

## The Hidden Leaders: Utilizing the Social Change Model to Engage All Members of an Organization

Colleen Grosch  
University of South Carolina  
[Colleen.grosch@gmail.com](mailto:Colleen.grosch@gmail.com)

Bolman and Deal's (1991) structural framework identifies leadership as a form of hierarchy. In any given organization the president, executive board members, and officers are the leaders at the top of the organizational chart while the rest of the members report to these leaders and are housed at bottom of the organizational chart. One of the disadvantages of such hierarchical approaches to leadership is that the leaders at the top can lose touch with the majority of the organization that is at the bottom of the chart. This is not beneficial for the growth of the group or the individual members.

In contrast, the social change model of leadership embraces transformational leadership and encourages leadership development at every level of the organization. This leadership model works to dispel the myths that a follower is not a leader and cannot lead (Astin, Astin, and Associates, 2001). The social change model is an inclusive model of leadership development. This model "is designed to enhance the development of leadership qualities in all participants...and to promote a process that is inclusive and actively engages all who wish to contribute" (Astin et al., p.18).

The two primary goals of the model are to enhance student learning and development by developing greater self-knowledge and leadership competence, and to create a positive change in the community or at the institution (Astin et al, 2001). The purpose of this paper is to advocate that higher education institutions adopt the social change model as the theoretical infrastructure of their student leadership development initiatives. Adopting the social change model will ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn and develop leadership skills in college which will in the end benefit both students and society.

### **Hidden Leaders**

In almost all groups there are formal leaders that often serve as the "face" of the organizations, but equally important, yet often overlooked, are the hidden leaders. Some professionals may refer to these members as invisible leaders, while others may view them as apathetic because they have not chosen to pursue more prominent formal leadership roles within an organization. No matter how these students are viewed, they are all still deserving of, and will benefit from, training in the social change model of leadership. After all, the hidden leaders are the glue that holds student groups together. The largest group of people within an organization is the general membership itself, not the formal leaders. Just as a chorus completes a musical, or the extras in a movie provide a realistic perspective, the general body of an organization allows student groups to prosper and grow. These hidden leaders maintain the shared values and goals of the organizations, and in turn, strengthen groups from the ground up.

The hidden leaders of organizations are typically not unmotivated; rather they may simply be lacking the knowledge of how to be a more prominent leader or the encouragement to take on more visible leadership roles. The value of the hidden leader often goes unnoticed because the traditional leaders are in the spotlight. However, the value of the hidden leaders should be highlighted and leadership development for them should be encouraged.

As *Leadership Reconsidered* (2001) mentions, leadership development is important and useful because it can enrich the undergraduate experience, empower students, and give students a greater sense of control over their lives. In providing leadership training only to people in formal leadership positions, the majority of the members of the organization miss out on opportunities to become better leaders. This training would not only better serve the organizations that they belong to, it would also be beneficial to these members in terms of their own personal and professional development. Leadership development and training opportunities should be open to all members of an organization and all members should be applauded and praised for their contributions to the overall success and improvement of the organization.

### **Social Change Model**

In focusing on a leadership development model that strengthens leadership in individuals, groups, and communities, the social change model promotes development in an inclusive and engaging environment – an environment that does, in turn, aid in student success. The social change model also aids in accomplishing higher education’s mission of educating and producing informed citizens. Several institutions, including [Central Michigan University](#), [University of Louisville](#), and [Loyola Marymount University](#), have adopted the social change model, and in doing so have included and provided an outlet of development for all students.

The social change model of leadership acts as an inclusive leadership development model. Whereas some leadership development models view leadership as positional, this model sees leadership as a process – it is ever-evolving and continually advancing. This model promotes several values – equity, social justice, self-knowledge, personal empowerment, citizenship, and service (HERI, 1996).

The model has seven critical values that examine leadership development from three levels – the individual, the group, the community. The individual values include consciousness of self (self-aware of what motivates one to take action), congruency (actions are consistent with beliefs), and commitment (motivates service, drives collective effort). The group values include collaboration (working with others in a common effort), common purpose (working with shared values), and controversy with civility (differences are inevitable, yet should be shared). The community value is citizenship (working for a positive change on behalf of others).

When advisors, visible leaders, and hidden leaders of an organization collaborate and realize the importance of all members, the personal success of each member will be greatly enhanced. Members will gain what is highlighted in the social change model as *leadership competence*, which is the capacity to mobilize oneself and others to serve and to work collaboratively. These emerging leaders will begin to understand their importance, their individual values, and the importance of every leader within the organization.

The advantages of the social change model are numerous. Astin's (1984) theory of Student Involvement supports the social change model in that each student is involved and invested in their organization or a cause that is important to them. The involvement of each member of an organization helps their personal growth as a collegiate and sets the foundation for success after they graduate. Success in an organization whether as a visible or hidden leader will encourage leadership as a graduate, whether in family or in business (Astin, et al, 2001).

This model also enhances the development of student organizations. If a focus is made on the values in the social change model, the organizational dynamic will strengthen and individual leadership qualities will prosper. Using the social change model as the theoretical infrastructure for student leadership programs will ensure that all student leaders – hidden and visible – will have the opportunity to develop leadership skills.

### **References**

- Astin, A. W., & Astin, H. S. and Associates (2001). *Leadership reconsidered: Engaging higher education in social change*. Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation.
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 287-308.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1991). *Reframing Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- HERI. (1996). *Collaborative leadership for social change – Guidebook (Version III)*. Los Angeles: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute.