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## THEORY-DRIVEN APPROACH TO DEVELOPING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO MENTOR: CONGRUENCE

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### Abstract

*The Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM) is the most widely used student leadership development model in higher education. Therefore, the purpose of the current paper is to share a theory-driven approach to developing Congruence, an individual value of the SCM. We discuss the development and implementation of a two-part virtual leader development intervention focused on college students who mentor K-12 youth. Part One was a virtual, two-hour content block in the fall with interactive activities. Part Two was a small-group, virtual meeting in the spring with in-depth discussions. The intervention focused on recognizing congruent leadership and considering a situation from multiple values. The intervention was evaluated based on the learning objectives, and mentors perceived notable growth. The purpose of the current scholarship-to-practice brief is that leadership educators and student affairs practitioners can utilize the curriculum to facilitate and evaluate a Congruence intervention in a curricular or co-curricular setting.*

### INTRODUCTION

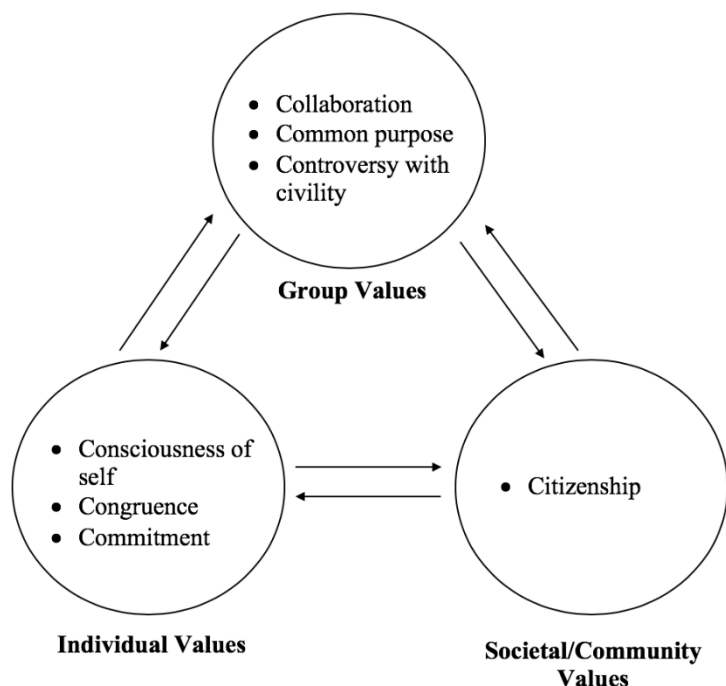
The Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM), a model of leadership development focused on fostering social change (HERI, 1996), is the most widely used student leadership development model among institutions of higher education (Haber & Komives, 2009). The SCM seeks to engage college students in social responsibility and develop socially responsible leaders (HERI, 1996; Dugan, 2006). Notably, social responsibility development has been identified as a student learning outcome of higher education, underscoring the relevance of interventions targeting socially responsible leaders' growth (Adelman et al., 2011).

Building upon a previous article that shared a developmental intervention targeting Consciousness of Self, the first value of the SCM (Sunderman & Hastings, 2022), the current paper focuses on the execution and evaluation of an intervention focused on Congruence, the second value of the SCM (HERI, 1996). We share a detailed description of the intervention, including samples of workbook pages and an evaluation plan based on the learning objectives. Our article aims to aid student affairs practitioners and leadership educators in facilitating the same or similar intervention in their classrooms or organizations. Broadly, there is a continued need for student affairs professionals to conduct and assess programs and share "expertise to the greatest extent possible" (Busby & Aaron, 2021, p. 11). The current article meets this need by sharing a co-curricular program and an accompanying assessment plan and results. Notably, the current intervention was conducted virtually in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated the unprecedented shift to virtual programming at higher education institutions (Busby, 2020; Downey, 2021).

## REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP

The Social Change Model (SCM) is a leadership development model focused on promoting positive social change in communities or institutions of higher education (HERI, 1996). The SCM has seven values in three categories (see Figure 1; HERI, 1996). There are three individual values: (a) Consciousness of Self, (b) Congruence, and (c) Commitment; three group values: (a) Collaboration, (b) Common Purpose, and (c) Controversy with Civility; and one community value, Citizenship (HERI, 1996; Tyree, 1998). Highlighting the relevance of the SCM, the World Economic Forum (2020) identified leadership and social influence, a target of the SCM, as two of the top 10 leadership skills for 2025. For a more in-depth discussion on the Social Change Model, refer to Sunderman and Hastings (2022).

**Figure 1.** *The Values of the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996).*



### Values of the Social Change Model of Leadership

Congruence, the focus of the current intervention, is “thinking, feeling, and behaving with consistency, genuineness, authenticity, and honesty towards others.” (HERI, 1996, p. 36). Palmer (1992), in “Divided No More,” states that leaders make a difference when they are congruent and match their behavior to their beliefs. Palmer (1992) shares the example of Rosa Parks (and before her Claudette Colvin) to illustrate Congruence. Risking personal harm, Parks lived out the value of “equality” by bravely sitting at the front of the bus. Her act of Congruence gave others the courage to stand up to inequity.

Beyond the SCM, Congruence has been described as an interpersonal and intrapersonal concept. Interpersonal Congruence is the alignment between the perceptions of leaders and followers, such as the alignment of leaders’ and followers’ values (Qu et al., 2019). In contrast, Intrapersonal Congruence, which matches the definition of Congruence articulated in the SCM, highlights the alignment of behaviors and values and has been connected to Authenticity (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and knowing oneself (Ryan & Ryan, 2019). Connecting Intrapersonal Congruence to self-determination theories, Hasan et al. (2015) write, “Intrapersonal Congruence in values is seen as indispensable to the motivation to pursue meaningful activity and to the experience of well-being and personal growth” (p. 93). Given the relevance of the SCM to leadership development and the applicability of Congruence to personal development, it is prudent that leadership educators and student affairs practitioners intentionally incorporate Congruence activities and discussions into curricular and co-curricular experiences. The following section offers one model for utilizing Congruence to inform leadership education.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

The purpose of the current paper is to share a theory-driven approach to developing Congruence, an individual value of the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM; HERI, 1996), through a two-part intervention. The intervention occurred within a 360-student (180 mentors; 180 mentees) leadership mentoring program at a four-year, public, Midwestern university. College students were selected for the leadership mentoring program (LMP) because of their leadership strengths. After selection, college students are paired in one-to-one mentoring relationships with a K – 12th-grade student leader in the community and meet for one hour each week for three years. Notably, mentors take an interpersonal leadership skills course during their first semester in the LMP and meet weekly with other leadership mentors for all three years. To provide formal leadership development to mentors and mentees, the LMP developed a seven-year curriculum centered on the seven values of the SCM, with one value focused on each year. The previous year's curriculum (i.e., Consciousness of Self) was shared in an online module for mentoring pairs who did not participate to review.

The current Congruence intervention had two primary components. First, mentors and mentees participated in a two-hour virtual workshop with interactive activities and discussions during the fall semester. While we initially intended to hold the first component as an in-person retreat, the materials were placed online and distributed broadly among the mentors due to COVID-19. Therefore, the content and activities were done asynchronously within mentoring pairs. The second component of the intervention was a one-hour discussion of research and mass media materials related to Congruence held with virtual small groups during the spring semester. The following section details the objectives, activities, and discussion topics shared with mentors and middle or high-school-aged mentees. Mentors and elementary-aged mentees utilized similar material adapted for a younger audience.

There were five retreat objectives. Each objective identified one behavior or thought process that participants would be able to do following the intervention:

- 1) Identify their values
- 2) Identify values in others
- 3) Describe and recognize congruent leadership
- 4) Reflect on how values influence decisions
- 5) Consider a situation from the perspective of multiple values

The virtual workshop began by asking mentors and mentees to discuss the following questions: “What does the term ‘Congruence’ mean, and why is it important?” After considering the topic, participants watched a 10-minute video that shared the definitions and research associated with Congruence and the SCM and learning outcomes.

Following the opening lecture, there was a refresher on the Consciousness of Self SCM value. The retreat began with a refresher because the first step towards Congruence is knowing one's values and beliefs (HERI, 1996). Consciousness of Self is the first value of the SCM and was the topic of the previous year's developmental intervention for the leadership mentoring organization, which second and third mentors and their mentees attended. New mentors and mentees were invited to review the curriculum in an online module before the Congruence intervention. During the Consciousness of Self refresher, mentors and mentees identified their top three values and reflected on their leadership strengths (see Figure 2). Mentoring pairs discussed the following topic of conversation: “While we all have top values that inform our actions and preferences, we do not always live out our values. When this happens, we are acting incongruently. Talk about how you felt when your behavior was inconsistent with your values.”

Following the Consciousness of Self refresher, mentors and mentees completed a case study of congruent leadership. The case study (Northouse, 2013, pp. 271-273) was about Sally Helgesen, the author of *The Female Advantage: Women's Way of Leadership* (1990). The case study describes Helgesen's journey with self-awareness and her internal feelings of conflict over dichotomous parts of her personality. Mentoring pairs walked through

a series of reflection questions that encouraged mentors and mentees to make meaning of the case study. Questions included the following: “Based on her actions, what does Helgesen value?” and “How did Helgesen live out Congruence between her values and actions?” (see Figure 2).

The final portion of the retreat was a moral dilemma activity. After studying what Congruence looked like in the life of Helgesen (Northouse, 2013), participants considered what Congruence might look like for them in a challenging situation. This activity started by asking mentoring pairs to consider when it was challenging to live out their values and share that time with the mentor or mentee. Then, mentors and mentees read through a situation (see Figure 3), which was a moral dilemma. After reading the situation, mentors and mentees answered the questions at the bottom of the page. Finally, the mentoring pairs discussed how someone with a different value might choose a different path or have different reasoning for a similar course of action. The retreat ended with mentors and mentees reflecting on how Congruence influences one’s leadership and social change capacity.

The spring portion of the intervention was built upon the fall retreat content. Small groups of mentors and mentees read “Congruence” (HERI, pp. 360-39) and answered concrete, conceptual, and application questions, such as (a) “Why, according to the article, is Congruence necessary for leadership?”; (b) “How can Congruence help to build trusting relationships within groups?”; and (c) “How can you help others develop Congruence?” Then, small groups watched a movie clip from *The Devil Wears Prada* (YouTube, 2015). During the movie clip, the main character, Andy, decides that she feels it is necessary for her career and life satisfaction but will hurt her friend and colleague. After watching this video, small groups again walked through concrete, conceptual, and application questions, such as (a) “What values do you think guided Andy’s decision?” and (b) “What does it look like for you to be a courageous follower and stay true to your values?”

**Figure 2.** *Consciousness of self refresher and case study questions.*

| <b>CONSCIOUSNESS OF SELF REFRESHER</b>  | <b>CASE STUDY OF CONGRUENT LEADERSHIP</b>   |
|---|---|
| What are your top 3 values<br>(in no particular order)?<br>1. _____<br>2. _____<br>3. _____           | What is going on in this case study?<br>What are the key moments?<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____    |
| What are your top 3 leadership strengths?<br>1. _____<br>2. _____<br>3. _____<br>4. _____<br>5. _____ | Based on her actions, what does Helgesen value?<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____                      |
| Reflection<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____   | How did self-awareness influence Helgesen?<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____                           |
|   | How did Helgesen live out congruence between her values and actions?<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____ |
|   | How can you apply what you learned from Helgesen to your leadership?<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____ |

Figure 3. Moral dilemma activity.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>MORAL DILEMMA ACTIVITY</b></p> <p>You are ordinarily a law-abiding citizen. One day, you take your 10-year-old dog to the vet because he is ill. The vet informs you that your dog is very ill, and, unfortunately, will not survive the week without a \$10,000 medication. Unfortunately, you are unable to afford this expensive medication. While on your way to the bathroom, you notice a box in the hallway containing the medication the vet just prescribed. You notice that no one else is in the hallway. Should you steal the medication to help your sick dog?</p> | <p>What would you do?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>What values guided your decision?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>What would you do if the animal dying was a dog you did not know? Does that change your decision? Why or why not? How did your values influence your decision?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
|---|--|

## DISCUSSION OF OUTCOMES/RESULTS

The year-long virtual Congruence intervention (i.e., fall virtual workshop and spring small groups) was evaluated among mentors six months after the fall workshop and two months after the spring small group meetings. Based on the recommendation of Rosch and Schwartz (2009), we evaluated the intervention two months after it finished to avoid the Honeymoon Effect. The Honeymoon Effect is a common issue with evaluation and assessment that happens when participants exaggerate the effects of an intervention immediately after it is finished (Rosch & Schwartz, 2009).

The evaluation survey matched the five program objectives because “assessments need to be directly aligned to the program’s goals and outcomes to provide valuable information” (International Leadership Association Task Force, 2021). As suggested by Seemiller (2013), we used the following response anchors targeting degree of change: 1 = Did not increase; 2 = Slightly increased; 3 = Moderately increase; 4 = Greatly increased. Mentors assessed their growth on the following statements: (a) My ability to identify my values; (b) My ability to identify values in others; (c) My ability to describe and recognize congruent leadership; (d) My ability to reflect on how values influence decisions; and (e) My ability to consider a situation from the perspective of multiple values.

Ultimately, 69 of 180 mentors (38%) completed the evaluation survey. Regarding years in school, 11% of participants were sophomores, 35% were juniors, and 38% were seniors. Regarding gender, 61% of participants were women, and 40% were men. Regarding race, 93% of participants were white, 4% were Black or African American, and 3% were Asian American. We aggregated the participant responses to create an average score on each objective. An average score  $\geq 3.0$  indicated development of the objective, as 3.0 indicates “moderately increased” (Seemiller, 2013). See Table 1 for the survey results.



**Table 1.** *Results of evaluation survey.*

| Question  | Average | % of Participants $\geq$ 3.0 Rating |
|---|---------|-------------------------------------|
| My ability to identify my values.   | 3.03    | 76.8                                |
| My ability to identify values in others.                                    | 3.13    | 84.1                                |
| My ability to describe and recognize congruent leadership.                  | 3.43    | 92.8                                |
| My ability to reflect on how values influence decisions.                    | 3.31    | 88.4                                |
| My ability to consider a situation from the perspective of multiple values. | 3.24    | 88.4                                |

On each of the five objectives, the average participant response was greater than 3.0, indicating that the objective had been satisfactorily developed (Seemiller, 2016). The lowest participant average was 3.03 for the first objective, “My ability to identify my values,” with 76.8% of mentors self-evaluating the first objective as “moderately increased” (i.e., 3.0) or “greatly increased” (4.0). Notably, content on this item was minimally included in program delivery, as it was more significantly addressed in the previous year’s invention on Consciousness of Self. The highest participant average was 3.43 for the third objective, “My ability to describe and recognize congruent leadership,” with 92.8% of mentors self-evaluating the third objective as “moderately increased” (i.e., 3.0) or “greatly increased” (4.0). The total average of participant responses across evaluation questions was 3.23, indicating a perception that the intervention has “moderately increased” their ability to fulfill the five learning objectives.

## REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRACTITIONER

The purpose of the current paper was to share a theory-driven approach to developing Congruence, an individual value of the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM; HERI, 1996). Specifically, we discussed the presentation and assessment of the intervention, which have notable implications for student affairs practitioners. First, student affairs practitioners and leadership educators are encouraged to utilize this curriculum and the accompanying assessment strategy in curricular and co-curricular settings. By discussing the intervention and providing pictures of the workbook, we hope to meet a need in the field for further “descriptions of assignments and activities comprising the day-to-day teaching of leadership” (Smith & Roebuck, 2010, p. 136). Future student affairs professionals may utilize the material to meet the unique needs of their meeting dates/times, class schedule, or student population. We also recommend that practitioners implement the current Congruence curriculum with the previous year’s Consciousness of Self curriculum (Sunderman & Hastings, 2022). In line with this recommendation, the leadership mentoring program in the current paper will complete a similar intervention next year on the third value of the SCM, Collaboration, which is a pattern that will continue until the seven values have all been the focus of an intervention.

Second, the evaluation results of the current intervention offer insight into virtual interventions. The COVID-19 pandemic required higher education programming to move almost entirely online, an unprecedented move that requires further examination to understand its impact (Downey, 2021). The current study provides insight into how one leadership mentoring program successfully adapted its in-person curriculum to a virtual setting by implementing the following strategies: (a) a central hub for accessing materials, (b) video recordings with interactive questions for participants to engage with, and (c) a workbook that could be printed off or completed online.

To strengthen the Congruence intervention, we recommend that future practitioners consider adding check-in discussions or short reflections between the two parts of the intervention (i.e., the fall retreat and the spring discussion). Adding additional exercises may increase participants’ ability to integrate the material into their lives. Further, future practitioners may want to spend additional time discussing the identification of individual values and the recognition of values in others, which were the two objectives that received the lowest average evaluation ratings. For example, suppose the Congruence intervention is completed in concordance with the Consciousness of Self intervention (Sunderman & Hastings, 2022). In that case, facilitators may ask participants

to bring the values they identified during the Consciousness of Self intervention and then spend time reflecting on potential changes in values, as well as how individual values shape our recognition of values in others. Finally, we recommend that practitioners engage participants in additional reflection opportunities following the intervention to crystallize participant learning. For example, a leadership program could have an end-of-the-year debrief meeting to discuss questions such as “When did you demonstrate Congruence throughout this past year? When did you not demonstrate Congruence, and what might you do differently in the future?”

We recommend that further qualitative and quantitative research seeks to understand the effects of virtual programming on student learning outcomes, particularly when compared to in-person programming. We also recommend that future scholars and practitioners build upon the current research by conducting and evaluating a similar intervention at other institutions and among other populations. For example, the current intervention may be particularly well-suited for implementation with a young professional organization focused on community development. Likewise, we encourage future scholars to extend the results of the current article by examining the effect of the Congruence intervention using the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (Tyree, 1998), a psychometrically-validated scale that measures the values of the SCM.

In sum, the current paper shared a developmental intervention focused on developing Congruence, the second value of the Social Change Model of Leadership (SCM; HERI, 1996), among college students who mentor. The intervention was evaluated based on the learning objectives, and mentors perceived notable growth. We hope that leadership educators and student affairs practitioners will utilize the curriculum to facilitate and evaluate a curricular or co-curricular Congruence intervention.

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