

**Exploring Leadership Identity: Student Reflections After the Insights Discovery©
Assessment**

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Introduction/Need for Research

Previous research describes how collegiate leadership development programs play a significant role in the leadership and personal development of undergraduate students (Eich, 2008). Clear communication, relationship building, and collaboration are among the most important skills and competencies needed in the workforce (Crawford & Fink, 2020). The Matador Institute of Leadership Engagement (MILE) is a three-semester, competitive leadership, and professional development program in the Davis College of Agriculture at Texas Tech University that seeks to instill these qualities in its student members through workshops, professional development activities, industry networking, hands-on agricultural tours, and legislative trips. At the beginning of each 14-student cohort, MILE members complete the Insights Discovery© psychometric assessment, which extensively examines each student's strengths, weaknesses, and communication styles. The report produced from this assessment sorts each student into four color-coded communication categories. To illustrate the communication styles present in the cohort, a graph is comparing the students' personalities. Students in MILE also enroll in a course during each of the program's three semesters. Through the course, students are required to write reflections about their experiences and personal development. Research describes reflective writing as an opportunity for students to interpret their experiences and utilize their own thoughts to learn (Badley, 2009). This poster describes student reflections written following a professional development workshop analyzing each student's Insights Discovery© profiles.

Theoretical Framework

The Leadership Identity Development Theory (LID) served as the theoretical framework of this study. LID suggests leadership is purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical, and process-oriented (Komives et al., 2009). This grounded theory is based on research regarding college students and suggests the following five categories influence the development of leadership identity: broadening view of leadership, developing self, group influences, developmental influences, and the changing view of self with others (Komives et al., 2006). This study focuses on "the developing self and changing view of self with others" categories.

Methodology

This study sought to assess students' written reflections following the Insights Discovery© assessments. Fourteen undergraduate students participated in a professional development workshop three weeks after completing the assessment to dissect the intricacies of their reports with their fellow [Program] members. Following the workshop, students were asked to reflect on their experience by answering the following questions: 1) How do you plan to implement what you learned about your leadership and communication styles going forward; 2) Did anything in your profile surprise you; and 3) What did you learn about your other cohort classmates during this process? A thematic analysis was conducted to determine overarching themes from the students' responses. More specifically, the researcher completed the six steps of a systematic thematic analysis: data familiarization; keyword identification; code selection; theme development; conceptualization through interpretation of keywords, codes, and themes; and the development of a conceptual model (Naeem et al., 2023). These student reflections were submitted as coursework associated with the program. All identifying factors were removed from the reflections before coding was conducted. Student reflections were coded and analyzed using open coding (Creswell, 1998).

Results/Findings

There were three themes discovered through the thematic analysis of the students' reflections. Students mentioned reflecting on their Insights Discovery© profiles improved their interpersonal communication and collaboration with their cohort. One student wrote, "I know how to communicate more effectively and be more understanding toward others." Students also described their *increased self-awareness* throughout their reflections. One student expressed, "Moving forward, I believe I could greatly benefit from being more empathetic to those who enjoy moving slowly with a lot of details while also building on my strengths." Students also explained how this experience *enhanced their personal growth*. This student stated, "I will take my profile and use it to better myself and learn new ways that I can execute projects and deadlines more effectively." Another wrote, "I've already been able to use my insights profile in an interview as well as my new job. It has been extremely beneficial to be able to express my strengths and weaknesses, while also explaining how to best use them." Overall, students developed a greater understanding of their communication styles and personalities. Furthermore, students acquired a deeper appreciation for understanding their peers' strengths, weaknesses, communication styles, and personalities.

Conclusions

Collegiate leadership development programs should consider implementing reflections after professional development assessments in their workshops, training, or curricula to foster relationship-building amongst their members. Moreover, this will promote effective interpersonal communication between members, improve their self-awareness and self-efficacy, and enhance their personal growth. Universities are tasked with providing students with opportunities to grow specific leadership and personal competencies (Easterly III et al., 2017). Moreover, college-aged students' attitudes, interests, values, and character development may require honing before entering the workforce (Baughman et al., 2012). Leadership and professional development assessments coupled with student reflection are effective in developing leadership identity, promoting self-awareness and career preparation.

Implications/Recommendations/Impact

Fostering interpersonal communication and relationships through self-evaluation and personal growth opportunities is necessary to create a more cohesive and understanding group of individuals. Educators in agricultural education, communications, and leadership should implement self-evaluation tools and reflection in the programs and classes they oversee. Future research should be conducted to determine if other self-assessments have the same group and individual outcomes as the Insights Discovery assessment on members of collegiate leadership development programs. Researchers should consider the small size of the sample when utilizing this data in future studies. As a result, further research should be conducted to determine if the themes are consistent across a larger group of students. An implication of this study is the cost of the Insights Discovery Assessment©, which is \$125 per student; however, a private industry partner of the [Program] funded the assessments. Regardless of the assessment, reflection or participation in a follow-up workshop is integral for student leadership development.

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