Developing Leadership Competencies to Promote the Community Development of the Mississippi Delta Region

Pricilla Clark
Center for Organizational Development
Federal Occupational Health
Bethesda, Maryland, USA
Priscilla.Clark@foh.hhs.gov

Tao Gong
Department of Economics
University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Princess Anne, Maryland, USA
tgong@umes.edu

Abstract

Parts of the Mississippi Delta region have been known for a number of very serious problems, including poverty, illiteracy, race relations, public health, and declining economy issues. An approach to combat its social and economic ills is to develop leadership competencies through a community leadership development initiative. The purposes of this study were to assess the extent to which leadership skills were developed in the Mid-South Delta Leaders (MSDL) program participants as compared to non-participants and to determine the specific impacts of the program on its participants. The study used a mixed methodology to assess the effect of the program on the development of a number of leadership competencies. The quantitative part used a posttest-only design with non-equivalent groups. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI-self) instrument was used to measure the leadership actions and behaviors. Data were analyzed with MANCOVA test to examine the effectiveness of the community leadership development initiative. Results suggested that the participation in the MSDL program significantly influences the leadership competencies with an $F = 2.554$, $p < 0.05$. The qualitative part was to explore using a follow-on open ended question: what specific impacts or changes did the MSDL program have on you? The results identified ten themes of impact. These themes of change range from better understanding of cultural and diversity differences, better networking and collaborative opportunities, promotions and better jobs, and better understanding how leadership makes an impact on community change.

Key words: community development, community leadership development initiative, leadership competencies, leadership practice inventory

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1.0 Introduction

Lack of leadership was named as one of the most serious problems of the rural South, particularly in the Mississippi Delta region (Winter, 1988). With the emergence of the vastly expanding global economy, new demands were placed on leaders of neighborhoods, communities, and regions (MSDL, 2004). For the

Mississippi Delta region, the Mid South Delta Leaders (MSDL) Program recognized the urgency of leadership as another source to combat its social and economic ills by preparing leaders to address some of today's poverty, illiteracy, race relations, and declining economy issues. An approach to community leadership issues helped in understanding some of these most basic social problems endemic to places like the Mississippi Delta region (Nylander, 1998). The future of the region's socioeconomic status was irrevocably intertwined with issues of cross-cultural understanding, human relations, public policy, economics, and its educational system (MSDL).

The MSDL program was a community leadership development initiative, which purported to develop effective leaders through the development of specific leadership competencies. This program was part of a larger initiative within the Delta region, the Mid-South Delta Initiative (MSDI)—an initiative that brought some positive change to the region. As noted in its literature, the MSDI was a long-term economic, community, and leadership development effort focused on 55 contiguous counties and parishes along the Mississippi River in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Established in 1997 by the Kellogg Foundation, the initiative was based on a shared vision of Delta people working together to build strong communities (MSDL, 2004). This initiative emphasized leadership development. In fact, it was a long-term economic, community, and leadership development effort. Leadership development was its major goal. Out of this goal, the MSDL program was created to enhance leadership in community leaders.

The goal of the MSDL program is to impart a new understanding upon community leaders through leadership development (MSDL, 2004). It is a project within the Mississippi River Delta region whose primary objective is to rid the area of economic decline. It relies on the development of the program's prescribed leadership competencies to accomplish this mission. These competencies were identified in the following six categories by a core team of MSDL developers and directors (Tabb, Moore, Gear, & Montesi, 2002):

1. The effective leader is personally empowered, a life-long learner and an educator who values the importance of sharing knowledge and imparting new skills to meet new challenges.
2. The effective leader works to facilitate group empowerment processes and is an activator in that they inspire, motivate, and challenge individuals and groups to achieve their highest potential.
3. The effective leader knows how to build effective organizations and coalitions through designing new structures and processes for achieving individual and collective goals.
4. The effective leader helps to build and promote healthy communities, understands dimensions of holistic community development and is an effective steward of the resources within their communities and environments.
5. The effective leader knows how to positively impact public policy and public governance processes.
6. The effective leader understands the larger environment, both locally and globally, within which change must take place.

As an 18-month community leadership development initiative, the MSDL program was designed to develop specific leadership competencies in community leaders (MSDL, 2004). In turn, MSDL believed that the development of these

competencies would improve the overall economic viability of the impacted communities (2004). The initiative purported to do this by bringing together a diverse group of community leaders to enhance their understanding of community and economic development through leadership development. With the dramatic shifts in the way people interacted and the decline in the social capital within communities, the need for community leadership was well recognized (Wituk, Warren, Heiny, & Clark, 2003).

The lack of social capital put communities at risk for a host of challenges; however, community leaders were able to address local challenges with useful leadership skills and concepts (Bolton, 1991). Therefore, fostering local leadership to help make communities better places to live was one of the primary purposes of community development (Mills, 2005).

Community leadership programs (CLP) are used for the development of leadership skills and concepts (Wituk et al., 2003). According to Langone and Rohs (1992), community leadership programs are the most prevalent form of leadership development, thereby growing the need for research to understand the nature of leadership development and its impact on projects and programs' effectiveness (Klimoski, 2000). Equally as important, there is a considerable demand for guidance in evaluating leadership development by those who practice and fund it (Hannum, Martineau, & Reinelt, 2006).What impacts and effects are these programs having upon their participants and impacted communities (Earnest, Ellsworth, Nieto, McCaslin, & Lackman, 1995)?

1.1 Purpose

The purposes of this study were to fill the gap by assessing the extent to which leadership competencies were developed in participant leaders compared to non-participant leaders, as measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) and to determine specific impacts of the program on individual participants. Laying the groundwork for the assessment of leadership development initiatives, such as this one, is essential because at various times, policymakers, funding organizations, planners, program managers, taxpayers, and program clientele need to distinguish worthwhile social programs from ineffective ones and launch new programs or revise existing ones to achieve certain desirable results (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman 2004). Because of political trends, resources will continue to require funders to choose the social problem areas on which to concentrate resources and the programs that should be given priority (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991). Also, extensive scrutiny of existing programs will continue because of the pressure to curtail or dismantle those that do not demonstrate that they are effective and efficient (Smith, 1989). This strategy makes the significance of the problem even greater and creates a wider audience for this study's results. Stakeholders, benefactors, and recipients or targets of social programs as well as the profession and fields of study in leadership and industrial and organizational psychology will benefit from the results of this study.

1.2 Research Questions

This study used a mixed methodology to assess the extent to which leadership skills were developed in the Mid-South Delta Leaders (MSDL) program participants as compared to non-participants and to determine the specific impacts of the program on its participants. The quantitative part will study whether the

post-program perceptions of participants of the MSDL program differ from non-participant leaders in regards to leadership actions and behaviors as measured by the LPI-self. To examine the research question involved in this study, the following hypothesis was tested: participation in the MSDL program will positively affect the development of leadership competencies measured by the leadership scores on the five LPI dimensions. The qualitative part will investigate what specific impacts or changes the program has on them. Specific positive changes were identified by respondents through an evaluation and coding of the qualitative responses to the open-ended question. Very recently, in 2011, additional qualitative interviews were conducted with these participants to determine the longitudinal effects of the program on their leadership competencies.

1.3 Limitations & Delimitations

1. Generalizations of the findings are restricted to the convenience sample of leadership program participants (Earnest et al., 1995).
2. The study confined itself to leaders from the Mississippi Delta region.
3. Biases in self-assessments are inherent (www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov).
4. The responses of the participants represented perceptions that may have been influenced by other variables not addressed in this study (Earnest et al., 1995).
5. A posttest-only design with non-equivalent groups was used, which is a design for which the groups have not been formed through randomization (Rossi et al., 2004).
6. Impact assessments are inherently comparative; therefore, using an experiment study is the optimal choice for design (Rossi et al., 2004). Designs using nonrandomized designs universally yield less convincing results than well-executed randomized field experiments (Newman & Brown, 1996).
7. The LPI can be used as a 360-survey including feedback from peers, subordinate, and superiors; however, for this study, it was only used as a self-assessment.

2.0 Literature Review

The MSDL program was a community leadership program aimed at developing leaders to improve communities within the Delta region. The literature demonstrates that community leadership programs have been in existence for decades, but the assessments and evaluations of them have not. There are a number of community leadership programs that exist across the nation, and while each is geared specifically to a community or a region, they have common traits (Earnest et al., 1995). Therefore, their models of evaluation can be shared across programs, which, in turn, help leaders to continuously improve how they implement and develop these type programs.

Many community leadership programs throughout the United States are based on the premise that leadership extends beyond necessary skills to maintain an organization to include those skills that affect change, develop policy, and implement programs (Earnest et al., 1995). Several studies sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation and others demonstrate that leadership programs make a difference in the lives of its participants (WKKF, 2006). A study conducted by Howell, Weir, and Cook (1979) demonstrated that four Kellogg leadership programs implemented in California, Michigan, Montana, and Pennsylvania

between 1965 and 1976 increased program participants' involvement in public and private organizations. Participants increased their leadership and problem-solving skills with confidence and broader understanding of society (Earnest et al., 1995). The programs enhanced participants' feelings of independence, growth, self-worth, knowledge of resources, the importance of fact gathering, greater awareness of community problems, and the ability to use group skills in community life (Earnest et al., 1995). The study also revealed that educational institutions involved in the programs expanded their programming in public affairs' education and leadership development (Earnest et al., 1995).

In 1986, the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service initiated its community leadership program in response to a critical need for leadership development (Langone et al., 1992). It was designed to equip local leaders with the skills necessary to manage change in their towns and cities (Earnest et al., 1995). This program found that "those who participated in the community leadership program felt more confident about promoting issues, were better able to motivate people, make informed decisions on public issues, work with people, lead a group, and deal with local leaders than those in the control group" (Earnest et al., 1995, p. 28). Three similar studies were conducted in Michigan, at the University of Akron, and in Montana. In Michigan, the study was completed on five Expanding Horizons Community Leadership Development Programs, which targeted new and less experienced community leaders (Kimball, Andrews, & Quiroz, 1987). The objectives of this program were to improve self-confidence and commitments to participate in community affairs and understanding of the community (Kimball et al., 1987). The University of Akron conducted the Community Team Leadership Program, whose goals were "to develop university and community relationships through which leadership in many constituencies can be identified; leadership participation in the university/community activities can be encouraged" (Seeley, 1981, p. 28). In Montana in 1971, another leadership program was funded by the WKKF; its primary purpose was "to increase the social and economic knowledge and leadership skills of present and future leaders in Montana" (Williams, 1981, p. 47).

Additional findings and results from each of these programs are as follows:

1. Program participants reported that they had taken on group leadership roles for the first time.
2. The leadership programs helped participants view their community from a different perspective, and participants exhibited changes in perceptions of improvements needed in community service areas.
3. Primary benefits increased personal contacts and interaction with classmates, increased leadership skills, and increased awareness of other societies and cultures.
4. Programs positively affected participants' personal, career, and leadership development and improved participants' family and peer relationships.
5. Participants became more committed to becoming informed about the public issues, participating in changing policies, and providing organizational leadership.
6. Self-assessed leadership effectiveness increased over time (Earnest et al., 1995).

Although these community leadership programs differed in format, length, and were geared specifically to a particular community, similarities were found among

their findings (Earnest et al., 1995). The most cited benefit of community leadership programs was increased citizen involvement/volunteer activity and increased leadership skills (Kimball et al., 1987; Kincaid & Knopp, 1992; Langone et al., 1992; Seeley, 1981; Whent & Leising, 1992; Williams, 1981 cited by Earnest et al., 1995). Community-based leadership development initiatives, like these, supported by several foundations have found that success is maximized when the plan for leadership development is mutually determined, with participants sharing leadership and responsibility for the process and its outcomes, and the process occurs within the context of the community—relying on local expertise as much as possible and taking place over the long term (Markus, 2001).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A posttest-only design with nonequivalent groups (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002) was employed to test the impact of a treatment (or an intervention) on an outcome while controlling for all other factors that might influence that outcome (Creswell, 2003). This design was used because the MSDL program started before the researchers in this study were consulted to measure the changes in leadership behaviors of the program participants. A review of the literature revealed that such a design was quite frequently used, and is the best design when "the logistical constraints that an intervention has already been fielded before the evaluation of that intervention is designed" (Shadish, et al., 2002, p. 104). For example, as cited in Shadish et al.'s book, St. Pierre, Ricciuti, & Creps (1998) reviewed 122 evaluations of the Even Start Literacy Program and found that a considerable number of studies used posttest-only design to explore the effect of the program on a variety of measures of child development, including the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT).

According to Shadish et al. (2002), the posttest-only design can be improved using a matching method to reduce selection biases when a pretest measure is not available. Matching, as defined by Shadish, et al. (2002), happens when "the researcher groups units with similar scores on the matching variable, so that treatment and control groups each contain units with the same characteristics on the matching variable" (p. 118). Therefore, this study formed a control group that is as similar as possible on a variety of characteristics using an individual matching method. Individual matching is defined as constructing an exact match or partner for each individual in the intervention group (Rossi et al., 2004). It is usually done through the matching of relevant characteristics or variables considered suitable for a particular study (Rossi et al., 2004).

A review of the literature was conducted to determine what variables were best suited for this purpose. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), situational variables have a direct impact on leadership effectiveness. Fielder (2000) also posited that effective leadership depends on the leader's and follower's characteristics as well as other factors in the leadership situation. All studies which inquire into the relationship between leadership effectiveness on one hand and other factors on the other belong to the category of contingency leadership theory (Vroom & Yetten, 1973). The contingency theories of leadership focus on several variables such as characteristics of the situation and leader role or position (Fielder, 1964; Hersey & Blanchard, 1993; Northouse, 2001; Vroom et al., 1973). Hencley (1973) notes that

"the situation approach maintains that leadership is determined…by the requirements of the social situation" (p. 38). Therefore, in order to evaluate a leadership program, the context of the situation or setting is a key factor. In other words, the context of the situation should be considered in attempts to understand how leadership emerges, and "not only in the extent to which or how context may affect the strength of the relations between other independent and dependent variables" (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993, p. 12). The context of the situation lends itself to organizational characteristics such as organizational structure and organizational stability (Bass et al., 1994). In a number of leadership studies, the setting or situation has been taken into account through its identification as an explanatory variable (Arnold, 2001; Klimoski, 2000; Yukl & Lepsinger, 2004). In the context of this study, the setting is the community and each participant has a role as a leader within the community setting or situation in which he or she works or acts as a leader or functions in a leadership role. In several similar recent leadership studies, the leadership position or job title was used as a variable to account for leadership effectiveness (Arnold, 2001; Klimoski, 2000; Markus, 2001). Therefore, two very important matching variables were used and accounted for through individual matching to make the groups comparable: leadership situation or community setting and job type or position. In an impact assessment, the intervention group is typically specified first and the evaluator then constructs a control group by selecting targets unexposed to the intervention that match those in the intervention group on selected characteristics (Rossi et al., 2004).

Several other matching variables were also used in this study to form a control group. These variables were (1) length of time on the job, (2) level of education, (3) gender, (4) race, and (5) age (Creswell, 2003). A search of the literature identified these variables used for this study. A leader's behavior may vary systematically as a function of gender because of gender-role expectations (Eagly & Johnson, 2000; Harvey, Barnes, Sperry, & Harris, 2001). Over the decades, many researchers have questioned whether gender differences account for differences in leadership styles and behaviors (Eagly et al., 2000; Hall, 1984; Henning & Jardin, 1977; Sargent, 1981). The process of leadership takes place over time implying that age could be regarded as an important variable that may have an influence on leadership practices (Beukman, 2005). This same concept holds true for the variable length of time on the job, which is normally measured in the number of years in an occupation or within an organization. The level of education is also considered an important variable. According to Ricketts & Rudd (2004), level of education had a significant effect on the way respondents viewed their leadership styles and behaviors. Race was included as a covariate as some leader behaviors and their enactment may vary systemically as a function of racial identity (Hofstede, 1980; Koopman, 1993). When comparing participants' measurements with non-participants', these variables are considered comparable factors that might systematically affect the results (Markus, 2001).

This study is an assessment that measures the effect of the program, which is to examine an outcome change that can be attributed uniquely to a program as opposed to the influence of some other factor (Mohr, 1995). Impact theory is a casual theory describing cause-and-effect sequences in which certain program activities are the instigating causes and certain social benefits are the effects they eventually produce (Boruch, 1997). Impact theory also expresses the outcomes of social programs as part of a logic model that connects the program's activities to proximal (immediate) outcomes that, in turn, are expected to lead to other, more

distal outcomes (Rossi et al., 2004). For example, the MSDL program purported to immediately enhance the leadership of its community leaders (proximal outcomes), which they believed would ultimately improve community and economic development in the region (distal outcomes). Proximal outcomes are rarely the ultimate outcomes programs intend to generate; they are not the most important outcomes from a social or policy perspective (Cronbach, 1982). However, these outcomes are the ones the program has the greatest capability to affect, so it is important to know whether they were attained (Rossi et al., 2004). If the program fails to produce these most immediate and direct outcomes, such as the leadership competencies in this study, and the program theory is correct, then the more distal outcomes in the sequence are unlikely to occur—community and economic development (Rossi et al., 2004). It is the more distal outcomes that are typically the ones of greatest practical and political importance; however, the proximal outcomes are generally the easiest to measure and to attribute to the program's efforts (Rossi et al., 2004). Therefore, this quasi-experimental impact assessment was designed to measure the proximal outcomes—development of the leadership competency model.

The intervention is the MSDL program. The leadership scores from this model represented the dependent variables—the outcome scores or response scores to determine the level of proficiency or enhancement in the participant leaders compared to non-participant leaders. Therefore, MANCOVA was used to test the hypothesis, as the dependent variables in this study are the five exemplar leadership practices. Stevens (1992) highlights two reasons why a researcher should be interested in using more than one dependent variable when comparing treatments or groups based on differencing characteristics: "1. any worthwhile treatment or substantial characteristic will affect subjects in more than one way, hence, the need for additional criterion (dependent measures), and 2. the use of several dependent measures permits the researcher to obtain a more "holistic" picture, and therefore a more detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 151). With MANCOVA, the study is able to determine the impact of treatment on outcome variables controlling for the effects of covariates.

3.2 Study Subjects

The subjects for this study were the Class I and Class II leader participants of the MSDL program representing the intervention group. Seventy-four participants completed the first two classes of the MSDL program and were chosen for this study because they had gone through each phase of the program and successfully fulfilled all requirements. Out of the 74 mailed and emailed surveys, a total of 37 respondents replied. Through individual matching on a set of variables, including leadership situation or community setting and type of job, a total of 37 were chosen to represent the control group. These were 37 individuals from the same communities who intended to participate in the program, but due to various reasons did not enroll in the program. Thus, this control group is similar to the treatment group. As a consequence, it was less likely that the selection biases were present than if an external control group was selected. Thirty-two returned their surveys, which yielded a total sample of 69 out of 111, a 62% response rate.

3.3 Validity of the Study

A key goal of an experimental or quasi-experimental design is to create a situation where the only difference between program participants and non-participants is their participation in the program (Hannum et al., 2006). This is very difficult in today's ever changing environments; however, it is generally achieved in quasi-experiments by measuring or controlling for factors that may be different between participants and non-participants (Rossi et al., 2004). In this study's assurance of validity, the researcher considered several of the potential threats. One was the selection bias issue. Any factor that causes people with certain characteristics to be more likely to participate in the program than people without those characteristics is a threat to internal validity (Langone et al., 1992). Therefore, this study employed individual matching and measured and controlled for the other factors that made the groups differ other than for reasons of the program. In addition to the one-to-one matching, the two groups were evaluated to determine that the participants and the non-participants groups were equivalent concerning their demographic as well as work-related characteristics such as age, race, and job titles.

Another threat to internal validity of the study is history. Evaluations can be compromised when changes in participants' environment occur around the same time as the program and cause participants to change their behavior in ways that might be confused with effects of the program (Hannum et al., 2006). Such events can occur in the internal environment of the organization or in its external environment (Hannum et al., 2006). In this study, the researcher used a control group. Using a control group allowed the researcher to better tease out programmatic effects, because both groups should experience the same events and shifts (Creswell, 2002).

According to Shadish et al. (2002), two methods can be used to help counteract these problems. The first is to ensure that treatment and control groups are as similar as possible before matching. Second, matching variables that are used should be stable and reliable such as gender, age, race, etc. (Shadish et al., 2002). Therefore, statistical tests were used to examine the difference between participants and non-participants of the program concerning the matching variables. Second, a set of matching variables have been used to select a control group that is as similar as possible on the matching variables. These matching variables included age, race, gender, and other variables, which were reliable and stable.

3.4 Instrumentation

This study used the Leadership Practices Inventory self-assessment instrument (LPI-self) to measure five categories of exemplar leadership actions and behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 1987/2002a). A literature review revealed that LPI-self can be used alone to measure the perceptions of participants as opposed to the non-participants in each of the five categories of exemplar leadership actions and behaviors (Shillingford & Lambie, 2010; Strack, Fottler, & Kilpatrick, 2008; Tang, Yin, & Min, 2011; Tang, Yin, & Nelson, 2010). For example, Shillingford & Lambie (2010) studied the relationship between the leadership practices of professional school counselors measured by the LPI-self and their programmatic service delivery. They found that self-perceived leadership behaviors contributed to the service delivery, which in turn supported the training for professional school counselors to improve their leadership skills. The LPI instrument measures five effective leadership practices or competencies, which are defined as follows (LPI online, 2007):

1. Challenge the Process—searching out challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve; experimenting, taking risks, and learning from the accompanying mistakes. An example of items is: "I search outside the formal boundaries of my organization for innovative ways to improve what we do."
2. Inspire a Shared Vision—an uplifting and ennobling future; enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes, and dreams. An example of items is: "I talk about future trends that will influence how our work gets done."
3. Enabling Others to Act—fostering collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust; strengthening people by sharing information and power and increasing their discretion and visibility. An example of items is: "I develop cooperative relationships among the people I work with."
4. Modeling the Way—setting an example by behaving in ways that are consistent with their stated values; planning small "wins" that promote consistent progress and build commitment. An example of items is: "I set a personal example of what I expect of others."
5. Encouraging the Heart—recognizing individual contributions to the success of every project; celebrating team accomplishments regularly. An example of items is: "I praise people for a job well done."

Thirty statements were used to measure these concepts or practices using a ten-point Likert scale. Each statement was ranked from Almost Never (1) to Almost Always (10) with a higher value representing greater use of the leadership practice (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). To determine the participants' leadership practices, the values of the items marked for each statement were totaled. The reliabilities for the LPI are consistently above .60 for the five leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

4.0 Results

Four respondents were dropped due to incomplete or missing values. Table 1 presents the results of the comparison of characteristics between non-participants and participants. Independent t-test was conducted to compare the characteristics concerning their demographic and work-related backgrounds between participants and non-participants. On average, the demographic characteristics as well as the work-related background of participants in this study were not significantly different from the non-participants. The results in Table 1 also showed a significant difference in the five leadership competencies between the participants and non-participants. Figure 1 displays the comparison of posttest scores for the five leadership competencies between participants and non-participants.

The assumptions for the MANCOVA test, including normality, linearity, and homogeneity of covariance, were assessed before the analysis was performed. The examination of the normal P-P plots for each dependent variable indicates that there are no significant deviations from the fitted line; therefore, five leadership practices are normally distributed variables. To test linearity, Pearson Correlation was conducted and Table 2 illustrates the correlation coefficients of the variables. The output suggested that there was a positive correlation between each of the five dependent variables, highly significant at 0.1 percent level. The significance of the correlations signifies linearity among the dependent variables. The assumption of homogeneity of covariance was tested by Levene's test and there are no significant

differences for all dependent variables. Table 3 summarized the results of multivariate and univariate tests. The MANCOVA test results supported the hypothesis that participation in the MSDL program has a significant effect on the development of leadership competencies, Wilks' $\lambda = .79$, F (5, 49) = 2.55, $p < 0.05$. However, the results suggested that no covariates significantly affected the leadership competencies. To determine the effect of participation on each of the dependent variables, the follow-up ANCOVAs were conducted. Significant univariate test effects were found for participation in the MSDL program on *Model the Way* (F (1, 53) = 12.98, $p < 0.01$), *Inspire a Shared Vision* (F (1, 53) = 8.42, $p < 0.01$), *Challenge the Process* (F (1, 53) = 8.89, $p < 0.01$), *Enable Others to Act* (F (1, 53) = 10.31, $p < 0.01$), and *Encourage the Heart* (F (1, 53) = 10.36, $p < 0.01$).

Table 1. *Comparison of Characteristics between Non-participants and Participants*

Variable	Means		t-test for equality of means
	Non-participants	Participants	t values
Dependent variables:			
1. Model the Way	46.10	52.74	-4.054***
2. Inspire the Shared Vision	45.55	49.47	-2.121*
3. Challenge the Process	45.29	51.21	-3.195**
4. Enable Others to Act	47.23	53.35	-3.289**
5. Encourage the Heart	47.32	53.29	-3.237**
Independent variables:			
7. Race (=1 if white)	0.36	0.48	-.827
8. Gender (=1 if male)	0.26	0.32	-.572
9. Age of Respondents	42.19	40.09	.923
10. Bachelor	0.10	0.26	-1.757
11. Graduate	0.48	0.38	.817
12. HigherEd	0.16	0.15	.156
13. K12	0.29	0.38	-.775
14. Government	0.39	0.29	.783
15. Nonprofit	0.13	0.12	.137
16. Length	10.10	8.85	.667

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p < .001. # of non-participants = 31 and # of participants = 34. Race =1 if white; gender =1 if male; bachelor =1 if level of education is bachelor; graduate =1 if level of education is graduate; highered =1 if work in higher education; K12 =1 if work in K-12; government =1 if work in government; nonprofit =1 if work in non-profit; length = length of time on the job in years.

Figure 1. Comparison of Posttest Scores of Leadership Competencies between Participants and Non-participants

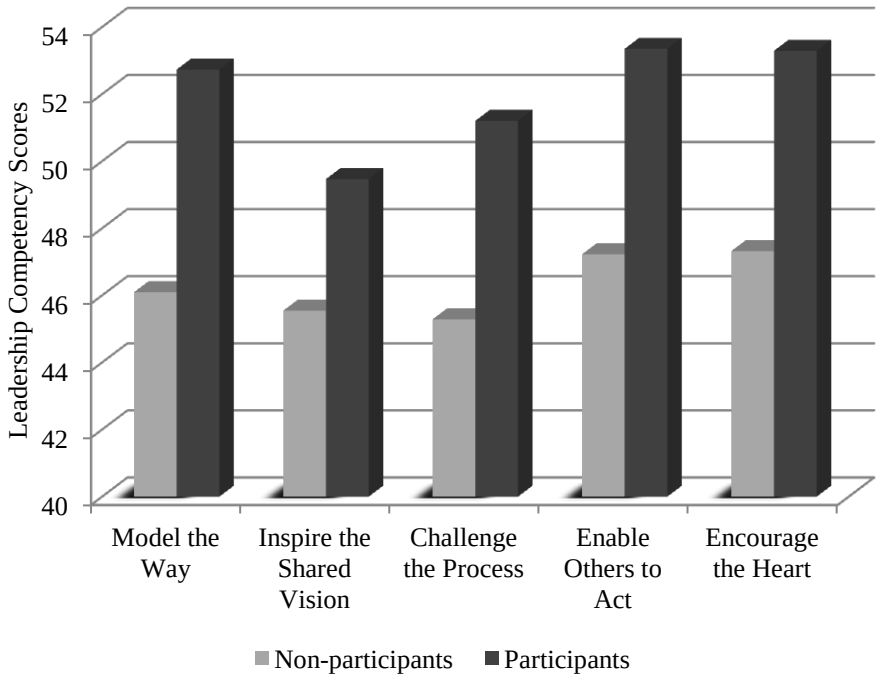

Table 2. *Correlation Coefficients Among Study Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Model the Way	–				
2. Inspire a Shared Vision	.77***	–			
3. Challenge the Process	.70***	.76***	–		
4. Enable Others to Act	.81***	.65***	.73***	–	
5. Encourage the Heart	.84***	.71***	.71***	.87***	–
6. Participation	.46***	.26*	.37**	.38**	.38**

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p < .001. Participation = 1 if respondents are participants.

Table 3. *Results of MANCOVA and ANCOVAs Tests*

Multivariate Test			Univariate Tests								
Variables	Wilks' λ	F	Variables	DV	F	Variables	DV	F	Variables	DV	F
Participation	0.79	2.554*	Participation	MTW	12.98**	Bachelor	MTW	1.24	Government	MTW	0.60
Race	0.87	1.44		ISV	8.42**		ISV	2.40		ISV	0.19
Gender	0.95	0.51		CTP	8.89**		CTP	1.89		CTP	0.40
Age	0.89	1.22		EOA	10.31**		EOA	1.24		EOA	0.06
Bachelor	0.95	0.52		ETH	10.16**		ETH	0.91		ETH	0.02
Graduate	0.90	1.08	Race	MTW	0.38	Graduate	MTW	0.21	Nonprofit	MTW	3.69
HigherEd	0.94	0.65		ISV	2.22		ISV	0.06		ISV	2.90
K12	0.93	0.76		CTP	0.03		CTP	0.02		CTP	0.59
Government	0.94	0.60		EOA	1.09		EOA	0.44		EOA	1.14
Nonprofit	0.86	1.62		ETH	1.90		ETH	0.13		ETH	0.37
Length	0.87	1.41	Gender	MTW	0.55	HigherEd	MTW	0.60	Length	MTW	0.11
				ISV	0.03		ISV	0.43		ISV	0.63
				CTP	0.00		CTP	0.02		CTP	0.87
				EOA	0.10		EOA	0.13		EOA	0.56
				ETH	0.00		ETH	0.02		ETH	1.09
			Age	MTW	0.18	K12	MTW	0.34			
				ISV	0.34		ISV	0.01			
				CTP	1.79		CTP	0.28			
				EOA	0.41		EOA	0.12			
				ETH	1.93		ETH	0.04			

Notes: * p<.05; ** p<.01; Dependent variables in Multivariate Test include the composite scores of Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart.

4.1 Qualitative Perspective

This study also included a qualitative perspective, which added to the strength of the study similar to previous studies of community leadership development programs (Earnest et al., 1995). The researcher asked a sample of respondents from the intervention group an open-ended follow-on question: what specific impacts or changes the program had on them? Specific positive changes were identified by respondents through an evaluation and coding of the qualitative responses to the open-ended question.

Twenty respondents answered one open-ended follow-up question for the purposes of identifying specific impacts of the program from the individuals that completed it. Of the 69 total study respondents, 37 were a part of the intervention group. From this intervention group, twenty responded to the follow-on question. Ten themes emerged from analyzing the responses to the following open-ended question: what specific impacts or changes did the MSDL program have on you? They are listed as the following:

1. Networking/Collaboration across state lines
2. Understanding diversity/cultural differences
3. Relationship building
4. Understanding how leadership affects community change
5. New jobs/promotions
6. Better commnication
7. New outlook/clearer vision for the future
8. All working together towards the same goal
9. Individual growth
10. Understanding local and state roles and interactions in communities

Seventeen out of 20 participants identified a variation of these positive impacts of the program. As the literature documented, there was a great divide between the races in the Mississippi Delta region. This area was plagued by inequalities and injustices. Based on 85% of the participants responding to this question, it can be determined that the MSDL program had an impact on the understanding of cultural and diversity differences. Participant 7 noted, "Everything that we wanted to see happen for the Delta was the same, but everybody was different." Participant 8 stated, "The program broke down some racial barriers and misunderstandings. It helped us to understand that we are all leaders…we may look different…. but seeking to improve our communities."

The number one theme that emerged was networking/collaboration. Twenty out of twenty responded that networking or working together with other class members was a direct result and benefit of the MSDL program. One collaborative effort led to the first ever Mayor's forum in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Several respondents noted that they are now working with other class members on initiating different projects within their communities. They also noted that they now have other resources to tap into as a result of the program because of networking and collaborating. For example, participant 6 said, "I now have a network of people that I can call to help whether it is here in Mississippi or in Arkansas. We built some lasting bonds."

The next strongest theme was the understanding how leadership made an impact on community change. Sixteen out of twenty respondents (80%) contended that they have a much better understanding of how leadership affects community change. For example, participant 18 stated, "Through leadership we got a clear understanding of what needs to happen to stimulate the economy. We didn't have this vision before." Several of the respondents noted that even in their roles as leaders they did not understand how to foster community involvement until after they had gone through the MSDL program. "This program helped leaders understand what leaders do," explained participant 17.

Based on the qualitative findings, 80% of the respondents also noted that they had grown personally and professionally after their involvement in the program, and 50% noted that they had gotten promotions and/or new jobs because of the program. "There is no way I would be in the position that I am in today if it had not been for the values that I learned through MSDL…," according to participant 17. Participant 1 stated, "I benefited personally… I was already a leader, but I learned a lot more about what that [leadership] meant. My organization is better because of it." Seventy-five percent noted that they are better communicators because of the program according to their responses to the open-ended question. "Not only am I a better leader but I know how to encourage and grow other leaders too…encourage them to see the potential and make a change for our communities", noted participant 15. Participant 16 pointed out that the "true impact lies only within the individual person."

In comparing the responses from the 2004 evaluation report, as documented by MSDL (2004), with the 2007 findings of this study, some of the responses are quite identical. It suggests consistency in results over time. In the 2004 evaluation study and this study, the participants documented positive change in self-development and satisfaction, improved leadership abilities, better understanding of cultural diversity, and better awareness of regional issues.

A literature review revealed that that it is important to evaluate leadership over time, and a longitudinal study to measure impacts over time can enhance the validity of the findings. Very recently in 2011, additional qualitative interviews were conducted with these participants from the program. A total of fifteen or more participants replied to an inquiry to collect additional qualitative data. From that fifteen, twelve were interviewed and asked the same question—what specific impacts or changes did the MSDL program have on you? Some of the very same themes emerged:

1. Better jobs/better opportunities
2. Greater self-confidence/individual growth
3. Greater/broader community involvement
4. Networking
5. Broadly thinking/understanding the big picture
6. Relationship building/connectedness
7. Understanding race relations/cultural differences

Even though the prevalent themes remain the same among the respondents, the number one impact changed from the earlier study. In 2007, 100% of the respondents noted that networking and collaborating with class participants was the greatest impact. With the most recent 2011 qualitative findings, 92% of the

respondents noted that they are more involved in community actions, such as serving on boards, providing information for community grants, creating their own programs, and volunteering more for civic activities. Networking and collaboration had the next highest response with 83% of the respondents noting that the networks and relationships that they made continue today where they are still trying to collaborate and work together. Fifty percent of the recent respondents also noted that their own level of confidence and belief in themselves was increased because of the program. For example, respondent #8 of the 2011follow-up noted that:

> "For me, MSDL not only impacted my awareness of my home, but it also taught me a lot about who I am and what my talents are, what I have to give back and how I can make a difference in our state and our southeastern region."

Another 58% noted how much more they learned about their own communities and how this has made them aware of opportunities that they could impact. "Everybody that went through the program wanted to put back in their own communities…" one respondent noted. "[MSDL] made me aware of non-profits… I took it to heart and am now helping [with a non-profit] to provide housing for homeless veterans…" another respondent noted. "Networking across states…still connected with a lot of folks…reconnecting on initiatives we can do for our communities… I think this is still the greatest benefit," another respondent recently noted. Respondent #1 noted that he "learned how to get a government appointment. This gave me confidence to accept a chairman of the board position as well."

As noted earlier in this study, it is the more distal outcomes that are typically the ones of greatest practical and political importance. With these recent findings, it can be inferred that some of the distal outcomes are being described by these respondents. MSDL purported to improve the leadership capacity of its participants, which in turn, would impact their communities. Over 90% of the recent findings support the MSDL's premise. "I wouldn't trade this experience for anything under the sun…the program made me want to do more…" explained one of the recent respondents.

These same themes and variations of them resounded in 100% of the literature reviewed in this study. They are consistent with the findings in a similar evaluation of the MSDL program conducted in 2004 and several other community leadership initiatives that have credited the programs with broadening their perspectives on a range of social issues, helping them develop new skills and competencies, and embedding them in a network of other leaders (Markus, 2001). All of the responses to the open-ended question were positive, which strengthened the quantitative findings in MANCOVA and ANCOVAs tests.

5.0 Conclusions

The overall objective of the MSDL program was to develop a cadre of leaders to address the economic and social changes and challenges of the region (MSDL, 2004). As discussed in the background of this study, parts of the Mississippi Delta region have been known both nationally and internationally as centers of tragedy, extreme levels of poverty, and strained race relations (Woods, 1998). For decades, programs, policies, initiatives, and dollars have been pumped into the areas but little to no change documented. Even the small pockets of success were not enough

to impact the areas. Therefore, the region partnered with state institutions to address these issues differently—through leadership development.

The quantitative results support that the participation in the MSDL program positively affected the five leadership competencies. The qualitative findings suggest that the graduates from the program have a better understanding of cultural and diversity differences and have learned how to work together and network more to deal with these sorts of problems—accomplishing some of the proximal outcomes of the program. Therefore, there is a strong likelihood that they will go on to make change in their communities regarding racial segregation and poverty, high unemployment rates, and poor education systems. With these findings and results, the study adds to this specific theoretical foundation of leadership as well as the knowledge of leadership development practices.

5.1 Recommendations for Future Research

The leadership literature is replete with definitions of leadership, leadership theories, what determines effective leadership, and leadership development programs. However, the field is not replete with evaluations and impact assessments of leadership development programs. "There is a critical demand for guidance in evaluating leadership development by those who practice and fund development" (Hannum et al., 2006, p. 12). The goal of leadership development evaluation is to advance the practice of leadership development and support so that it can more effectively affect change that will have a positive impact on society and the world (Hannum, et al., 2006). Therefore, it is important to further the study of impact assessments and evaluations on leadership development programs.

This study could be furthered in several different directions that would continuously add to the body of knowledge in leadership. For example, this study employed a post-test only design. The most effective approach in measuring the specific development of leadership would have been to do a pre-test/post-test design to determine if there were significant differences in the leadership scores before the intervention and then after it. This study only employed the self-assessment. It could be furthered to include the assessments of the leaders by their peers and/or followers. This would minimize the biases in self-assessment only scores. Additionally, health and preparedness in the Mississippi Delta directly impact the economics of the region; however, these themes were not included in this study because of the specific goals of the MSDL program. Therefore, furthering the study focusing on these additional themes would add depth to the study.

What is most significant about this study for organizational leaders, like the community leaders of the MSDL program, is that they develop and implement programs with measurable outcomes. Whether they are leadership development, program initiatives for affecting change, new policies, or the like, organizational leaders need to measure their intended outcomes—create metrics for success. With these metrics, organizational leaders can determine if they are meeting, exceeding, or failing their goals. Leadership is about continuous change (Maxwell, 2000). In order to continually evolve an organization, organizational leaders need to have an assessment of what needs to change, how it needs to change, and what needs to stay the same. This study will help organizational leaders determine the effectiveness of their leadership, which in turn, determines the effectiveness of their organizations.

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