power motives. Leadership identity had an alpha reliability of .86.

Social Influence. Social influence was assessed by gathering peer ratings of each member in relation to how much influence was demonstrated by that individual. Participants rated the extent to which each member "has influence among other people in the organization," with values ranging from 1 (weak) to 7 (strong). Given the large size of three of the organizations (membership listed as over 120 total members), the list of organization members was split into two, with participants having to rate only one half of the organization members or the other (randomly selected). For each person, ratings were averaged across all participants who had rated the person. The inter-rater correlations for the influence measure were high in all organizations (all were greater than or equal to .28). Consequently, across organizations there was good reliability for ratings of influence (.90 to .98). Because this variable was substantially linked to seniority, the effect of length of membership was removed by using the non-standardized residual of influence regressed on the number of years spent in the organization.

Transformational Leadership. As in prior research (Judge & Bono, 2000; Lim & Ployhart, 2004) five scales from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999) were combined to form a single transformational leadership dimension. These scales were: charisma-idealized influence (attributed), charisma-idealized influence (behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Participants rated an average of three peers on how much they agreed that the statement described them on a 5 point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Together, these scales had an alpha reliability coefficient of .93.

Organization Offices. Members were asked to name the offices they held in the organization. Responses were categorized into executive offices (0 = held no executive office, 1 = held an executive office), which was limited to executive board positions (e.g., president, vice-president, treasurer). Because only established members could hold offices, analyses were limited to members who had been in the organization one year or more. Within this sub-sample, 10% of participating members held executive positions.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive data from our sample as well as correlations between our predictor variables and the leadership indices. Table 2 presents the correlations between the leadership indices. These correlations range from a low of .17 to a high of .39. These relationships are all in the positive direction, indicating that there is a common component to each of these conceptualizations that could be described as an "overall" leadership component that none of them fully explains. While these relationships are significant and positive, they do demonstrate that there are substantial differences between these methods of assessing leadership in undergraduate fraternal organizations.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Predictors and Criteria

	Mean	SD	Social Influence a	Transformational Leadership a	Executive Offices b
1. Extraversion	3.58	.67	.25*	.05	.12
2. Emotional Stability	2.91	.52	.06	-.05	-.03
3. Agreeableness	4.18	.45	.05	.12*	.10
4. Conscientiousness	3.71	.61	.15*	.17*	.06
5. Intellect	3.93	.50	.10	.05	.12
6. Dominance	3.41	.57	.18*	.00	.16*
7. Hope for Power	2.30	.67	.05	-.13*	.23*
8. Fear of Power	1.93	.58	-.22*	-.08	-.19*
9. Leadership Identity	3.77	.70	.26*	.09	.24*

a n = 319-352
b n = 206
* p < .05

Table 2
Correlations Between Leadership Indices

	Social Influence	Transformational Leadership
1. Executive Offices (a)	.39*	.17*
2. Social Influence (b)		.39*

a n = 187-206
b n = 317
* p < .05

Relationships Between Personality and Leadership Indices

Objective Leadership: Executive Offices. None of the Big Five personality traits was a significant correlate of holding executive offices. However, high trait Dominance ($r = .16$, $p < .05$), high Hope for Power ($r = .23$, $p < .05$), low Fear of Power ($r = -.19$, $p < .05$), and high Leadership Identity ($r = .24$, $p < .05$) all showed significant relationships with the attainment of executive office. It therefore appears as though individuals from the study who exhibit trait and

motive profiles associated with hierarchy-striving and status attainment are indeed successful at achieving status, in the form of executive offices, in their undergraduate fraternal organizations.

Perceived Leadership: Social Influence. High Extraversion ($r = .25$, $p < .05$), high Conscientiousness ($r = .15$, $p < .05$), high Dominance ($r = .18$, $p < .05$), low Fear of Power ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$), and high Leadership Identity ($r = .26$, $p < .05$) were correlated significantly with our index social influence. Together, these findings seem to indicate that in order to wield unofficial influence in an undergraduate fraternal organization, it is not sufficient to be ambitious and domineering. One must also possess a disposition that promotes sociability and persistence. This was often the case when examining members with seniority in the organization and was not directly correlated to positions of leadership.

Positive Leadership: Transformational. High Agreeableness ($r = .25$, $p < .05$), high Conscientiousness ($r = .17$, $p < .05$), and low Hope for Power ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$) were correlated significantly with our index social influence. Interestingly, these results seem to indicate that it is not the ambitious individual that is being described by their peers as a good leader, but simply an influential person. Instead, these individuals tend to be likeable, hard working, and do not desire to put themselves over their fellow members and may be described as possessing a service-oriented leadership orientation. Their dispositions make them well suited to serve others and the organization as whole and their peers recognize this and praise it.

Discussion and Implications for Fraternity and Sorority Practitioners

Undergraduate fraternal organizations promote their ability to advance members' existing skills through involvement in organizational leadership roles. There is not a well-established body of knowledge about outcomes of serving in leadership positions or the organization's ability to aid in the development of leadership skills. Research on leadership development as an outcome of membership in undergraduate fraternal organizations should be prioritized by those who are proponents of these organizations.

This study reflects the attention needed to nurture the personality traits of leaders and identify ways to assist in the development of skills by other members. While none of the Big Five personality traits was a significant correlate of holding executive offices, many showed significant relationships with the attainment of executive office. This may reflect the needed skills to acquire positions but does not indicate a correlation with maintaining positions. Training efforts for persons aspiring to leadership roles may focus on developing these traits through team building or other group focused activities.

It is also evident that if such positions are admired or preferred by persons entering positions, then they should be nurtured and maintained through the duration of serving in such positions. Educational training from campus professionals and others invested in the fraternal movement may be necessary to assist leaders in understanding the need to develop further already strong skills.

From the perspective of exercising power, undergraduate fraternal organizations are an unusual case since influence can be associated with length of membership, regardless of actual acts of

effective leadership or duration of time in formal leadership positions. Individuals with formal positions of power are not the only members with influence, and sometimes are they are superseded by members who never served in formal leadership roles, particularly if such individuals have longer membership tenure. It becomes necessary to distinguish between the different types of leadership that can be present in such organizations.

Individuals who attained formal positions of power tended to exhibit characteristics of ambition. They desired power and influence and viewed themselves as leaders. They also acted in a dominant manner and did not seem concerned with how others perceived their actions. It is possible this is the reason why the relationship between holding executive office and being rated as a positive leader was relatively small. Unpopular decisions sometimes warrant low ratings for leaders.

Individuals who were rated as being influential, though not necessarily in a positive way, tended to exhibit characteristics that get individuals noticed in the experience-rich environment of undergraduate fraternal organizations. These individuals described themselves as sociable, hard-working, and as natural leaders. There was a positive correlation between being described as wielding influence and being described as wielding it in a positive manner. This seems to indicate that in undergraduate fraternal organizations, individuals who serve their organization in positive ways are recognized as deserving of deference by other members, even if they do not necessarily hold formal positions.

Individuals who were described by their peers as positive role models were typically characterized by their strong work ethic and attempts to get along with others. Further, these members did not see themselves as ambitious. It is likely that these individuals were most attracted to the aspects of the organization that promoted brotherhood and sisterhood rather than opportunities for advancement. This conclusion is formed due to their desire to maintain neutrality and not disrupt the equilibrium of the organization while getting their work done. Perhaps their commitment to these ideals is what made their peers recognize them as positive agents within the organization.

Together, these results seem to indicate a number of interesting possibilities about the nature of undergraduate fraternal organizations. It seems as though these organizations do facilitate the opportunity to advance and attain positions of prestige should an individual desire it. However, when it comes to who is recognized as a positive example of a leader in the organization, it is not the ambitious members who are nominated, but rather the individuals with the strongest commitment to the organization and their fellow members. Practitioners working with leadership training for undergraduate fraternal organizations should not only focus on members in officer positions. The impact of "official" leadership positions such as president, community service chair, or new member educator, may be hindered by more "popular" voices in the organization.

Advancing change can be difficult in traditional organizations. Conveying messages to "average" members, not just formal chapter leaders, could aid in advancing organizational capacity for success in completing goals and bringing about change. In addition, those working with undergraduate fraternal organizations should provide leadership workshops and develop

curriculum that would empower officers to mobilize members toward common goals and to counteract negative influences in the organization.

Practitioners should also focus on intentional leadership development experiences during the new member orientation process. As members join the organizations, can fraternity and sorority practitioners collaborate with other important constituents to create a new member leadership class or training program? This may be a practical way to ensure that persons who aspire to serve their organization and the fraternal community are given the skills to do so. Foci should include team building, group dynamics, managing change, and influencing others. Our results indicate new members seeking leadership positions may have less influence than current leaders and members not holding formalized positions. As members mature in the organization and seek to achieve formalized positions, they will need to be able to counteract some negative forces in the organization. Those invested in working with these organizations should provide ample leadership training as early as the new member education period or even prior to gaining membership into the organization. In addition, training for senior members to assist in channeling influence toward positive growth of fellow members may be important. This can aid in creating mentoring roles between senior members and new members of the organizations.

In this study, we investigated the consequences of interpreting leadership in undergraduate fraternal organizations from a variety of perspectives. Leadership can be thought of alternatively as objective or subjective. In the objective sense, either one is in a formal or recognized position where one is a leader or not. In the subjective sense, one can be ascribed leadership by one's peers through social reputation. In a social group, such as an undergraduate fraternal organization, this can mean that an individual simply wields power and influence or it can mean that they act as a role model for others. Thus, what it means to be a leader in these organizations can have diverse meanings when considered by different people. Leadership does not necessarily mean committing positive actions and having a positive role in these organizations. Because of this, it is necessary for future research on undergraduate fraternal organizations to de-mythologize the word "leadership" and clarify what aspect of leadership is under investigation.

Future research into the antecedent personality characteristics of leaders in undergraduate fraternal organizations should take into account the different approaches to understanding personality. Each of the approaches used in the current study demonstrated unique relationships with the leadership outcomes and each offered insight into the meaning of leadership in the context of undergraduate fraternal organizations.

Although we found in this study that formal and informal leadership positions and levels of influence were significantly related to one another, it was clear that individuals exemplifying these types of leadership differed in terms of their character. Future studies may focus on the power and influence that former officers or appointed leaders have once they have completed their office and no longer serve the organization in an official role. Do they have similar or more influence than outspoken members with the same membership tenure who do not have previous "leadership credentials?"

As leadership in undergraduate fraternal organizations is further researched, one should consider the variety of ways to conceptualize leadership. In this study, we attempted to distinguish these

different approaches to leadership and outline the implications for describing which members exhibited the characteristics of leadership in the context of the organization.

It also seems prudent for studies of leadership development in undergraduate fraternal organizations to clarify what sort of leadership is expected to develop in such organizations. Many members will at some point be placed in a position of responsibility. However, not all of these positions carry the same level of prestige or relevance in the organization. Rather, the non-executive positions are expected to facilitate development of personality characteristics that are prototypical of effective and positive leadership. Training to empower such leaders to advance into other leadership roles is an important priority for practitioners working with undergraduate fraternal organizations.

Other opportunities exist to replicate this study on less homogeneous organizations. Less than 10 percent of those participating indicated ethnicity other than Caucasian. In addition, each organization considered for the study identified as a social fraternity and sorority, so application to professional organizations may also allow for different findings. The study was done at one institution with organizations selected by campus professionals. This may have influenced the results due to the selection of organizations. If applied across many organizations with a less biased sample, the results could vary or stay consistent.

Finally, longitudinal studies will be necessary to demonstrate that positive leadership values and the aspects of personality most closely linked with positive leadership do, in fact develop, in the context of an undergraduate fraternal organization. Research such as this will be essential in displaying the positive role of these organizations for leadership development during the critical developmental years of college.

Conclusion

There are a number of different ways to look at leadership. Individuals can attain positions of power, they can wield influence unofficially, and they can exhibit positive behaviors that make them good role models. We believe that in order to understand the development and selection of leaders in undergraduate fraternal organizations, one should be aware of the differences between these approaches. By understanding the antecedent aspects of personality that facilitate the development and attainment of these types of leadership, we can better understand the process by which leadership develops in undergraduate fraternal organizations. This approach can provide rich data to document further the powerful opportunities for leadership development in undergraduate fraternal organizations.

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