

# **BUILDING A TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION FOR PEER LEADERS: Consideration vs. Structure**

## **Abstract**

Leadership is necessary for organizational effectiveness (Kroeck et al., 2004), a finding that applies to student organizations at institutions of higher education (Plante, 2016; Posner, 2012). However, student leaders of campus organizations face nuanced and significant challenges (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Plante, 2016). Therefore, we sought to diagnose and analyze the central challenge of a peer leadership position within a collegiate leadership mentoring program. After diagnosing the central challenge of the position, we built a training and development intervention grounded in the leadership theory of consideration versus structure (Halpin & Winer, 1957; Stogdill, 1974). The intervention was administered to two cohorts of seven student leaders and subsequently assessed for effectiveness. The current paper shares the assessment results, along with details on developing and implementing the leadership intervention. We hope practitioners can (a) implement the process we outline to conduct a needs assessment and create a leadership development intervention and (b) utilize the training in their co-curricular organizations.

## **Introduction**

Organizational effectiveness, including the effectiveness of collegiate organizations, relies on successful leadership (Kroeck et al., 2004; Plante, 2016; Posner, 2012). However, college student leaders of campus organizations face significant challenges related to leading and motivating their peers (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Plante, 2016). Given the difficulties facing college student leaders,

we sought to analyze the central challenge of the Student Staff position, a peer leadership role within a sizeable collegiate leadership mentoring program. After identifying the critical challenge of the position to be balancing empathy and accountability, we created a training and development intervention grounded in the leadership theory of consideration vs. structure (Halpin & Winer, 1957; Stogdill, 1974). The theory of consideration vs. structure targets interpersonal behavior skills, skills essential for

leaders and their development (Lord & Hall, 2005; Miscenko et al., 2017; Mumford et al., 2007).

The training intervention was administered to two cohorts of seven student leaders and subsequently assessed for effectiveness utilizing the program outcomes and learning objectives. The current application manuscript shares the assessment results, along with details on developing and implementing the leadership intervention. We hope practitioners implement the training in their co-curricular organizations or utilize the outlined process to conduct needs assessments and create developmental interventions. Thus, we aim to contribute towards a need in the field for “descriptions of assignments and activities comprising the day-to-day teaching of leadership” (Smith & Roebuck, 2010, p. 136), as well as sharpening the capacity of leadership educators to develop, assess, and evaluate contextually-considered and theoretically-grounded interventions.

## Background

The purpose of the current application manuscript is to share the creation of a leadership development intervention focused on the theory of consideration vs. structure targeting peer leaders within a leadership mentoring program (LMP). Having existed for over 70 years, the LMP is a well-established organization at a large, midwestern university. The LMP works with 180+ college student leaders whom peers, faculty, and staff have nominated for demonstrating leadership behaviors. Approximately 60 students each year are chosen to be mentors through a structured interview process. Each mentor remains in the program for three years working with a 4th – 12th-grade student in the community whom teachers and school staff have nominated for positively influencing others.

Leadership mentoring pairs are organized into small groups, called “projects,” based on the age or school of the Leadership Mentee. Projects contain approximately 25 – 35 mentoring pairs. There are seven projects within the LMP, each led by an exceptional senior student, given the title of Student

Staff. Projects are typically staffed by seniors from other projects.

Within the LMP, Student Staff are the primary touchpoint for Leadership Mentors, as projects meet weekly for one hour. Additionally, Student Staff serve as the liaison between the LMP and the families of Leadership Mentees. If, for example, the LMP experienced a breakdown in leadership among a Student Staff member, it would influence an entire project of mentors, mentees, and the families of mentors, well over 75 people. Given that these peer leaders are critical to the functioning of the LMP and that leadership is necessary for organizational effectiveness (Kroeck et al., 2004), the training and development of Student Staff (i.e., senior student peer leaders within the LMP) is the focus of the current intervention.

Over the past ten years, the LMP has worked to enhance the experience of Student Staff by building developmental conversations into staff meetings and providing structured feedback. However, we have not conducted an intake assessment to diagnose and analyze current needs, which is the starting point for building a training and development intervention (Kroeck et al., 2004; London et al., 2007).

Kroeck et al. (2004) outlined two variables that ought to shape leadership assessment: (a) the purpose of the assessment and (b) the level of assessment use. The purpose of an intake assessment is related to the time horizon – past term, near term, or long term (Kroeck et al., 2004). Since Student Staff members hold the position for one school year, the assessment focused on the near term, also referred to as assessment for development. At an individual assessment level, this includes furthering leaders’ awareness of their strengths and skills. At an organizational level, this includes developing leadership training and emphasizing recruitment/selection needs.

London et al. (2007) discussed three steps to developing an assessment: (a) develop an understanding of the job position and organizational needs, (b) connect the job requirement to individual characteristics or behaviors, and (c) identify ways to measure these qualities that connect to job

performance. The intake assessment focused on addressing these three steps. Specifically, we asked all Student Staff (N = 13) in the 2019-2020 school year to answer the following questions:

- What leadership strengths do Student Staff need to be successful?
- What knowledge and skills do Student Staff need to be successful?
- Where are there gaps in the knowledge and skills needed and training provided?

The intake survey revealed several leadership strengths that Student Staff members perceive as necessary to succeed. Strengths mentioned more than once were communication (n = 4), empathy (n = 3), holding others accountable (n = 3), adaptability (n = 2), responsibility (n = 2), rapport building (n = 2), relator (n = 2), organization (n = 2), developer (n = 2) and facilitation skills (i.e., asking questions, n = 2). When asked what knowledge and skills are necessary to succeed in this role, Student Staff said organization (n = 3), communication (n = 3), proactive mentality (n = 2), building deep relationships (n = 2), open-minded humility (n = 2), knowledge of fostering investment-level relationships, active listening (n = 2), collaboration and delegation (n = 2), and managing peers (n = 2). In the questions about (a) strengths necessary and (b) knowledge and skills necessary, Student Staff particularly highlighted the importance of balancing empathy and accountability.

The final question on the intake survey asked Student Staff to discuss gaps between the knowledge/skills needed for the position and the training provided. Participants addressed the following areas: (a) staying organized at the beginning of the year; (b) understanding how to address conversations that challenge your decisions; (c) creating a thriving environment; (d) balancing friendship/community with accountability/managing peers; (e) learning about the culture of the project (i.e., adding structure to the transition dinner with outgoing and incoming Student Staff, x2); and (g) a master list of curriculum ideas for one-on-ones based on age and personality. Four Student Staff also indicated the importance of learning on the job, and three noted that they did not feel there was a

gap between the knowledge/skills needed and the training provided.

Considered holistically, the responses to the intake assessment revealed three primary leadership issues at the Student Staff position within the LMP. First, Student Staff continuously articulated the challenge of balancing empathy and accountability in managing the students who are also their peers. In speaking to this challenge, one Student Staff wrote that further training should discuss "how to effectively balance the relationship of friendship and community among members and yourself while still expecting accountability." Second, Student Staff found it challenging to understand the project culture they are staffing upon entering the role. A Student Staff commented, "it is vital that there is time for Student Staff to understand the culture of a project as they enter into it." Third and finally, creating and sustaining a positive culture at project meetings was identified as a leadership issue. One student staff member noted that they needed help "figuring out how to create an environment that thrives."

## Leadership Theory and Framework

The primary responsibility of Student Staff with the LMP is to steward the health and wellbeing of approximately 25-35 mentoring relationships. Adding challenge to the task, the Student Staff are peers of the Leadership Mentors they supervise and steward. Student Staff discussed in the intake assessment that a primary leadership issue is balancing empathy and accountability or concern for people versus concern for results. For Student Staff to strike this integration of leadership behaviors, we identified it as necessary and helpful for them to consider and apply the theory of consideration versus structure.

**Consideration Versus Structure.** Researchers at the Ohio State University explored how leaders acted and found that behaviors tended to fall into two categories: consideration (i.e., relationship behaviors) and initiating structure (i.e., task behaviors; Stogdill, 1974). Halpin and Winer (1957) investigated leader behaviors in a military setting and found a connection between structure or consideration leader behaviors and follower

outcomes such as morale, effectiveness, and satisfaction. In a follow-up study, Fleishman and Harris (1962) found supporting evidence to Halpin and Winer (1957) in an organizational setting and within various cultures, including Japan, the United States, and Israel. Specifically, they found that if a leader needs to show structure, it is also vital to exhibit consideration behaviors. Korman (1966) discovered a frequent link between consideration behaviors and follower satisfaction. Greene (1975) suggested that perhaps followers' performance influences the consideration or structure of the leader. Integrating both consideration and structure, Blake and Mouton (1978) created a managerial grid asserting that leaders who demonstrate high structure (i.e., concern for results) and high consideration (i.e., concern for people) maximize followers' performance and satisfaction through team management. In a literature review, Judge et al. (2004) found that consideration behaviors were associated more with follower satisfaction, leader effectiveness, and follower motivation, while structure behaviors had a strong relationship with follower and group performance.

**Assessing Consideration Versus Structure.** To assess the current level of consideration and structure, as well as to identify potential areas of growth, we asked the 2019-2020 Student Staff (N = 13; i.e., the same students who had completed the intake assessment) to complete the Leadership Behavior Questionnaire (LBQ; Northouse, 2019). While we initially planned to assess the consideration versus the structure of Student Staff with the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire – Form XII (LBDQ-XII), originally titled the LBDQ and created by Stogdill (1963), the measure was not readily accessible and is time-consuming. Therefore, in the current intervention, the assessment of consideration versus structure behaviors among Student Staff was measured using the 20-item self-report LBQ (Northouse, 2019). This assessment is targeted toward training and focused on reflection. Student Staff were given the following prompt before completing the 20-item scale: "Read each item carefully and think about how often you engage in the described behavior as a Student Staff. Indicate your response to each item by selecting one of the five numbers below each item. 1 = Never 2 =

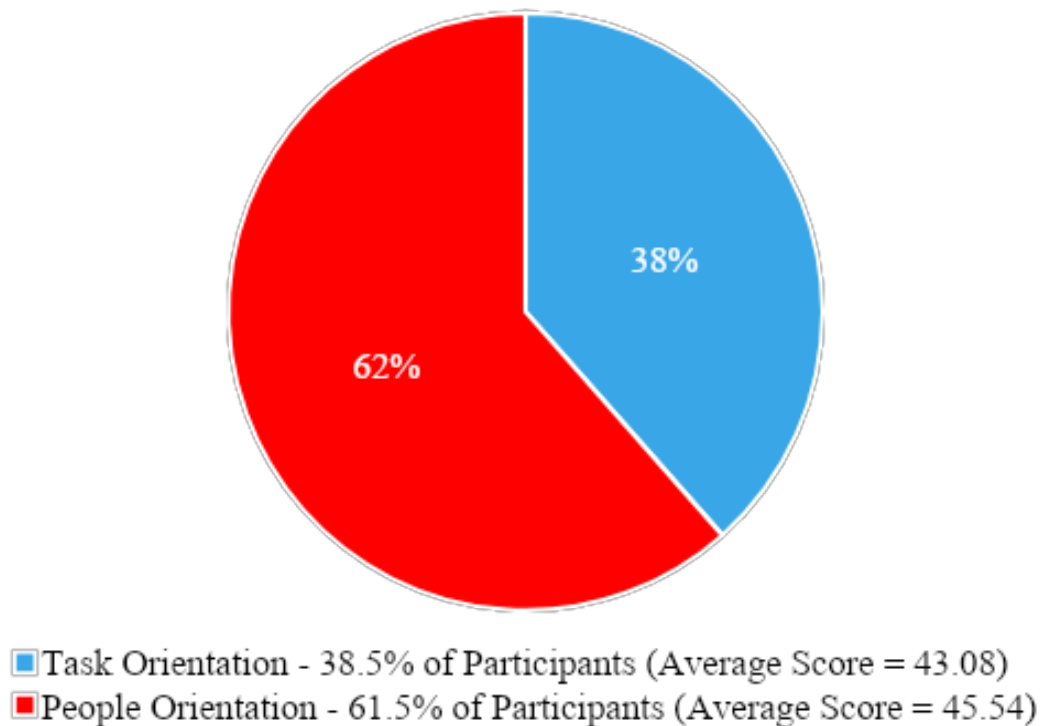
Seldom 3 = Occasionally 4 = Often 5 = Always." The odd-numbered items are summed to measure task behaviors, while the even-numbered items are summed to measure consideration behaviors. An example of an item measuring task behaviors is "Set standards of performance for group members." An example of an item measuring consideration behaviors is "Help others in the group feel comfortable."

**Leadership Behavior Questionnaire Results.** All 2019-2020 Student Staff (N = 13) completed the LBQ. Eight Student Staff scored higher in people orientation than task orientation (i.e., 61.5% of participants), while the other five scored higher in task orientation than people orientation (i.e., 38.5% of participants; see Figure 1). The average aggregate score for the ten questions related to people orientation was 45.54. The 45.54 score fell within the "very high range," which is 45-50 points, and indicates the extent to which an individual makes a follower feel comfortable with individuals and the group (Northouse, 2019). The average aggregate score for the ten questions related to task orientation was 43.80, which fell within the "high range" (i.e., 40 – 44 points; Northouse, 2019). Task orientation measures an individual's tendency to define followers' roles and communicate expectations.

**Feeding Back the Data.** The results were shared summatively with Student Staff during a regular weekly meeting. We guided the meeting with an agenda that noted specific opportunities for input (Cummings & Worley, 2015). We showed Figure 1 to Student Staff members and interpreted the results. In response, Student Staff members shared their training ideas to develop Student Staff members' task orientation (i.e., structure) and people orientation (i.e., consideration).

**Figure 1**

*Results of Leadership Behavior Questionnaire*



Student Staff provided several key insights that aided in creating the training and development intervention. Regarding consideration versus structure, Student Staff shared numerous comments addressing the tension between empathy and accountability, accentuating the utility of this leadership theory in the current context. Specifically, students suggested that incoming Student Staff spend time talking about approaching a common and challenging situation. Additionally, a student suggested that Student Staff complete the LBQ at the start of the year with times for reflection. Student Staff also thought sharing their primary task challenges with the incoming class would be helpful.

**Program Outcomes and Learning Objectives.** Building upon the results of the intake assessment and data feedback session, we developed program outcomes for the Student Staff training and development program. Program outcomes (or program/project objectives) are overarching statements of intent for programs and answer the

question, “Why are we doing this?” (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013a, p. 161). The program outcomes are as follows:

1. To create a team of LMP Student Staff that embodies both consideration and structure leadership behaviors.
2. To develop project meetings where all members feel welcomed, valued, empowered, trained, and held accountable.
3. To provide timely assistance to project members who struggle to meet consistently with their Leadership Mentee.

The first program outcome specifically highlights the leadership theory of consideration vs. structure (Northouse, 2019; Stogdill, 1963) and speaks to the balance of empathy and accountability frequently discussed in the intake assessment and feeding back of data by Student Staff as a central challenge of the position. The second program outcome speaks to the overarching goal of Student Staff,

translating their utilization of consideration and structure behaviors into improvements in the culture of project meetings and their relationships with individual Leadership Mentors. The third program outcome focuses again on utilizing the structure behaviors to connect with struggling Leadership Mentors and problem-solve alongside them.

Learning objectives (or learning outcomes) were then developed. They were grounded in the overall program outcomes to “describe what participants will learn as a result of attending an education or training session” (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013b, p. 182). While project outcomes focus on the broader program, the learning objectives focus on the individual participants. Following this training and development program, Student Staff will be able to:

1. Define consideration and structure leadership behaviors.
2. Describe their preferred approach as a leader: consideration or structure.
3. Defend their perception of their preferred approach as a leader with past examples.
4. Identify situations in which consideration leadership behaviors are beneficial and situations in which structure leadership behaviors are beneficial.
5. Author a plan to approach a challenging situation with a Leadership Mentor utilizing both consideration and structure leadership behaviors.

The learning objectives focused on understanding and implementing consideration versus structure leadership behaviors.

## Description of the Practice

We completed a backward design sheet at the beginning of developing the training program, which outlined the learning objectives, procedures for evaluating participant learning, and learning activities. The training program was four 15-minute training pieces on consideration versus structure starting at the beginning of the school year. Student Staff suggested delivering training in chunks during the feedback session, which aligned with scholarly

research on cognitive load (Van Merriënboer & Sweller, 2005).

The four 15-minute pieces of training focused on consideration versus structure to help Student Staff address the central challenge of balancing empathy and accountability. The four pieces of training were also accompanied by a workbook. See Figures 2-4 for examples of workbook pages. The training began with a lecture that discussed the difficulty of balancing empathy and accountability in a leadership position and introduced the theory. Then, we asked Student Staff members to define consideration and structure leadership behaviors in their own words to ensure learning (See Figure 2). In the second training, Student Staff completed the Leadership Behavior Questionnaire (LBQ) to assess their tendency toward either consideration or structure leadership behaviors (Northouse, 2019). Student Staff processed their results with a fellow Student Staff and then shared their results to see the overall group makeup. After completing the LBQ, Student Staff defended their perceived preferred approach by writing and drawing examples of past experiences when they embodied that leadership approach (See Figure 3). Student Staff shared their examples with a small group.

Applying this theory to the Student Staff position, during the third training, Student Staff identified situations in which consideration behaviors are beneficial and situations in which structure behaviors are beneficial, sharing their lists with the group (See Figure 4).

Specifically, we noted that many leadership conversations and experiences require us to lean on both types of behavior to be effective. Finally, Student Staff authored a plan to approach a challenging situation with a Leadership Mentor who does not meet consistently with their Leadership Mentee by utilizing both consideration and structure leadership behaviors. In small groups, Student Staff wrote a plan and shared it with the group, practicing phrases they might write or say in working with the struggling mentor. After the four-week intervention, we discussed and reflected on consideration and structure leadership behaviors throughout the year during the weekly Student Staff meetings.



## Program Evaluation Plan and Outcomes/Results

We evaluated the intervention with a survey centered on the program outcomes and learning objectives. Evaluation is intended to provide insight into participants' or students' satisfaction levels or their perception of the benefits associated with a leadership experience (Hoole & Martineau, 2014). Using the degree-of-change response anchors suggested by Seemiller (2013; i.e., 1 = Did not increase, 4 = Greatly increased), we asked Student Staff to evaluate the program outcomes by assessing the degree to which they perceived they had changed in their ability to do the following: (a) To create a team of LMP Student Staff that embodies both consideration and structure leadership behaviors; (b) To develop project meetings where all members feel welcomed, valued, empowered, trained, and held accountable; and (c) To provide timely assistance to project members who are struggling to meet consistently with their Leadership Mentee. Participants evaluated the intervention learning objectives by indicating their level of proficiency on the following five statements (i.e., 1 = Limited Proficiency, 4 = Exceptional Proficiency): (a) Define consideration and structure of leadership behaviors; (b) Describe your preferred approach as a leader: consideration or structure; (c) Defend your preferred approach as a leader with past examples; (d) Identify situations in which consideration leadership behaviors are beneficial and situations in which structure leadership behaviors are beneficial; and (e) Author a plan to approach a challenging situation with a Leadership Mentor utilizing both consideration and structure leadership behaviors.

It was predetermined that an aggregate total  $\geq 3.0$  ("Moderately Increased" or "Advanced Proficiency") would indicate that the intervention had met its aims on the three program outcome statements and five learning objectives (Seemiller, 2016). Participants completed the assessment survey in March of the spring semester (i.e., six months after the intervention). The purpose of having six months between the intervention and the survey was to avoid the Honeymoon Effect, a common problem with self-assessment data that happens when participants overestimate the impact of an

experience immediately after it is over (Rosch & Schwartz, 2009).

Data from the 2020-2021 ( $n = 7$ ) and 2021-2022 ( $n = 7$ ) Student Staff teams was aggregated and shared below. All 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Student Staff ( $N = 14$ ) participated in the survey. Table 1 shows the results of the program outcome questions. Table 2 shows the results of the learning objective questions.

Each program outcome statement had an average perceived proficiency level  $> 3.0$ , indicating that leadership mentors, on average, perceived their behavioral proficiency in the program outcome statements (and associated targeted leadership competencies) as Advanced. Additionally, over 80% of student respondents year over year rated their proficiency on each of the program outcome statements as Advanced or Exceptional. Taken together, the first two assessment results indicated strong perceived growth in targeted leadership competency knowledge, value, and/or ability as well as behavioral proficiency among the targeted leadership competencies year over year.

**Table 1**  
*Results of Program Outcome Questions*

<i>Question</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>% ≥ 3.0 Rating</i>
To create a team of NHRI Student Staff that embodies both consideration and structure leadership behaviors.	3.14	100
To develop project meetings where all members feel welcomed, valued, empowered, trained, and held accountable.	3.71	100
To provide timely assistance to project members who struggle to meet consistently with their Leadership Mentee.	3.43	100

*Note.* Response anchors were 1 = Did not increase to 4 = Greatly increased.

**Table 2**  
*Results of Learning Objective Questions*

<i>Question</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>% ≥ 3.0 Rating</i>
Define consideration and structure of leadership behaviors.	3.86	100
Describe your preferred approach as a leader: consideration or structure.	3.57	100
Defend your preferred approach as a leader with past examples.	3.71	100
Identify situations in which consideration leadership behaviors are beneficial and situations in which structure leadership behaviors are beneficial.	3.86	100
Author a plan to approach a challenging situation with a Leadership Mentor utilizing both consideration and structure leadership behaviors.	3.57	100

*Note.* Response anchors were 1 = Limited Proficiency to 4 = Exceptional Proficiency.

Survey results revealed that all Student Staff self-reported that their ability to enact the program outcomes had "Moderately Increased" (i.e., a score of 3) or "Greatly Increased" (i.e., a score of 4).

Likewise, all participants indicated that they perceived themselves to have "Advanced Proficiency" or "Exceptional Proficiency" on the five learning objectives. Additionally, the average score

on all questions was  $\geq 3.0$  ("Moderately Increased" or "Advanced Proficiency"). The lowest average evaluation was a 3.14 on the program outcome question: "To create a team of LMP Student Staff that embodies both consideration and structure leadership behaviors." While this question had the lowest average score, it met the 3.0 threshold, indicating perceived participant development (Seemiller, 2016). The highest average evaluation was a 3.86 for the learning objectives of "Define consideration and structure of leadership behaviors" and "Identify situations in which consideration leadership behaviors are beneficial and situations in which structure leadership behaviors are beneficial." This pattern indicated that participants perceived high proficiency levels in understanding consideration vs. structure and applying it to situations relevant to the Student Staff position.

## Reflections and Recommendations of the Practitioner

The current paper outlines the development of a leadership intervention starting with creating an intake assessment specific to the targeted program/position. After Student Staff completed the intake assessment, we identified the leadership position's central challenge as balancing empathy and accountability and selected a leadership theory, consideration versus structure (Halpin & Winer, 1957; Stogdill, 1974), that addressed the central challenge. We assessed the theory amongst Student Staff. The resulting data were analyzed and fed back to Student Staff in a structured setting, allowing them to react to the data and answer open-ended questions. With feedback from the participants, we developed program outcomes and learning objectives for a leadership intervention. The program outcomes and learning objectives then guided the creation of a leadership intervention focused on the identified theory and the needs of the targeted program/position. After implementing the intervention, we assessed program outcomes and learning objectives to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. We hope that by providing an in-depth outline of a leadership development intervention, other leadership educators can implement a similar structure to develop, assess,

and evaluate contextually-considered and theoretically-grounded interventions. As higher education practitioners are urged to document their impact (Reinelt & Russon, 2003), leadership educators would be prudent to build theory-based interventions with learning objectives and program outcomes accompanied by an assessment and evaluation structure.

Further, leadership educators may wish to employ the current consideration versus structure intervention in their co-curricular settings. Additional peer leadership positions (e.g., Resident Assistants, Undergraduate Teaching Assistants, etc.) may find training grounded in the challenge of balancing empathy and accountability particularly applicable. Notably, the intervention outline we have shared meets a need in leadership education for "descriptions of assignments and activities comprising the day-to-day teaching of leadership" (Smith & Roebuck, 2010, p. 136). Further, as leadership educators implement the consideration versus structure intervention, we recommend that they collect and analyze evaluation data, comparing it with the current study results to explore the differing needs of their participants, as well as opportunities to improve the intervention.

We encourage leadership education practitioners to build upon the current application manuscript by employing the structure of intervention development, beginning with an intake assessment, amongst their own curricular and co-curricular settings. As different needs may inevitably emerge among different populations and positions, the field of leadership education will continue to develop new ways of utilizing leadership theories to meet the needs of student leaders. Leadership development interventions grounded in theory may be particularly beneficial among student leaders of campus organizations who face significant challenges related to leading and motivating their peers (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Plante, 2016).

In sum, the purpose of the current application manuscript was to analyze the primary challenge of a peer leadership position within a collegiate mentoring program. After diagnosing the central challenge, we developed, implemented, and assessed a training and development intervention

grounded in the leadership theory of consideration vs. structure. We hope this paper provided two insights. First, we outline a process for developing a leadership intervention that begins with a needs assessment and focuses on the unique challenges associated with a group/position that leadership educators are encouraged to utilize when creating developmental interventions. Second, we share a leadership development intervention grounded in the leadership theory of consideration vs structure, as well as an accompanying evaluation plan, for leadership educators to implement.

Advancements in the field of leadership education will only stand to be strengthened by sound design, delivery, and evaluation decisions. Alternatively, stated another way, advancements in the field of leadership education stand to be stunted if program design, delivery, and evaluation processes lack an academic foundation. Design and delivery of leadership programs that fall prey to rocky foundations lead to evaluation and research efforts on rocky programs that contribute little to the field. Therefore, we urge leadership education scholars and practitioners to build programming centered on theoretically informed design, delivery, and evaluation structures to benefit students, programs, and the field of leadership education.

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