**SLO 1: Reflection Paper**

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The application of different organizational leadership theories, models and approaches in my current workplace have been both beneficial and challenging, depending on the specific task my team is assigned with accomplishing. It should be mentioned that my workplace changed significantly from the start of my program in Spring 2023. Two years ago, my workplace consisted of being assigned to an elite special operations Army aviation unit. The demographics of service members in this unit varied greatly. Experience levels fluctuated between junior Soldiers with less than twenty-four months of service, most of which had mainly been spent in initial training environments, all the way up to senior leaders with decades worth of experience, thousands of flight hours and a phenomenal understanding of leadership in the Army. Regardless the experience level, the beauty of this unit is that the mission was “no fail” and there was minimal micromanaging from senior leaders. The trust in others to do their job made it easy to be less involved in picking up the pieces where others fell short and allowed members to focus on executing their job requirements to their fullest extent. In fact, members of this unit were consistently being assessed and if they were unable to accomplish their tasks, they were swiftly reassigned to another organization. During my time with this unit, the opportunity presented itself to apply for an Army program that allowed me to stay on Active-Duty status, while simultaneously completing my graduate degree, participating in Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) classes and being a full-time college student. This program would become my new workplace for no more than twenty-one months. The change in pace, peer relations and expectations and required mission set significantly changed the leadership approaches I had to exercise to be successful while enrolled in the ROTC program.

Early into my Organizational Leadership program, one course required me to take three different assessments on leader behaviors and styles, in order to better identify areas that I could work on to become a more effective leader. These three assessments included the Student Leadership Practice Inventory ® (SLPI), the CliftonStrengths assessment and the Jung Typology assessment. These assessments measured various styles of approaches and applications that the test taker could then use to better align with effective practices found in *The Leadership Challenge* (6th Edition) by James Kouzes and Barry Posner. The idea behind Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership is that it sets a roadmap for developing effective behaviors in leaders, across individuals, teams and organizations (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 23). Prior to understanding the different leadership approaches, my initial SLPI assessment revealed that my top leadership behaviors were taking initiative, setting personal examples, challenging skills and abilities, praising people and following through on promises. Trailing closely behind were my five bottom leadership behaviors that needed improvement; fostering cooperative relationships, talking about how the future could be better, supporting others’ decisions, providing leadership opportunities for others and seeking feedback about the impact of actions. While at the time I didn’t think I could develop new ways to approach tasks from the perspective of the results of my leadership analysis, it wasn’t until I had started my new “career” as a full-time student within the WKU ROTC program that I found I could implement these improvements. Using the SLPI results, along with my top five CliftonStrengths results of context, restorative, input, responsibility and relator, I was able to fine tune my personal and professional approaches and see the results unfold in real time in my new role.

A later course that was required by my program emphasized the study of leading organizations. This course introduced concepts that provided me with opportunities to apply personal leadership attributes to a larger group dynamic and addressed ways of operating organizations with effective results by focusing on four specific frames. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, authors of the book *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (7th Edition), explained how organizations can be improved by organizing intents and goals into four frames; the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame and the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 20). By gaining an understanding of how these frames better organized goals and outcomes within an organization, I was able to exert streamlined effort into appropriate matters within my organization. This new understanding of organization framing, coupled with my individual leadership assessments, ended up helping me significantly in my role as a cadet leader within the WKU ROTC program.

My approach in leading others in the ROTC program required a rather foreign approach than what I had used in my previous workplace. I had to understand that my new, college- aged peers were less experienced when it came to issues in life, in the military, and that they were not required to fall into order like junior Soldiers I had previously led in my prior unit. This posed a challenge because I was limited in imposing consequences if tasks were not accomplished. I found that a transformational leadership approach would be the best fit for leading while in the ROTC program because it allowed me to use my previous, real life military experience to reinstate the importance of meeting certain benchmarks required by ROTC program and later in the Army. In fact, *The Heart of Coaching: Using Transformational Coaching to Create a High-Performance Coaching Culture* (4th Edition), put emphasis on the Transformational Coaching Process. This process put forth useful guidelines that meshed extremely well with my personal leadership traits that were highlighted in my initial leadership course. By pairing my experience with the Transformational Coaching Process’ desires for leadership roles (coach, facilitator, servant, role model, visionary), I found fulfillment in leading others with less experience, as well witnessed a significant culture change in how others around me led (Crane & Patrick, 2017, p. 18). I quickly saw how my actions were emulated by others as fellow peers appeared to be inspired to re-create the emphasis I put on other’s achievements, peers were quicker to be proactive instead of reactive in completing taskings, and everyone was getting better at being humbled and okay with laughing at their mistakes. Once I had set the tone as a classmate who was willing to operate like a cadet within the same capacity of my peers, my decade and a half worth of experience appeared to have become more meaningful and respected by those in my “year group”. It started to surface that I had significantly influenced my peers’ development when it came to achieving results and remaining calm in emergent situations. Over the course of two semesters and by continually exercising this transformational leadership approach, I found that our program’s overall climate became more conducive to producing effective leaders within the ROTC program.

Currently as Military Science Level IVs (MS4s), many of us are set to graduate and be commissioned as Army officers in less than fourteen weeks. As of the start of this semester, I was assigned by our Professor of Military Science (PMS) to be the Battalion Executive Officer (XO). In this role, I am the liaison between the cadets in our program and the cadre of the Military Science Department. While I was initially less than thrilled about this additional responsibility in ROTC, I found that my fourteen years of military experience has provided unwaivable influence and leverage in the process of onboarding freshman and sophomore cadets. I believe these specific students to be the most influential because they are not obligated to attend ROTC engagements outside of normal class hours, as ROTC for them is an elective. At the same time, these students have the potential to contract into the United States Army, and post-graduation, become Army Officers. The intent of involving the underclassmen with the senior cadets is to inspire them to become the next generation of military leaders. I have found that in my new role I gravitate towards teaching and participating in activities with these younger cadets. The level of influence that I have over them, compared to the older cadets seems to be more impactful and at times I find myself able to communicate with them easier as I see them as junior Soldiers, like “privates” in service. I have found that for a long time, the culture of our program revolved around the notion that cadets should just do something because they are told to do it, rather than being provided clear or creative guidance on why they should do something. I found that utilizing the concept of creativity in our organization resonates much better with the younger demographic. Using Daniel Levi’s *Group Dynamic for Teams* (5th Edition), I was able to adjust my desire for cadet success based on organizational environment and creativity. Levi’s book emphasizes the importance of creativity and how organizations seek innovative (Levi, 2017, p. 246). I exercised this approach by implementing different creative avenues throughout physical training, military lab training and end of semester events. While the problems that these creative solutions solved weren’t explicitly identified by cadre, peers or the ROTC program itself, the execution and success of changing the approach to different requirements in our program allowed for the entire cadet body to retain knowledge and achieve goals much more consistently.

**Artifacts collected to support this SLO:**

* Branch Night Pictures & Underclassmen Recognition
* Cadet Summer Training (CST) Bold Leader Warrior Spirit Award
* WKU ROTC Wassom Award
* Lab After Action Reviews (AARs)
* WKU ROTC Training Meeting Notes
* LEAD 500 (SLPI Guided Leader Behavior Reflection)
* LEAD 500 (Critical Book Review of *The Heart Led Leader*)

**References**

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2021). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (7th ed.). Jossey-Bass, a John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Imprint.

Crane, T., & Patrick, L. (2017). *The heart of coaching: Using transformational coaching to create a high-performance coaching culture* (4th ed.). FTA Press.

Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (2017). *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations* (6th ed.). Wiley.

Levi, D. (2017). *Group dynamics for teams* (5th ed.). SAGE.