Fostering leadership through organizational structure

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Abstract

This case study discusses the postindustrial paradigm of leadership and its influence on the field of leadership and also the higher education leadership literature. Furthermore, this case study examines the structure of one university honor society to discuss how the structure allows for the development of multiple leaders within the organization. Additionally, this case study applies a postindustrial view of leadership to the leadership that occurs within this university honor society. The case study concludes with recommendations for developing multiple leaders within a university honor society.

Keywords: postindustrial leadership, leadership development, honor society, university, organizational structure, teams
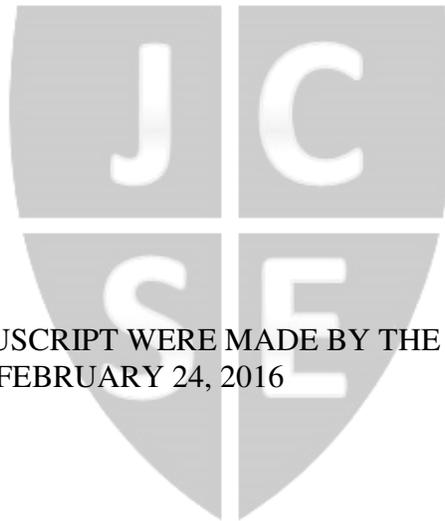
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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is embedded in the foundation of several university honor societies as evidenced by their purposes. Omicron Delta Kappa is "the National Leadership Honor Society" (Omicron, n.d., p. 1). Mortar Board "is the premier national honor society recognizing college seniors for superior achievement in scholarship, leadership and service" (Mortar, 2010, p. 1). "Lambda Sigma Society is a national honor society for second year men and women dedicated to the purpose of fostering leadership, scholarship, fellowship, and the spirit of service among college students" (Lambda, n.d., p. 1). The National Society of Collegiate Scholars "provides career and graduate school connections, leadership and service experiences" (National, n.d., p. 1). "Order of Omega is a leadership honor society for members of Greek organizations" (Order, 2011, p. 1).

These honor societies are typically student run organizations and have officers, one of whom is the president. Many members of student run organizations who hold positions often indicate that leaders of the organization are the president and other individuals serving in appointed positions (vice president, treasurer, etc.) (Schertzer & Schuh, 2004). This mindset could be attributed to the "hierarchical structure" of many of these student organizations (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 6). Additionally, university faculty and administrators, as well as the general student body, typically have the mentality that in order for a student to be considered a leader on campus, the student should have an appointed positon in a student organization (Astin & Astin, 2000).

The purpose of this case study is to provide an understanding of how the established structure of one honor society allows for the development of multiple leaders within the organization, including those members who do not hold an appointed position, and to apply concepts of the postindustrial paradigm of leadership to the leadership that occurs within this honor society. This case study also offers implications for future practice to further the development of multiple leaders in university honor societies.

INDUSTRIAL VS. POSTINDUSTRIAL PARADIGMS OF LEADERSHIP

A paradigm is "a worldview and…relates to the main assumptions brought to the study of leadership" (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006, p. 15). For the purpose of this case study, overviews of the industrial and the postindustrial paradigms of leadership are provided. Rost (1991) gave in-depth overviews of the industrial and the postindustrial paradigms of leadership. The industrial paradigm, which remained prevalent from the 1930s through the 1980s, focused on leadership as a management process. Rost explained that this process generally involved coercion by the manager to reach the desired outcome. Furthermore, Rost summarized the characteristics of leadership in the industrial paradigm as "rational, management oriented, male, technocratic, quantitative, goal dominated, cost-benefit driven, personalistic, hierarchical, short term, pragmatic, and materialistic" (1991, p. 94). Even throughout the 1980s, with the sudden increase in published literature, authors still held the mentality of the industrial paradigm.

Emerging post 1980s, the postindustrial paradigm of leadership shifted away from the managerial and authoritarian focus of the industrial paradigm (Rost, 1991). The postindustrial paradigm encompasses the idea of multiple leaders versus one appointed leader and focuses on the needs and thoughts of not only the leaders but also the followers. Rost (1991) defined

leadership as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102). Rost's definition includes four factors that are significant to this case study including the concept of multiple leaders, relationships that are "unequal" and "noncoervice," and "mutual purposes" (1991, pp. 102-103).

LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

With a paradigm shift, higher education leadership literature had a renewed focus (Kezar et al., 2006). Kezar et al. (2006) discussed how literature used to place an emphasis on college and university presidents as the main individuals providing direction and leadership within higher education institutions. However, current literature shifted away from discussing presidents as primary leaders and began to include the leadership provided by other key players at the university: faculty, staff, and administrators. Furthermore, Astin and Astin (2000) remarked that students are also being viewed as leaders and as contributing to leadership on campuses.

With a call for "increased accountability" in higher education (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001, p. 15), several authors began to discuss the importance of students gaining leadership skills through experiences during college for the betterment of society (i.e., Astin & Astin, 2000; Cress et al., 2001; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Omatsu, n.d.; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, n.d.). Astin and Astin (2000) explained that higher education institutions host several events and avenues for all students, including those who are not serving in an official leadership position on campus, to become involved in leadership. For example, during college students strengthen their leadership skills through their involvement in extracurricular activities and membership in student organizations. Several university leadership programs, as well as national college leadership programs (e.g., LeaderShape), have also been established to aid in this development process (Cress et al., 2001; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, n.d.). Dugan and Komives (2007) also elaborated that "campus leadership practices expanded exponentially in the 1990s to include the first undergraduate leadership major…and a plethora of leadership certificate programs and academic minors at other institutions. Leadership educators also began offering a wide array of co-curricular leadership programs" (p. 6).

Kezar et al. (2006) further explained that in previous years, literature conveyed higher education leaders as aloof and powerful. More contemporary literature describes how higher education leaders value the input of others and attempt to create a less hierarchical working environment. Of particular attention is a shared and more inclusive style of leadership within higher education. Included in this newer perspective on leadership is the concept of leadership in teams.

LEADERSHIP IN TEAMS

Bensimon and Neumann (1993) stated that:

As a society we hold fast to the myth of one-person leadership. Our organizational structures reinforce it.…If, as many writers tell us, teams are a thing of the future, this is less because they represent something new than because they represent something that has already been in place for a long time. We simply have not brought the idea of leadership as a team-rather than as one person-to light. (p. 2)

Within the higher education setting, colleges and universities began to understand the need for collaboration among the various units for effective campus leadership (Kezar et al., 2006). This understanding led to several individuals and units working in teams. With an increased emphasis on teams in higher education, Kezar et al. (2006) stated that "given the tradition of collegial governance and leadership in higher education, it is not surprising that the notion of teams has been widely used in recent years to understand the phenomenon of leadership" (p. 131). A paradigm shift and a renewed focus in the literature allows for a focus on leadership in teams in understanding how an honor society's structure can aid in developing multiple student leaders. First, it is important to understand the concept of teams.

Teams are groups in which individuals work together and rely on one another to achieve their established goals (Kogler Hill, 2010). Teams may exist to provide institution-wide communication, partnerships, problem solving, and/or project management and completion (Kezar et al., 2006). Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks (2001) indicated that team leaders often develop goals and assemble team members to aid in the process of goal completion. Zaccaro et al. commented that "effective leadership processes represent perhaps the most critical factor in the success of organizational teams" (2001, p. 452).

HONOR SOCIETY STRUCTURE

This particular honor society exists at a 4-year public research university with approximately 42,000 students. The honor society is specifically geared towards recognizing freshmen college students with high academic achievement (3.5+ GPA). Since the founding of the university chapter in 1955, over 18,000 members have been inducted.

The honor society has an Executive Board and a Leadership Council. The Executive Board functions as the overall administrative board of the honor society and includes the positions of president, vice president(s), treasurer, and secretary, all of which are appointed positions. The Leadership Council is comprised of approximately 60 of the organization's members who have applied for, interviewed for, and been accepted into the Council. The Leadership Council does not include appointed positions. Students serving on the Leadership Council voluntarily apply to participate and to volunteer their time once accepted into the Council. All positions last for one academic school year, and students must reapply for positions each consecutive school year.

Each member of the Leadership Council participates in a committee to keep the organization active on campus, to represent the honor society, and to keep in contact with alumni. Within the Leadership Council there are six committees: member recruitment, parents and alumni, members, regional conference, induction ceremony, and outreach and service. Each Executive Board member leads a committee, and the president has the responsibility of overseeing all committees, activities, and events. Students on the Executive Board and the Leadership Council collaborate to perform the duties of each committee. Table 1 (Appendix) includes descriptions of each of the committees.

This honor society chapter has an adviser on campus. The adviser receives updates and instructions from national headquarters regarding the supervision and the running of the chapter, as well as information about chapter activities, the membership drive, and new member induction. The chapter adviser's main role is to guide students on how they should run the chapter based on the information received from national headquarters; however, the students are

responsible for actually managing the chapter. Therefore, the members of the honor society must collaborate within teams to complete tasks and events to keep the chapter running.

LEADERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

There are many teams within this honor society's structure. For example, the Executive Board represents an administrative team, and the Leadership Council is a team with much broader goals of representing the honor society on campus, keeping the honor society active on campus, and keeping in contact with parents and alumni. The individual committees are teams functioning to accomplish more specific goals based on the committee, and smaller teams may form within committees to accomplish tasks and projects.

This section discusses how this honor society's structure allows for the development of multiple leaders, whether through an appointed position or through voluntary participation, in the organization. Furthermore, as previously noted, Rost's (1991) definition of leadership has several aspects that are important to this case study. This section also provides a more in-depth understanding of how these factors apply to leadership within this honor society.

Leadership Development Through Team Structure

Operating from the postindustrial paradigm, Rost's (1991) definition of leadership includes the concept that there are often several leaders within a leadership situation versus having one appointed leader. Perhaps one of the most important functions of this honor society's structure is that it welcomes multiple leaders. Dugan and Komives (2007) noted the significance of organizations offering leadership roles aside from the traditional appointed positions to allow more students the opportunity to develop leadership skills. By having multiple teams, this honor society's structure supports additional leadership roles other than the appointed positions on the Executive Board.

By working in a team structure, there can be several leaders at any given time within this honor society, which allows all members to be potential leaders throughout a given school year. These individuals can be an appointed leader or a member of the Leadership Council who volunteered his or her time to the organization and eventually took on a leadership role. To perform all the duties necessary to achieve the honor society's goals, the Executive Board members cannot and should not be the only leaders. Members of the Executive Board lead committees and within each committee Council members have the opportunity to lead special projects and teams. For example, in planning the induction ceremony a member of the Executive Board leads the overall vision of the event while multiple teams within the induction ceremony committee form to take on the responsibilities of planning the event. Committee members have the opportunity to lead one of these smaller teams.

In addition, Clifton and Anderson (2004) stated that "the most important thing is to be intentional. Purposely look at each college experience in terms of learning something about how to be a leader. Whether you are a leader or a follower, you can learn something about leadership" (p. 20). Dugan and Komives (2007) further specified that students "learn leadership" skills through their interactions with students, faculty, and staff (p. 17). Members of the honor society have the opportunity to "learn leadership" from other members who assume a leadership role within a committee. While some members may not actively take a leadership role within the honor society, they can still observe and learn a range of leadership skills as various leaders have

a variety of leadership skills. These learned skills can then be utilized at a later time, whether in this honor society or in another organization, if these students decide to take an active leadership role.

Leadership

The second factor of Rost's (1991) definition of leadership that is important to this analysis is "unequal" relationships (p. 102). Rost (1991) noted that:

> Typically leaders have more influence because they are willing to commit more of the power resources they possess to the relationship…there are times when followers may exert more influence than leaders, times when they seize the initiative, and times when their purposes drive the relationship. If one or a few followers cause this influence pattern to develop, the followers then become leaders. (p. 112)

Executive Board members who hold appointed positions lead the honor society and the committees because they have the most knowledge about the direction and the vision of the honor society. Yet, Leadership Council members may take on a leadership role within a committee because of their interest in an opportunity or because they have in-depth knowledge about a specific task, project, or opportunity and have "valuable expertise to provide any leadership process" (Kezar et al, 2006, p. 131). As a result, these members would be considered leaders within the honor society.

Also consistent with the postindustrial paradigm and Rost's (1991) definition of leadership is that the established relationships within a leadership situation are void of any coercion. The relationships between members of the honor society, a team environment, should be noncoercive as the members agree to the mission of the honor society at the time they join the organization. While leaders of a committee or a team may "commit more of the power resources they possess to the relationship," this power element does not mean there are coercive relationships within this honor society (Rost, 1991, p. 112). What it means is that at a given time the leaders are taking the lead to guide a project, committee, team, or task and consequently "exert more influence" than followers in the process leading these endeavors (Rost, 1991, p. 112). Members of the Leadership Council have the option to switch committees if they feel coerced by a leader; however, there should be no instance when any member uses coercive tactics.

Lastly, "mutual purposes," as described by Rost (1991, p. 103), are agreed upon by the members of the honor society. Not only do the Executive Board and the Leadership Council come together to support the purposes (comparable to the mission) of the chapter and the honor society, they also work in teams to support these purposes. Each committee is assigned specific year-long tasks that relate to the overall mission/purposes of the chapter and the honor society, and each committee relies on the work of the other committees to accomplish tasks. Committees' leaders and followers must work collaboratively to achieve committees' tasks and to assist in achieving the honor society's overall mission. Additionally, these tasks and purposes can evolve over time as honor society members work together and share their thoughts and ideas.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

"More than anything, leadership needs to be thought of as a collaborative process…rather than focusing solely on those who hold traditionally recognized positions of leadership, we must broaden our notion of who is a leader, so that many more Americans are empowered and able to lead in the future" (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, n.d., para. 3). Shertzer and Schuh (2004) studied the perceptions of and beliefs about leadership of college students who were and were not serving in positional leadership roles on campus. Researchers found that many students, particularly those serving in leadership positions, still held the viewpoint that in order to be a leader one must have a formal title/appointed position in a campus organization. Additionally, several students classified these leaders as extroverts and strong communicators. This viewpoint aligns with Rost's (1991) description of the industrial paradigm.

Shertzer and Schuh's (2004) findings suggest that students and campus staff should adopt a postindustrial viewpoint, a more inclusive leadership perspective, to stimulate all students' participation in the leadership process. Additionally, Shertzer and Schuh emphasized campus staff members' involvement in creating a postindustrial leadership climate on campus that involves all students in the leadership process. This can be done through educational efforts, the development of "an institutional leadership statement" that reflects the postindustrial paradigm, and outreach efforts aimed at including all students in events and organizations on campus (Schertzer & Schuh, 2004, p. 129).

Furthermore, Dugan and Komives (2007) recommended planning "short-term" workshops, such as the honor society's leadership workshops that last one day, to help ignite students' development (p. 17). As previously noted, this honor society's leadership workshops are planned by the members committee. These workshops can serve as tools to help students understand their personal leadership strengths and weaknesses, how to develop their skills, and how to get involved as a leader within the honor society. If a chapter's college or university has a Center for Leadership or a similar department on campus, staff from that office can speak at the leadership workshops and facilitate sessions.

Dugan and Komives (2007) asserted that students should be supported "in adopting an accurate and healthy self-awareness regarding their leadership capacity" (p. 19). To do so, Dugan and Komives indicated that it is important to acknowledge when students are displaying leadership skills so students can begin to view themselves as leaders and not always as followers. Clifton and Anderson (2004) stated that "recognition and affirmation from leaders is extremely important" in the leadership process (p. 13). In future practice perhaps an honor society's president and committee leaders could publicly recognize all members' positive leadership skills within the organization, which could help shift students' thinking towards what Rost (1991) described as the postindustrial paradigm of leadership.

To develop multiple leaders within an honor society, it is recommended that honor society chapters develop a structure similar to the one discussed in this case study. Not only does this honor society's structure reflect the postindustrial paradigm of leadership but also leadership within teams, both of which allow for the development of multiple leaders. For other honor societies or student organizations with the goal of developing student leaders, a structure with an administrative team, a leadership council, and committees is beneficial to helping multiple students take leadership roles and develop leadership skills. Furthermore, within this structure students also have the opportunity to observe leadership which can help them learn and demonstrate leadership in the future.

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APPENDIX

Table 1	
Descriptions of Leadership Council Committees	
Committee	Description
Member Recruitment	In charge of membership drive to recruit new members. Process lasts from February to March of each school year.
Parents and Alumni	Collects donations from parents and alumni and filters donations to the appropriate sources, such as scholarship funds.
Members Committee	Plans leadership workshops for members serving on Leadership Council and Executive Board to help develop members' leadership skills. There are two workshops a semester. Each workshop lasts a day.
Regional Conference	Plans logistics of regional conference and runs the regional conference.
Induction Ceremony	Plans new members' induction ceremony and reception.
Outreach and Service	Coordinates with other campus organizations to complete community service projects. Also partners with Academic Center for Excellence to plan tutoring events to help students on campus excel on their midterm and final examinations.