

**LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: BUSINESS-MANAGEMENT  
VERSUS VISIONARY-SERVANT**

by

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A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Educational Leadership

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December, 2021

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*Qualified Signature	✓	Yes		No		Literature Review		Case Study	✓	Empirical Study
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## **Scholarly Delivery Framework**

The research focus of these scholarly deliverables is on leadership, specifically visionary-servant leadership, with deans at Hispanic-serving institutions of post-secondary education as my primary subjects and the beliefs, biases, and ethics that influence leaders' decisions regarding change. The first scholarly deliverable is a disguised case study article that can be used for teaching doctoral or master's candidates in the field of educational leadership. The title of this article is "Top-Up Leadership: A Variant Model of Servant Leadership." The case represents the unfamiliarity of many people with servant leadership approaches and the difficulties that can arise for these new leaders. The final scholarly deliverable is an empirical article. The title is "Leadership in Higher Education: Business-Management versus Visionary-Servant." The mixed-methods study is about describing the self-reported preferences of undergraduate students at one Hispanic-serving institution in the United States regarding leadership in higher education through a dichotomous set of qualities that represent each approach. The study continues by interviewing educational leadership doctoral students from the same university about the possible reasons for these preferences. Combined, these studies support a greater focus on visionary-servant leadership instruction, especially in education disciplines, as this model is preferred by contemporary undergraduate students (Mean = 70.97%). These results are reinforced by the insights of educational administrators completing their three-year EdD program who see this as a generational preference for leaders who are approachable, supportive, and have a strong vision of success for all stakeholders.



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS**  
**Letter of Approval**

April 1, 2021

Mr. Sosa:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #2021.03.014 for your study titled, “BML vs. VSL,” meets the requirements of the WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Human Subject Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on **March 31, 2022**.

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A [Continuing Review form](#) along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a [Close out form](#) must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR](#), unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR](#), potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an [Amendment form](#) to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.
8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format:  
WTAMU IRB##-##-## Approved: ####/####/#### Expiration Date: ####/####/####.

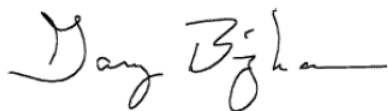
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if applicable to the research being proposed. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.

Sixty days prior to the expiration of this proposal, you will receive a notification of the approaching expiration date at which time you will need to submit an [Amendment/Continuation/Close out](#) form.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gary Bigham  
Chair, WTAMU IRB



Dr. Angela Spaulding  
Vice President of Research and Compliance

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge several people for their help and support in getting me here:

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### My Clan

Thanks to all of those who have impacted my life, near and far, past and present. Through you, I have learned about myself as well as my potential. Whether these were interactions of encouragement or pointing out where I could do better, you have helped me become a better person and I am grateful.

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## **Top-Up Leadership: A Variant Model of Servant Leadership**

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## **Abstract**

At a university in the United States, a new grant-funded project and its founding team were experiencing disruptive internal relations. Engaging in covert and disparaging communication, cliques had become disorderly and garnered the disapproval of Deans' Council. The project's emerging leader called for an emergency meeting to clarify his brand of servant leadership and the responsibilities that everyone had to the project and each other. The narrative describes his perceptions, decision-making processes, and delivery of a leadership model that turns standard models upside-down. This disguised case study intends to provide aspiring leaders a glimpse into issues they may experience working with people who are accustomed to top-down leadership environments.

*Keywords:* servant leadership model, decision-making, beliefs, values, ethics, team dynamics

## **Top-Up Leadership: A Variant Model of Servant Leadership**

Leadership, a social-relational concept, studied since the time of Aristotle, and educational leadership has been heavily theorized and researched for the last one hundred years (Gumus et al., 2016; Wang, 2018). The industrial age of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century brought with it a common belief that applying a business-management model to educational administration and decision-making processes would be a benefit to these institutions and the people they serve, but research indicates that this may not be the case (Bastedo, 2009; Seale & Cross, 2017; Shek et al., 2015). In their review of literature on school governance, Bush and Glover (2014) argued that leadership has overshadowed management in recent decades and that successful leaders focus on learning, theory, practice, and accountability. Research on democratically accountable leadership proposed that combining these seemingly opposed concepts reduces feelings of inequality among members of a team while strengthening harmony and social justice (Mullen et al., 2008). They also found that merging these concepts was difficult for the students in their study. Fortunately, there may be a model of leadership that can accomplish this task.

Shek et al. (2015) focused their study on servant leadership, a concept that ties leadership to the ethics of social interaction such as care, fairness, and respect. They believed that aligning one's leadership style with the moral imperative of serving others is essential for reclaiming an ethical compass in the modern age. Trastek et al. (2014) explored this concept within the health care industry. They found a pragmatic potential to applying a servant leadership style that increased the quality of health care for patients, and at the same time, decreased its associated costs. These authors concluded that servant leadership is the best model for an industry of people caring for other people. Higher

education should be no different because teaching is the practice of people caring for and nurturing the educational and socioeconomic potential of other people (Catacutan & Guzman, 2015; Shek et al., 2015).

In a meta-analysis of theories related to educational leadership, Wang (2018) concluded that the presence of social justice theories has grown in recent years, and the research is still evolving. Unfortunately, servant leadership is not a widely researched area in the educational environment (Gumus et al., 2016). In their review and analysis of thirty-five years of educational research in the area of leadership models, Gumus and colleagues found that servant leadership ranked last in research foci from 709 empirical articles. This lack of attention may be why the post-secondary education system still holds to the top-down business model of administration, or it could be something else. Locke and Guglielmino (2006) characterized higher education institutions as resistant to change because of their distinct culture. They found that administrators and staff are different subcultures in the educational system and that misunderstandings lead to less effective service. A study by Birel (2019) stated that the climate of a university was of particular concern to ethical leadership behaviors, and another study (Kiley, 2019) listed three strategies to combat poor leadership: transparency, promoting positive cultures, and support.

Looking back at applying a business model to the higher education environment, Smith-Daniels and Smith-Daniels (2008) found that teams that successfully balanced their attention while making decisions realized higher returns than those that did not. They also discovered that most business-minded teams in their study did not incorporate a balanced-attention approach when it came to time, cost, and the performance of the

entire team. Providing an educational service should mean that college and university leadership acknowledge service as their primary goal (Shek et al., 2015) and balance their attention by tending to the needs and supporting the aspirations of their staff and faculty, those who work on the frontlines serving and supporting post-secondary education students (Locke & Guglielmino, 2006).

These issues – a pervasive business-model approach to educational administration, a lack of information about servant leadership, subculture differences, and unbalanced attention – are compounded for emerging leaders who are stepping into their new role. Fortunately, there are various techniques and practices to make use of in their decision-making activities. Eriksen (2009) discovered that the learning-curve developing leaders' experience might be attenuated by an in-depth values assessment and contemplation about their beliefs and how these internal principles influence decision-making. Participants in Eriksen's study found relevance and meaning in an exercise that developed their reflexivity and self-authorship skills. Cho et al. (2016) and Wieth and Zacks (2011) upheld that leaders become aware of their chronotype, a person's circadian rhythm for sleep and productivity, and its related optimal time-of-day for making decisions. For many, analytical problems should be handled in the morning, while moments of insight happen in the afternoon or evening. Researchers have also encouraged mastery of leadership skills through consideration of the moral/ethical nature of a dilemma (Catacutan & Guzman, 2015; Green & Walker, 2009; Myers, 2015), gender's influence on perceived authenticity (Tibbs et al., 2016), and mixed-methods approaches (Bush & Glover, 2014).

The following disguised case study will explore the perceptions, thought processes, and use of theory of one such emerging leader as he began his journey as the team leader of a new grant-funded program at a recently designated Hispanic-serving institution of post-secondary education. This narrative will illustrate his decision-making process regarding his role as project leader, dealing with a volatile situation that has arisen within the team, and the responsibilities the group members have to one another. Educational leaders may find this portrayal familiar and encouraging as they experience their own challenging yet navigable leadership scenarios.

### **Setting**

The events that follow occurred at a regional university in the United States. As with many communities in this area of the country, the surrounding populace was experiencing a shift in demographics that showed evidence of a growing Hispanic population. With this increase, the institution was undergoing a similar influx in its Hispanic student enrollment with many of these young adults being first-generation college students who also come from low socioeconomic neighborhoods (barrios). This surge in Hispanic student enrollment qualified the University for Designation as a Hispanic-serving institution and Title III funding from the United States Department of Education, but some on the university's grant-writing team worried that the demographics of the school's leadership might hinder the success of such a substantial and significant grant.

The institution's student population, faculty, and administration were still predominantly Caucasian. Female faculty members outnumbered their male counterparts, but men still held more leadership positions. The grant writers believed that the culture of

higher education has not been especially accommodating to the cultural backgrounds of Hispanics and other minorities. Additionally, gender differences in perceived leadership effectiveness were considered when selecting grant staff. Add to this the fact that all of these issues were present at this institution, along with having a team of new hires from various backgrounds with divergent personalities, and the situation was ripe for complications.

### **Case Narrative**

The end of the fall 2016 semester held a monumental transition in the life of Mr. Wolf. He had just completed a Master of Arts degree in Psychology at a regional university in the southwest United States. This nontraditional, Mestizo (culturally “mixed” First Nations Pueblo and Hispanic), family man had worked in the construction, financial, and information technology industries, raising three biological children and three foster children before deciding to pursue higher education. During his master’s program, he served as a graduate assistant for two and a half years on a grant-funded research project and was offered a full-time position running a new Title III grant. The project created a group of academic success coaches to help inexperienced first- and second-year students acclimate to college life. Each of five discipline-specific colleges would have their own coach, and Mr. Wolf would serve as the project manager and team leader.

The team consisted of a Hispanic male with an MBA (Mr. Gomez) and four white females – one with a Biology MS (Mrs. Cole), one pursuing an MBA (Ms. Green), one with 17 years of experience in higher education (Mrs. Knowles), and one with a Communication BA (Mrs. Ford). As they each served and were directly supervised by the



dean of their respective colleges, Mr. Wolf was not their boss, simply their grant team leader, and he had no intention of overstepping into that role. His perception of operating as this team's leader, one of service and support, stemmed from his wide-ranging background and mixed culture. This was unfamiliar to most of the members on this newfound team. As they tried to understand their roles and responsibilities, some were growing discontent with his passive leadership style, and subversive communication began to circulate. Mr. Gomez, a friendly and familiar voice in the group, confided that some of their teammates had commented that Mr. Wolf lacked any real leadership skills, while others complained that his requests for activity reports made him seem like a micromanager. As discord grew, meetings became chaotic with members vying to speak over one another and take control of the meeting agenda, the group's activities, and the project's objectives. Mr. Wolf's supervisor, the Vice President of Research, was made aware of the issues and Deans' Council now requested and required him to address the problem directly. Could he possibly lose his position over this situation?

Mr. Wolf felt disheartened and took several days to contemplate his previous behaviors, the group's dynamics, and possible actions to resolve the perceived problem with his leadership. He disagreed with applying a top-down managerial approach to leading this team; management is meant for the project, not his new colleagues. He wanted the team to be democratic, but Mr. Wolf also feared that he was faced with bearing the accountability of the entire team as any failures would be attributed to him. He thought about how Mr. Gomez had provided friendly support and encouragement while keeping him apprised of the secret dialogs. He wondered, "Why do the others, especially Mrs. Ford, seem determined to replace him? Was it just because of the

complaints that he was aware of or could it be something else?” He tried not to think that the growing problems were due to his gender or ethnicity, because that would be too distressing. Having grown up in the barrio, Mr. Wolf had plenty of experience in feeling discriminated against because of perceptions that he was poor and uneducated, in other words, not of proper cultivation and standing. He knew he had to step away from this type of defeatist thinking.

Mr. Wolf spent the next morning reviewing the approved grant proposal documentation. In his mind, he could see the hierarchy laid out in the grant documentation, which placed him in a management position but without any supervisory authority over the other team members. Mr. Wolf considered confronting the dissidents by discussing all of the information that Mr. Gomez had shared with him, but that meant exposing his confidant and he believed that course of action had a high probability of creating more problems for him to contend with all on his own. He thought about asking the deans to join in on the discussion, but that would certainly undercut his authority as team leader. He even contemplated changing his leadership approach, but no other theoretical paradigm felt right to him. That evening, in a moment of insight, he remembered a group discussion with the pastor from his church in which a model of leadership was discussed, dissected, and redelivered with a twist. This was it; this was how Mr. Wolf decided to address the group’s misunderstandings. The next day, he sent an email to request an emergency meeting with only one item on the agenda: Leadership.

### **The Meeting**

The team assembled in the elegant Graduate Suite on the university’s campus. It was evident by looking around the room that Mr. Gomez and Mrs. Cole were interested

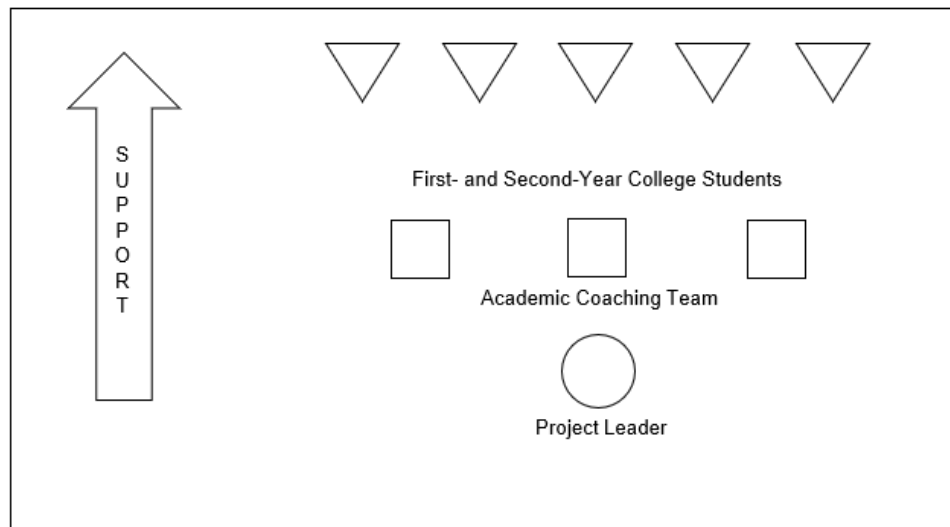
in what the meeting would reveal while the others seemed mostly annoyed at having their day interrupted for another meeting that would probably end in confusion, chaos, and contempt. Mr. Wolf sat at the head of the table with only one blank sheet of paper and a pencil. He addressed the team, “I am aware that many of you may not understand my role on this team and our responsibilities to each other, so I wanted to take a moment to try to help clarify the matter.” He continued, “I am this team’s leader, but I am not your supervisor. This puts me in a precarious position. I am not here to tell you how to do your jobs and micromanage you,” throwing up quote fingers to signify that he was aware of the negative comments. He continued, “I need your cooperation with turning in activity reports for us to remain compliant and accountable to our program officer. Without it, the university could lose a two-million-dollar grant and you could all lose your jobs. Also, I am not going anywhere; I was hand-picked for this job and took it because I believe in the work we are doing.” With this, the unfriendly faces worn by Mrs. Knowles and Mrs. Ford became contemptuous glares of anger. Mr. Wolf thought, “Do these two want me gone that badly?” He looked over at Ms. Cole, whose expression had changed from confusion to something akin to shame. Mr. Gomez nodded with approval, and Ms. Green joined in showing interest.

Mr. Wolf then took his sheet of paper and began drawing – a circle at the top, three squares in the middle, and five triangles across the bottom all aligned in a pyramid-type chart. He held it up for all to see and said, “This represents a standard hierarchy of leadership. The leader is at the top, managers are in the middle, and workers are at the bottom. Most of the time, the leader has the vision and tells the managers what is wanted. Then the managers figure out how to implement the vision and assign workers to do the

jobs. This is a top-down leadership style and it is not who I am.” While the angry faces softened, they still carried an element of dissonance. He went on, “My style is servant leadership.” At this, he turned the pyramid upside-down (see Figure 1). “I see myself in the circle at the bottom. I am here to support each of you in the work you want to do for your students,” Mr. Wolf said, pointing at the squares and pushing his finger up to the triangles. He concluded, “I just wanted to show you this and say that I support you in reaching your objectives, so in turn, you can support your students in achieving academic success. This is why I may seem passive in my leadership. It is because I do not want to direct you; I only want to help you achieve your goals and the goals of your colleges.”

With this, Mr. Wolf saw the demeanor of the group change. Mr. Gomez chimed in, “Well said! Thank you for supporting us. I really think that this team will do great things together.”

*Figure 1. A Diagram of Servant Leadership.*



*Note:* This figure illustrates how the inverted-pyramid model of servant leadership support flows upward to lower levels of a standard leadership hierarchy.

## Teaching Notes

Leadership and decision-making processes can be challenging at times. As this construct is social-relational in nature, it evolves as society changes, and as with any transformation, some individuals resist these changes. The difficulties leaders experience, especially emerging leaders, could be compounded by factors beyond their control. Occasionally, these factors may include a focus on traditional approaches that often sustain inequality (Seale & Cross, 2017), a lack of widely-accepted nascent research (Gumus et al., 2016; Wang, 2018), cultural differences (Locke & Guglielmino, 2006), the moral seduction of self-interests (Bastedo, 2009), as well as ethical challenges (Shek et al., 2015). There is hope, though. In a landmark study by Neumann (1990), it was argued that schemas, or preconceptions, may aid perception and promote understanding and efficient action, but they may also be flawed due to inaccuracy, outdated applicability, or missing information. Although these deep beliefs and modes of conduct may be extremely resistant to change, “change can occur if a person encounters plentiful, clear, and particularly meaningful information that contrasts with a long-established schema” (p. 401).

Servant leadership is not a new concept; Greenleaf (2002) originally wrote about the concept in the 1970s. This work was later succinctly characterized as follows:

Servant leadership is serving the highest needs of others in an effort to help others achieve their goals. Servant leadership focuses on the leader’s development through awareness and self-knowledge. Self-reflection and awareness enable a leader to understand his or her purpose, beliefs, and individual characteristics. This process of reflection leads to moral insights

that develop one's personal conscience as well as core ethical and moral beliefs. (Trastek et al., 2014, p. 379)

The servant-leader carefully considers the impacts of their actions on those who are the least privileged in society, and these internalized virtues are expressed in their skills, behaviors, and interactions. The characteristics of servant leadership include "listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community" (Trastek et al., 2014, p. 379). Through these qualities, a servant leader's team will feel as though they are supported in achieving their own professional goals, while at the same time, becoming more committed to the common goal of serving others.

As the demographics of the student body in post-secondary education continues to shift from the traditional affluent, white, male student between the ages of 18 and 25 to one with more diversity (de Brey et al., 2019), educational leaders would be wise to learn more about the various groups of students and staff they serve. Additionally, enlisting alternate leadership strategies, such as servant leadership, may align more closely with the cultural backgrounds of those they serve. This could be a greater benefit to their institutions' financial status as more students enroll and persist because they feel valued as people and not just as paying customers. The following questions may be used to explore servant leadership in educational settings:

1. List three features of standard top-down and bottom-up leadership models. In what ways might servant leadership represent a different structure altogether?

2. How might the actions of Mr. Wolf have differed if he did not favor servant leadership so strongly? Describe how applying other leadership models might have made a difference.
3. With a partner, discuss the behaviors of Mrs. Ford. What do you think were her motives for working to discredit Mr. Wolf? How would you have dealt with her and the others?
4. How do you feel about the “defeatist thinking” that distressed Mr. Wolf? Discuss your thoughts on the stress minorities (gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, etc.) may experience in a majority-led environment.
5. Why is servant leadership the least studied of all of the leadership models? How might the team’s behaviors have differed if this leadership model was widely understood and accepted?
6. Describe how servant leadership might look within your organizational environment and who in your organization’s leadership may already exemplify these traits.
7. Why do executive leaders in education feel pushed to be more managerial? Do you think they feel alienated from coworkers, and how would you address this?
8. How much reliance on schemas do you use in your decision-making? After reading this case, in what ways, if any, do you plan on altering your decision-making processes?

9. How well do the executive leaders in your organization know their staff and subcultures? What might you do to approach this topic with leaders in any organization and encourage them to foster those relations?
10. In a group of three or more, pick a subculture like staff, Hispanic students, people on the autism spectrum, low-SES, or gender-neutral. On a sheet of paper, list all of the descriptors that come to mind. Examine your list and count how many can be perceived as positive and how many as negative.



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## **Leadership in Higher Education: Business-Management versus Visionary-Servant**

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a neoliberal form of governance that views students as customers has existed in much of higher education. But as the demographics of college students in the United States have changed over time, there has been a growing call for a different type of educational leadership, one that sees all stakeholders – students, families, staff, faculty, etc. – as partners. This study explored and explained undergraduate students’ self-reported preference for either a business-management (BML) or a visionary-servant (VSL) leadership approach at one institution in the southwest United States. **Research Methods:** An explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was conducted using research on the characteristics of BML and VSL. A survey with 12 answer pairs which pitted the two styles against one another was administered. The instrument was dispensed to undergraduate students (n = 190) at one Hispanic-serving institution. Descriptive and comparative statistical analyses were performed, and follow-up interviews (n = 11) were conducted to expound upon the results. **Findings:** Descriptive statistics show a higher undergraduate student preference for VSL over BML. Additionally, interview data explained this preference as aligning with a “nurturing” ideal thought to be of importance to educational systems. Three themes emerged from this data: transformational vision, service and supportive leadership, and personal/relational skills. **Implications:** These findings can better inform educational leaders about their leadership practices as it relates to the latest generation of college students, especially those from underrepresented demographics and those who attend minority-serving institutions.

*Keyword:* educational leadership, neoliberal business management, visionary servant, Hispanic-serving institutions, undergraduate preferences, empirical paper

## **Leadership in Higher Education: Business-Management vs. Visionary-Servant**

For most of the 20th century, a neo-liberal form of governance suffused many higher education (HE) institutions with a business management approach to leadership, but many have questioned whether this model ever worked in the academic environment (Arevalo et al., 2015; Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Collyer, 2015; Gumus et al., 2018; Shek et al., 2015). With the growing study of organizational culture (Chun & Evans, 2016; Kruse et al., 2017; Robert & Wasti, 2002; Shkodriani & Gibbons, 1995; Vandello & Cohen, 1999), the focus of this research asked whether today's undergraduate students preferred this business management leadership (BML) style or if a visionary servant leadership (VSL) approach would align more closely with their ideals.

While the modern-day HE leader may have traits from both models, Collins (2001) described several important differences such as having ambition that advances the self (BML) or others and the organization (VSL), task-orientation (BML) or people-orientation (VSL), and concentrated efforts that support either current (BML) or future success (VSL) to name a few.

### **Identification of Research Problem**

The BML style found in much of HE may not align with the perceptions and preferences of today's students (Anderson et al., 2017; Birel, 2019; Caza & Rosch, 2014), especially those attending minority-serving institutions (Arevalo et al., 2015; Chávez et al., 2012; Garcia, 2017; Keddie & Niesche, 2012; Zambrana et al., 2015). And, as the demographics of college students in the United States have changed over time, highlighted by the growth of HSIs (Preuss et al., 2020; Revilla-Garcia, 2018), there has



been a growing call for a different type of educational leadership, one that sees all stakeholders – students, families, staff, faculty, etc. – as partners (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Gravett et al., 2019; Williams, 2019). This may be due in part to the collectivistic nature of Hispanic culture, which emphasizes social justice, service to the community, and relationships (Chun & Evans, 2016; Matos, 2015; Ojeda et al., 2013; Ruiz, 2005; Shkodriani & Gibbons, 1995). Collins (2001) offered an alternative to BML in VSL, which they argued was the leadership model used to take some companies like Fannie Mae, Kimberly-Clark, and Walgreens from good to great. These VSL characteristics were also identified in many revered historical figures such as Mother Teresa (Bojaxhiu), César Chávez, Martin Luther King Jr., and Eleanor Roosevelt.

As a social-relational concept, educational leadership has been heavily theorized and researched for the last 100 years (Daniëls et al., 2019; Gumus et al., 2018; Hallinger, 2014; Kezar, 2012; Lumby, 2019; Northouse, 2019; Wang, 2018). The industrial age of the early 20th century brought with it a common belief that applying a business-management model to HE administration would be a benefit to these institutions and the people they served, but research indicated that this might not be the case (Bastedo, 2009; Seale & Cross, 2017; Shek et al., 2015). In their review of literature on school governance, Bush and Glover (2014) contended that management had been overshadowed by leadership in recent decades. Preuss and colleagues (2020) identified problem areas in the administration of HE, specifically at HSIs, which were delineated along cultural boundaries (Hispanic/Non-Hispanic Whites) which were supported by Arevalo et al. (2015), Garcia (2017), and Kruse et al. (2017), among others. Researchers have also examined and argued against the neo-liberal marketization of post-secondary

education, which many believe is suppressing the vision and mission of their institutions (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Collyer, 2015; Gravett et al., 2019; Gunter, 2009; Osei-Kofi, 2012; Sapir, 2019).

The advantages of higher education to modern and global societies are evident (Schofer et al., 2020), but a clear path away from the neo-liberalization of academia is not as apparent (Lumby, 2019; Northouse, 2019). Many education leadership researchers critically examined these concerns and often proposed leadership styles that fit under the umbrella theory of social justice as a counterbalance to the neo-liberal and authoritarian system of higher education (Collins, 2001; Northouse, 2019; Shek et al., 2015; Wang, 2018). This may be even more important for HSIs and the Hispanic populations they serve (Chun et al., 2016; Gravett et al., 2019; Matos, 2015; Ojeda et al., 2013; Preuss et al., 2020). Still, no other studies have attempted to capture the preferences of students, those most directly affected by HE governance, regarding the ideal HE leader in a dichotomous listing of BML versus VSL traits and behaviors.

The purpose of this research was to expand on the analysis of theories and practices associated with quality leadership within a post-secondary education setting. More specifically, this research first examined quantitatively undergraduates' self-reported preferences for leader characteristics that exemplify either a BML or VSL model, which may also be viewed as the differentiation of individualistic or collectivistic cultural inclinations, respectively (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). It also strived to expand upon why students at HSIs in the United States may favor one model over the other qualitatively by interviewing doctoral students in their final year of an educational leadership program.

The end goal was to provide leaders in HE with information to recognize, develop, and appreciate VSL as a counterbalance to BML in the post-secondary education landscape.

The following sections discuss the general topic of leadership, educational leadership, and then focuses attention on HSIs. After this, the proposed research strategy was established with the aim of answering the following research questions:

1. Between VSL and BML, which leadership model more closely aligns with the self-reported HE governance preferences of undergraduate students at HSIs?
2. What, if any, are the differences in the self-reported HE leadership preferences of undergraduate students at HSIs when compared across demographics?
3. According to the perspective of educational leadership students, what reasons are given for identifying one leadership style as better than the other for HE?

Finally, discourse concludes with this study's outcomes and their relevance to education which supports proposing the deliberate pursuit, development, and incorporation of VSL into all post-secondary education leadership positions and programs in the United States.

## **Definition of Terms**

### ***Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)***

HSIs are degree-granting, post-secondary education institutions (colleges and universities) that have at least 25% of their undergraduate student body self-identifying as Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The formal label is a designation given by the U.S. Department of Education and allows researchers at these institutions to apply for and receive grant funding specifically reserved for HSIs. Hispanics represent the second largest segment of the U.S. population (Flores, 2017), and nearly two-thirds of

Hispanic undergraduates attend HSIs (Revilla-Garcia, 2018). Preuss and colleagues (2020) argued that the need to focus attention on this growing population of future college students has never been greater for the future of higher education.

### ***Business-Management Leadership (BML)***

The BML label is based on neo-liberal ideologies, which hold a hierarchical structure with executive leaders at the top, followed by managers, workers, and then customers (Gunter 2009). People who subscribe to this approach often see HE institutions as marketable businesses which function as producers of high-quality employees. According to Chung-Herrera and Lankau (2005), some of the business-management leaders' features included charismatic, competitive, dominant, high self-regard, achievement-oriented, high need for power and monetary rewards, individualistic, analytically objective, and attributes success to own abilities and efforts (pp. 2041-2045). These elements are mirrored in the Level 4 leader discussed by Collins (2001), along with the usual pattern of being hired from outside of the company as a hero who comes in to save the organization.

### ***Visionary-Servant Leadership (VSL)***

The VSL label is based on social justice ideologies that hold a shared leadership approach with everyone working to serve each other as partners (Gravett et al., 2019). People who subscribe to this model often see HE institutions as communities that enable participative citizens. According to Collins (2001), some characteristics of the Level 5 or visionary-servant leader include quietly charismatic, cooperative, inclusive, self-effacing, people-oriented, high need for social justice, collectivistic, analytically subjective, and

attributes success to others or just luck. These qualities are also discussed by Greenleaf (2002), Gumus et al. (2018), Shek et al. (2015), and Spears and Lawrence (2002).

## **Review of Literature**

Leadership is a skill that is highly valued in today's society and has been considerably investigated (Daniëls et al. 2019; Eva et al., 2019; Gumus et al., 2018; Schofer et al. 2020; Wang, 2018), yet reaching a consensus on an overarching definition of leadership and its elements still eludes researchers (Northouse, 2019). In a meta-analysis of theories related to educational leadership, Wang (2018) found 295 concepts that education investigators have studied over 10 years, with 20 of these being highly researched. On the other hand, Gumus and colleagues (2018) only found 14 notable leadership models, while Daniëls et al. (2019) proposed just eight dimensions within four models. The fact is that while many have researched the traits, behaviors, and qualities of great leaders, debate continues surrounding the best fit for certain situations and populations.

Researchers have explored various theories related to effective leadership in education and the professional development needed to cultivate such skills (Baker et al., 2018; Daniëls et al., 2019; Gumus et al., 2018; Wang, 2018). Mumford and colleagues (2000) proposed nine critical skills that leaders must employ to perform at their best. These included problem definition, cause/goal analysis, constraint analysis, planning, forecasting, creative thinking, idea evaluation, wisdom, and sense-making/visioning (p. 35). Other characteristics espoused by Daniëls et al. (2019), Kruse et al. (2017), and Preuss et al. (2020) included communication, cultural competence, and collaboration, among the traits needed for effective leadership. Bolden and colleagues (2014) suggested

that academics should take a position of citizenship in their institutional communities to enhance the probability of success and offset any experiences with ambiguity, dissonance, vulnerability, or other negative sensitivities. Each of these leader traits and behaviors may be thought of as existing along the individualistic-collectivistic cultural spectrum with some sharing space on both sides (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Oyserman et al., 2002; Robert & Wasti, 2002; Triandis, 2004; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). Be that as it may, with so many answers regarding successful leadership, problems persist in the practice of educational governance.

### ***Problems of Practice***

By critically examining leadership in education, researchers have found numerous issues surrounding the practice of effective leaders (Anderson et al., 2017; Collyer, 2015; Garcia, 2017; Harris & Hartley, 2011). When they considered leadership theories within the context of generational difference, Anderson et al. (2017) proposed, “Our current leadership theories will be challenged by employees who want to redefine the leader-follower relationship” (p. 253). They believed that as the dispositions and values of workers shift over time, so too will the most efficacious leadership theories. Add to this the demographic shifts described by Flores (2017), Nittle (2019), and Revilla-Garcia (2018) coupled with the needs of a growing Hispanic student body discussed by Chun et al. (2016), Greene et al. (2008), and Matos (2015), and it becomes clear that institutions will struggle if they fail to adapt.

**Climate and Culture.** The shared perceptions of the people in an organization, as well as their feelings toward the organizational identity, are notable areas of struggle (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Garcia, 2017; Kang et al., 2020; Lumby, 2019; Preuss et al.,

2020). A study by Braxton (2010) found that adherence to cultural norms was vital to the functionality of colleges and universities, while Birel (2019) stated that the climate of a university was of particular concern to leaders' behaviors. The cultural competence of an organization's employees was determined to be an important factor for many Hispanic and Mestizo (mixed Indigenous and Hispanic) peoples (Arevalo et al., 2015; Chávez et al., 2012; Chun & Evans, 2016; Greene et al., 2008; Matos, 2015). Campbell and O'Meara (2013), as well as Kezar (2013), found faculty perceptions regarding the climate and policies at their institutions influenced their ability to work successfully. Moreover, Chun et al. (2016) and Greene et al. (2008) found that culture and climate influence student success.

Yet not all institutions of higher learning promote positive organizational practices that benefit all of their members (Lee, 2017; Sosa-Provencio, 2019; Webber & Rogers, 2018). Harris and Hartley (2011) found cultural ideologies derailed a university's vision, mission, and outcomes. Locke and Guglielmino (2006) characterized post-secondary education institutions as resistant to change because of their distinct culture. They found that administrators and staff are different subcultures in the educational system and misunderstandings led to less effective service. Baker et al. (2018) identified a lack of preparatory support as a primary issue related to emerging leaders (department heads) dropping out of the leadership pipeline, a sentiment supported by Zambrana et al. (2015). Additionally, Lee (2017) described stigmas within the culture of higher education that diminished the sense of belonging felt by marginalized groups.

These cultural issues are echoed in the strained relations between institutional employees and students, especially those from Hispanic backgrounds (Chun & Evans,

2016; Chun et al., 2016; Garcia, 2019; Greene et al., 2008). Generational differences were noted by Anderson et al. (2017), while ethnic differences were observed by Arevalo et al. (2015) as they pertained to leadership, services, and student success. Matos (2015) described some of the difficulties many Hispanic students feel when adjusting to the culture of HE and how they use cultural capital to counter these effects. These difficulties and solutions were also used by many Indigenous and Mestizo students (Chávez et al., 2012). Preuss and colleagues (2020) underscored numerous misrepresentations and distorted beliefs on the part of academics regarding Hispanic culture. They suggested that HE leaders make it a point to understand and integrate aspects of Hispanic culture into every component of HSI's educational systems. However, Chun and Evans (2016) highlighted the pressure many HE leaders feel as they work "to develop integrated and intentional approaches to addressing cultural competence" for the benefit of their students (p. 7).

**Racial/Ethnic Minority and Low-Socioeconomic Status.** Much research has been conducted on leadership as it relates to marginalized groups (Baker et al., 2018; Lee, 2017; Preuss et al., 2020; Zambrana, 2015). According to Chávez et al. (2012), Ojeda et al. (2013), and Ruiz (2005), students from Indigenous, Mestizo, and Hispanic backgrounds adhere to more collectivistic beliefs and behaviors than their White-majority counterparts. These collectivistic traits were described in the seminal work by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) and echoed through the years by such notable researchers as Hui and Triandis (1986), Oyserman et al. (2002), and Vandello and Cohen (1999). Salis Reyes (2019) placed these ideals firmly within the Indigenous Native American community, while Matos (2015) described the importance of family, a collectivistic trait,



for Hispanic and Mestizo college students. Using the Individualism-Collectivism Scale (Hui, 1988), Shkodriani and Gibbons (1995) compared individualism and collectivism among Mexican and American cultures, which showed significant support for Hispanic's tendencies toward collectivistic ideals. The problem is emphasized by the work of Keddie and Niesche (2012), who reported on a school leader who was willing to sacrifice the culture of their student body so their school could more closely resemble the "Whiteness" of state standards. Sosa-Provencio (2019) and Salis Reyes (2019) referred to these challenges as the remnants of "colonialism", during which many conquered cultures of the world were disregarded and replaced by White-European standards.

As it relates to emerging leaders, Sosa-Provencio (2019) studied the numerous challenges women of color experience as educators, while Guarino and Borden (2017) found that gender inequity impacted service loads which did not contribute to their leadership aspirations. Matias and Zembylas (2014) found that pity and caring can be perceived as emotions of disgust toward peoples from cultures primarily of a collectivistic nature. Finally, Lee (2017) illustrated how many instructors and emerging leaders who were raised in low-socioeconomic backgrounds feel as though they do not belong in the middle-class homogeneity of higher education. It is clear that these differences need to be attended to, but addressing these cultural roadblocks is further hindered by problematic ideologies found within higher education's current configuration.

**Neo-Liberal Ideologies.** Systemically, the neo-liberalization of post-secondary education, with its emphasis on functionalism, marketization, and blaming its inadequacies on lower members (namely teachers, parents, and students), must be

brought into question (Gunter, 2009). That researcher found inaccuracies in the intended purposes, rationales, and defenses of a managerial, business approach to educational leadership. Osei-Kofi (2012) claimed that neo-liberalism suppressed social inclusion and that these ideologies failed to address issues of racism. And when Sapir (2019) studied the neo-liberalist decision to change a free-for-seniors auditing course to one for-profit, they found that the neo-liberal approach was at odds with the traditional moral economy of academia. Taken together, the question of neo-liberal ideologies' influence on the governance of academia appeared to have a resoundingly negative answer. This system has not sufficiently addressed the tasks for which it was employed, and it has done nothing to address inequality.

**Decision-Making.** As seen in the Sapir (2019) study, difficulties extend into the decision-making practices that could remedy these problem areas. In 2013, Graham and colleagues framed the institutional change process in their study of higher education. They found that policies, structures, and a lack of support can hinder change mechanisms “and the accompanying institutional benefits” (p. 11). Graham and Donaldson (2020) examined academic leaders' responses to pressures and problems along with the strategies and decision-making processes they used. They demonstrated how people who use traditional business/management logic often view non-traditional approaches with suspicion and consider them to be of less quality. To exacerbate this dilemma, Greer and colleagues (2015) revealed that educational leadership students scored significantly lower than other graduate students on moral reasoning as measured by the Defining Issues Test. With so many issues surrounding the practice of leadership, an unconventional approach

was clearly needed, but it would have to incorporate some traditional values for it to balance the problems at hand and garner enough support to be effective.

### ***Responding to the Problems of Practice***

Many education leadership researchers have critically examined these concerns and proposed leadership styles that fit under the umbrella theory of social justice as a counterbalance to the neo-liberal system of higher education (Collins, 2001; Northouse, 2019; Shek et al., 2015; Wang, 2018). In a meta-analysis of educational leadership research, Wang (2018) concluded that the presence of social justice theories had grown in recent years, and the research was still evolving. Taking a critical theory approach to challenge the ideologies found in the educational system, Sosa-Provencio (2019) promoted social justice as a revolutionary ethic of care, and then Sosa-Provencio et al. (2020) showed how critical consciousness and nourished resistance provided a counterbalance to neo-liberal practices. In a study by Collyer (2015), resistance to marketization strategies in higher education was examined and showed how this act contributed to the growth of an institution. Ball and Olmedo (2013) further elucidated how resistance through the practice of critique was, in essence, a form of self-care which exemplified the struggle against neo-liberalism.

This is also important for individual students, and their families as DeMatthews and colleagues (2016) described one education leaders' struggle with student achievement. That leader decided to institute social justice leadership and become a family/community advocate, which increased student success in their locale. Zambrana et al. (2015) communicated how underrepresented faculty of color are affected by current leadership practices. They uncovered that there was a compelling need for mentoring to

counteract work barriers and support professional as well as personal growth. And finally, Williams (2019) developed and promoted their Systemic Restorative Praxis system, which they claimed could undo the continuing damage of colonialism and usher in a more equitable system designed to be a benefit to more members of the global society. Yet, as previously stated, any novel approach to educational leadership would have to exercise both social and business styles.

**Visionary Leadership.** In Collins' (2001) discussion about leadership, he described the most successful leaders who left organizations with a lasting blueprint for success exhibited two overarching traits, the first being visionary leadership. This was described as a professional will or focus on building a great company, organization, or system. While this description seemed to align with the business model approach, it also portrayed a leadership style that stood in opposition to the individualistic, and often ego-centric, traditionalist view.

Gumus et al. (2018) reviewed leadership models and described visionary leadership as a characteristic of a charismatic leader who encourages followers to go against the status quo, to think in new directions, and to celebrate differences with confidence. As Samier (2012) perceived the need for educational systems to be more creative in their change processes; they provided avant-garde leadership as a creative-visionary style that used critique and idealization to realize effective administration. Then, Gravett et al. (2019) found that envisioning "students as partners," instead of the neo-liberal "customer" approach, was more beneficial to all stakeholders in those educational systems.

Looking back at applying a business model to an organizational leaders' environment, Smith-Daniels and Smith-Daniels (2008) revealed that teams that successfully balanced their attention while making decisions realized higher returns than those that did not. They discovered that most business-minded teams in their study did not incorporate a balanced-attention approach when it came to time, cost, and the performance of the entire team. Again, while it may have seemed as though the visionary trait was related to neo-liberal leadership styles, that was not entirely true. For the success of an organization and all of its stakeholders, Collins (2001) made the case that the greatest leaders held visionary ideals which advocated service to others as the highest priority. Therefore, it can be said that providing an educational service should mean that leaders envision service as their primary goal (Shek et al., 2015), and they should balance their attention by tending to the needs and supporting the aspirations of their staff and faculty, those who work on the frontlines serving and supporting post-secondary education students (Locke & Guglielmino, 2006).

**Servant Leadership.** It may be difficult for some people to grasp how a visionary leadership approach could be combined with a leadership style that places service to others at its center. However, Collins (2001) described the Level 5 (visionary-servant) leader as ambitious, but always with the success of the institution at the forefront of their mind. Salis Reyes (2019) described Native American students wishing to do this very thing – gaining knowledge to drive decolonization and build their nations (vision) as well as giving back to their communities and encouraging a blending of cultures (service). They stressed that Native American students see college differently than traditional students – a time and place to learn how to give back to their communities and not just

for individual achievement. Mansfield (2014) believed that listening to students was the highest form of servant leadership, while Caza and Rosch (2014) found that students had previous beliefs that favored servant leadership qualities. This section takes a closer look at the second half of Collins' (2001) paradoxical yet successful leadership approach.

Servant leadership combines influential leadership with altruistic service (Northouse, 2019). During the 1970s, Greenleaf (2002) first acknowledged servant leadership as a practice of prioritizing the needs of followers by way of supportive communication, social responsibility, and an ethical grounding in serving the greater good. Spears and Lawrence (2002), researchers who worked closely with Greenleaf, identified the following 10 servant leadership behaviors:

- Actively listening to understand the perspectives of all of the followers.
- Genuinely empathizing with the followers to validate their feelings.
- Caring about the well-being of followers and working to rectify past wrongs.
- Being aware of oneself and the impact on other people and organizations.
- Persuading groups and individuals through supportive communication.
- Conceptualizing visionary goals and clear direction for their followers.
- Predicting the future by analyzing the past and present.
- Stewarding their followers and organizations responsibly.
- Being committed to the beneficial growth of all people in their charge.
- Building a community of like-minded people to support to each other, their individual growth, and to realize their collective vision. (pp. 4-8)

Additionally, Liden et al. (2014) developed an "ABC" model of servant leadership, which consisted of antecedent conditions (context and culture, leader

attributes, and follower receptivity), behaviors of the servant leader (previously noted), and consequences or outcomes (follower performance and growth, organizational performance, and societal impact). These traits overlap with the beliefs and behaviors commonly attributed to collectivistic cultures, which promote social justice and serving one's people (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012).

Shek et al. (2015) focused on servant leadership and the interrelationship between leadership practices and the ethics of social interaction such as care, fairness, and respect. At the end of their research, they believed that aligning one's leadership style with the moral imperative of serving others is essential for reclaiming an ethical compass in the modern age. Northouse (2019) highlighted how servant leadership placed altruism as the centerpiece of its methodology. Other strengths involved how servant leadership promoted sharing control and influence with followers. Servant leadership appeared to be applicable at "all levels of management and in all types of organizations" (p. 370) to create a culture of ethical and inclusive service. Regrettably, servant leadership was not a widely researched area in the educational environment (Gumus et al., 2018). In their review and analysis of 35 years of educational research in the area of leadership models, those researchers revealed that servant leadership ranked last in research foci from 709 empirical articles. This lack of attention could be why the post-secondary education system still holds to the top-down business model of administration.

**Visionary-Servant Leadership.** As Collins (2001) described VSLs, "Level 5 leaders embody a paradoxical mix of personal humility and professional will" (p. 39). These people exhibited fanatical drive and compelling modesty, ambition for the

company and understanding for its people, as well as diligence in their work and self-effacement in their success. In their research, they were not seeking the idea of a visionary-servant leader, but their findings repeatedly pointed to leaders who embodied this particular set of traits as having taken good companies into greatness while setting up their successors for continued positive achievement.

Collins' (2001) concept of the visionary-servant (Level 5) leader was found in varying degrees throughout many of the articles discussed so far. Most of the people who were studied seemed to imbue at least some of the characteristics described by Collins, and many of them came from educational settings. Some participants exhibited vision and service traits, such as systemic change (Samier, 2012; Santamaría, 2014; Sosa-Provencio, 2020; Williams, 2019) and community advocacy (Bolden et al., 2014; Chávez et al., 2012; DeMatthews, 2016; Salis Reyes, 2019) to name a couple, but the context of this research is the education system, and so a deeper examination of the current educational environment is warranted.

### ***The Educational System***

With a critical theory lens, the position that most of today's systems have their roots in the European colonization of world cultures should be stated and supported upfront. This concept has been alluded to as I discussed the work of Salis Reyes (2019), Sosa-Provencio (2019), and Williams (2019). The second position of critical theory, that all systems are flawed in how they benefit some members over others is supported by the work of Harris and Hartley (2011), Keddle and Niesche (2012), and Zambrana et al. (2015). And while many educational practitioners shy away from critical theory as confrontational and counterproductive, Gunter (2009) argued that critical examination in



educational research is of the highest importance. They proclaimed this approach as elevating wisdom, advocating for the least of a system's members, and celebrating divergent modes of thought. For these reasons, this review is committed to a critical examination of the educational system, and especially the third tenant of critical theory, the challenge to provide a practical and cost-effective solution to a problem of practice.

It is clear that institutionalized education is important. Schofer and colleagues (2020) reinforced the idea that higher education has a positive impact on society. They connected higher education to improvements in globalization and societal organization as well as the rational thought of individuals. Yet, as it is true about nearly every system, issues within the educational system still pervade.

When examining the internal struggles of emerging educational leaders, Daly et al. (2014) described how advice networks influence their trajectory. Those who began their careers with strong and varied advice relationships reported more years of service and a higher sense of reform-centered efficacy. Unfortunately, these networks are lacking for many underrepresented minority academics (Zambrana, 2015). Sharafizad and Redmond (2020) found that followers' discretionary efforts were influenced by their professional commitment, organizational factors, and job characteristics, but not culture or leadership. They stated that this was due to pervasive negative perceptions involving culture and leadership at all higher education institutions.

With regard to the leadership dynamic, Ho and Ng (2017) found tensions in distributed leadership, especially surrounding the aspects of boundary-spanning work. These tensions provided context for leadership practice and highlighted the relationship between the structure of an institution and the agency of its members. Braun et al. (2015)

found positive aspects regarding strategic orientations, distributed leadership, and policymaking even when the “shadow of hierarchy” (p. 1832) threatens to intervene in an organization’s self-regulation. At a larger scale, Pak and Desimone (2019) found issues with shared leadership from state to local levels. They pointed out that many people believed that this leadership approach added to the authority of an initiative, but in reality, it added instability and inconsistency as leaders at different levels struggled for control.

Organizationally, Kraft et al. (2015) reported on organizational responses that affected their members’ ability to manage ambiguity and uncertainty. For these institutions, individual and uncoordinated efforts alone were not adequate in meeting the needs of students from high-poverty urban neighborhoods; it had to be coordinated, engaging, and supportive, all while promoting order and discipline. Bastedo (2009) examined the organizational impediments that threaten the independence of leaders on boards of trustees. They found numerous problems, which included political loyalties, conflicts of interest, domination, cliques, and personal agendas. They concluded that, while trustees were often blamed for their immoral behavior, fundamental problems within an organization’s culture allowed moral seduction to occur. While there are many levels of leadership in educational organizations, special attention to deans is needed for this research.

**Deans’ Level Leadership.** Sayler and colleagues (2019) described how associate deans are promoted to their positions and what they do. These “hidden leaders” (p. 1127) were often appointed after having served as faculty, and their roles supported the functioning and management of their colleges. Bystydzienski et al. (2017) found that

deans and department chairs were pivotal in creating a more welcoming university climate and culture, and Bray (2010) revealed how norms influenced relationships and guided deans in their roles within the social action system of higher education. Bobe and Kober (2020) associated characteristics like age, sex, educational background, and tenure status to a dean's use of university management-control-systems. This decision-making power influenced financial and non-financial performance measures to varying degrees.

To further the discussion on decision-making, deans who approached change initiatives with careful forethought, even when labeling change agents, avoided negative consequences like dismissive or cynical attitudes and serious or lighthearted teasing (Cordiner et al., 2018). Likewise, Bohle Carbonell et al. (2013) found that administrators who tapped their faculty's creative potential saw many improvements. Being cognizant of and incorporating their followers' strengths stimulated the growth of learning programs, motivated faculty to join new task forces, and increased new knowledge for the institution and its stakeholders. Deans can make many positive impacts on their institutions, but HSIs are a select environment within the higher education landscape.

**Hispanic-Serving Institutions.** Preuss et al. (2020) conducted research on HSIs and described these institutions as summarily different when compared to other institutions of higher learning in the United States. Unlike Tribal and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, HSIs are predominantly White institutions that have seen an influx of Hispanic students from the populace of their surrounding geography. They argued that receiving the designation HSI does not mean that these organizations have done anything to address the needs of their Hispanic students, only that they carry at least

25% or more Hispanic enrollment. This, they concluded, presented problems for the institutions as well as the people, communities, and cultures they served.

In a critical assessment of the U.S. Department of Education's definition for HSI designation, Garcia (2017) defined a new vision that emphasized not just enrolling Hispanic students or helping them succeed in higher education but also incorporating aspects of their culture into all course curriculum and student services. For this researcher, HSIs should actually change their policies, practices, and programs to incorporate Hispanic culture into all of their curriculum and services for their leaders to claim the designation. However, they also found that most HSIs only concentrated on enrolling Hispanics, with a few making changes to address the needs of their Hispanic communities. As discussed earlier, welcomed changes would highlight the Hispanic ideals of benefitting one's people (Chávez et al., 2012; Salis Reyes, 2019; Sosa-Provencio, 2019), cultural inclusivity (Keddie & Niesche, 2012; Osei-Kofi, 2012), community advocacy (DeMatthews et al., 2016, Lee, 2017), and mentoring to navigate social and political power relations (Santamaría, 2014; Zambrana et al., 2015). But many leaders in education have struggled with how to move from the neo-liberal, business model of higher education to one that is more aligned with the cultural backgrounds and preferences of their growing Hispanic student bodies (Preuss et al., 2020). All of the reviewed research pointed to a particular type of leadership that may benefit HSIs specifically, and higher education in general, more than the traditional business model that suffused educational systems across the United States.

**The Visionary-Servant Leader at HSIs.** Many Hispanics in the U.S. share Native American heritage – Mestizo or mixed cultural backgrounds – and therefore hold

a combination of collectivistic and individualistic views with a preference for actions that benefit their family and community over individual advancement (Preuss et al., 2020). Chávez and colleagues (2012) elaborated on HE students' belief that their collegiate achievements must be a benefit to their clan, which was echoed by Salis Reyes (2019). A study by Caza and Rosch (2014) explored students' preexistent beliefs about leadership and found ideas of community service, open-mindedness, venerable values, and comfort with change dominated their belief structures. These exemplify the visionary-servant leader and are supported by the work of Rehbock et al. (2019) and Santamaría (2014). Additionally, Mansfield (2014) said that students need transformative, social justice leaders to listen to them, not just for student success but so their institutions can prosper as well. When these studies are taken together, it supports the notion that students may prefer visionary-servant leaders be at the helm of educational systems in the United States.

Stulberg and Chen (2013) tracked social movements of the mid-to-late twentieth century and found that they mainly affected institutional change through key administrators' moral and ideological beliefs, again service and vision. Samier (2012) encouraged creative-visionary leadership to advance the educational system, Sosa-Provencio (2019) spoke of a visionary ideal of servant leadership, and DeMatthews et al. (2016) described how social justice leadership helped an entire Hispanic community. This seemingly paradoxical leadership style was there all along, hidden in plain sight within the theoretical models of social justice, transformational, and other service-oriented leadership approaches.

The assembly of this review indicated that the components of VSL have been discussed by numerous researchers from around the world for quite some time. Leadership models such as social justice leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership all have concept overlap with the visionary-servant (Level 5) leadership model produced by the work of Collins (2001). Many researchers have found increasing interest in leadership models that focus more on service and less on management. Some have even shown decreasing interest in the traditional business and neo-liberal administrative practices that dominated educational leadership over much of the twentieth century, and these sentiments were repeatedly echoed by various stakeholders.

This review provided student support for the use of VSL in educational administration. It shows support for this approach from faculty and emerging leaders at many levels of the educational system. It even supports this type of leadership from disciplines outside of education. The most interesting findings indicated that VSL is alive and well in deans' councils across the United States. There may be room for improvement, though, as some researchers call for changes to current policies at the federal on down to the local level. Some of these requests take a critical stance, like those that call for decolonization, but each offers practical and cost-effective means to address the problems they identified. All in all, visionary-servant leadership could serve as a new standard for the evolution of educational leadership in higher education.

## **Method**

### **The Research Design**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), researchers should first examine their philosophical worldview before solidifying their approach to study. With a leaning toward critical theory and participatory action research plus a background as a Mestizo ethnic minority, that qualified for a worldview that aligns with the transformative researcher. The focus of this study was to illuminate a perceived problem within the educational system brought about by the neo-liberalization of academia which stratifies stakeholders and leaves many voices (e.g., students, staff, etc.) unheard (Graham & Donaldson, 2020; Gunter, 2009; Osei-Kofi, 2012).

Therefore, to investigate this topic carefully, an explanatory sequential mixed method approach was employed to study the predisposed notions students have regarding leadership styles and behaviors found in HE. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006) supported using a sequential study to explore descriptive information and then expound upon this with other data collection techniques to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena. This was accomplished using a mixed methods approach which aligns with Creswell and Creswell's (2017) statement, "The core assumption of [mixed methods] inquiry is that the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone" (p. 4).

Additionally, since there was no instrument to gauge students' preference for traits that exemplify the BML or VSL models, a new instrument was developed using literature on these two styles (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Collins, 2001; Endeman,

1990; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Creswell and Creswell (2017) supported the use of mixed methods when exploring a phenomenon, when explaining the reasons behind the phenomenon, and when testing a new instrument – all of which were included within this study.

Characteristics of the BML and VSL models were organized and set up in a dichotomous array to structure a questionnaire that could be administered via Qualtrics (see Appendix A). It was then be sent to all undergraduate students attending the same HSI via email (see Appendix B). This was then followed up with the recruitment of doctoral students in an educational leadership program at the same university to participate in interviews to understand why students may prefer leader characteristics that represent the BML or VSL model (see Appendix C).

### ***Population and Participants***

The target population for this study was undergraduate and doctoral students attending one HSI in the United States. According to the literature, education leadership research has documented an increase in studies focused on leadership styles that comprise concepts like social justice, transformational, distributed, and servant leadership (Daniëls et al. 2019; Eva et al., 2019; Gumus et al., 2018; Schofer et al. 2020; Wang, 2018). Preuss et al. (2019) argued that Hispanic people generally hold to a collectivistic cultural background, as opposed to the individualistic nature of the Non-Hispanic, White American culture. As such, students who attend HSIs may lean toward leadership styles like those discussed here. This study aimed to gauge whether students enrolled at one HSI prefer leader approaches and behaviors that align with the visionary servant leader over a business management model.



All undergraduate students from a regional HSI received a recruitment email requesting their participation during the summer of 2021 and the survey was left open into the beginning of the fall semester (see Appendix B). This email contained a link to the online survey as well as a copy of the informed consent form for their records. It was hoped that the sample of survey participants would be demographically representative of the student body enrolled at this HSI. With 6,167 undergraduate students currently enrolled at this institution and an expected return of approximately 10% of the undergraduate student body, the anticipated number of student participants was around 600. Twenty education leadership doctoral students were in this cohort and approximately 10 of them were expected to participate in the qualitative interview portion of this study to shed light on the survey results and the possible reasons behind the resultant leadership preferences of contemporary undergraduate students (see Appendix C).

### ***Data Collection***

Stated previously, participant recruitment emails were sent to every undergraduate student at the HSI where this study was conducted. As the survey was administered using Qualtrics, this quantitative data was collected within that online system. Data were stored on password-protected servers and identifying participant information had been removed before processing. Once the survey was closed and statistical analysis was complete, emails were sent to students in the educational leadership doctoral program at that same university. Interviews were scheduled during the fall semester and then conducted through Zoom with each taking about 25 to 35 minutes to complete. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed by the principal investigator for analysis.

### *Analysis Procedures*

Using the statistical processing tools within Qualtrics, descriptive statistics were performed for each of the demographic and study questions. The literature suggested that the demographic question regarding cultural background would have to be binned before analysis because a majority of the literature reviewed earlier described differences as being influenced by a collectivistic or individualistic cultural background. This procedure was performed on the data set which then allowed for relational analyses of the binned collectivist/individualist variable and the 12 study questions using Fisher's Exact Test which produces a p-value as well as a Cramer's V effect size. Only one comparison showed a statistically significant difference, and this prompted further analysis using McFadden's r-squared to create a model of this relationship and reveal the significance of the difference. After the quantitative analyses were complete, the qualitative phase began.

Once the interviews were transcribed, qualitative analysis was implemented. Qualitative interview data were examined to develop categories, themes, and highlight any interrelationships which might signify commonalities for the self-reported reasons students prefer one leadership approach over the other. This was accomplished first by color coding certain statements and main ideas within the transcripts by hand. A second pass of coding allowed for those statements and main ideas to coalesce into categorical content. Examination of these collections then allowed the researcher to label them with thematic descriptions. Lastly, these data sets were combined during the final analysis to inform the development of these dissemination materials.

## Results/Findings

The survey was distributed to all undergraduate students (N = 6,167) at one regional university during the summer of 2021 and left open into the fall semester. When the survey was closed, 222 undergraduate students had started the survey, or a response rate of about 3.6%, lower than the anticipated 10%. However, the educational leadership doctoral students agreeing to be interviewed went above expectations with 11 completing interviews.

On the first demographic question about their preferred gender identity, females dominated the pool at 71.94% (141) and males made up 27.55% (54), with only one participant (0.51%) choosing to declare themselves as “non-binary” of the 196 participants that continued the survey. For comparison, this HSI’s demographics showed only 58.5% of undergraduates were female and 55.9% were White.

Rather than using the standard demographic of Race/Ethnicity, a slightly different approach was implemented. Cultural Background was a “Select All That Apply” question (Table 1), so the total count of 215 did not equal remaining participants as many chose more than one option.

**Table 1**

*Cultural Background (Select All That Apply)*

Asian/Middle Eastern	4.65%	10
Black/African American	5.12%	11
Hispanic/Latinx/Chicano	30.70%	66
Native American/Alaska Native	2.33%	5
White/European American	57.21%	123

As research has described the first four cultural categories as leaning more toward collectivism (Chun & Evans, 2016; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Matos, 2015; Ojeda et al., 2013; Oyserman et al., 2002; Ruiz, 2005; Shkodriani & Gibbons, 1995; and Vandello & Cohen, 1999), were combined into a “Collectivistic” cultural background variable, while those who only chose a White/European American background were designated as “Individualistic” (Table 2). This binning procedure was not a perfect differentiation as some White/European American communities and families hold a more collectivistic set of values and behaviors (Anderson et al., 2017). Many of the studies used in the literature review of this study reinforced a cultural dichotomy that supported this binning procedure as it related to the broader implications of this study. Data for those who did not complete the survey were not used, which resulted in a final participant count of 190, or just above 3% of the pool.

**Table 2**

*Percent of Students Assigned to Each Orientation Based on Reported Cultural Background*

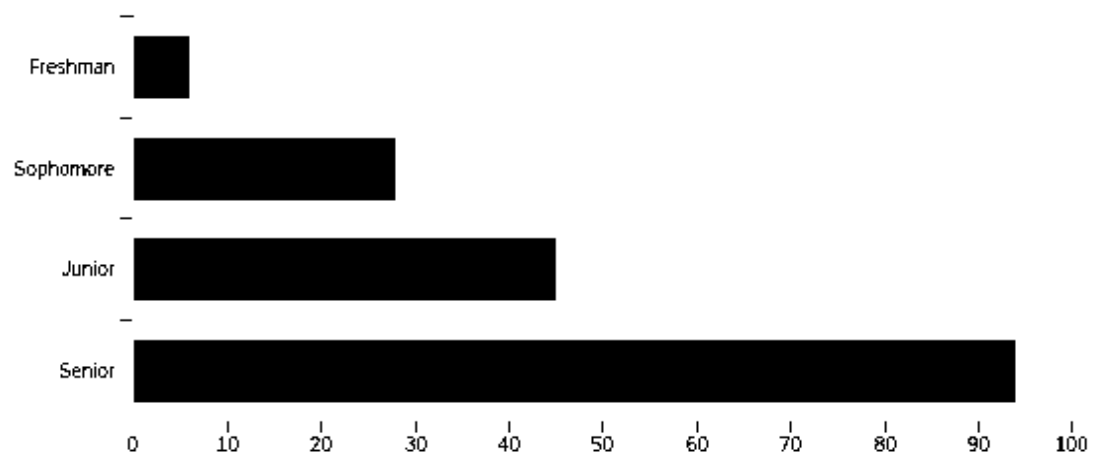
<u>Orientation</u>	<u>Total %</u>	<u>Total #</u>	<u>Female %</u>	<u>Low-Income %</u>	<u>First Generation %</u>
Individualistic	56.32%	107	55.32%	37.30%	37.89%
Collectivistic	43.68%	83	44.68%	51.71%	56.89%

Participants reported a near even grouping in regards to their relationship status with 49.75% selecting single/separated/divorced and 50.25% selecting married or cohabiting. Additionally, a majority also described themselves as not having any children (57.87%). A greater part of students who took the survey stated not having come from a low-income background (56.35%), but two-thirds conveyed that they were first-

generation college student (67.01%). Regarding a student's relationship to their university, most of these participants worked full-time jobs (52.04%), enrolled as full-time students (64.80%), and were learning in a mostly off-campus environment (59.69%). Two interesting relationships within the demographical comparisons were the percentages of participants who held both a collectivistic background and first-generation status (56.9%) as well as collectivistic and low-income backgrounds (51.7%). The reverse was seen for White/European American students who were binned as individualistic and not first-generation (62.1%) nor having come from a low-income background (62.7%). The summary of undergraduate student classifications can be seen in Figure 1 and their declared college major in Figure 2. Of the students attending the investigated HSI, freshmen were underrepresented in the sample and students from the college of Education and Social Sciences were overrepresented.

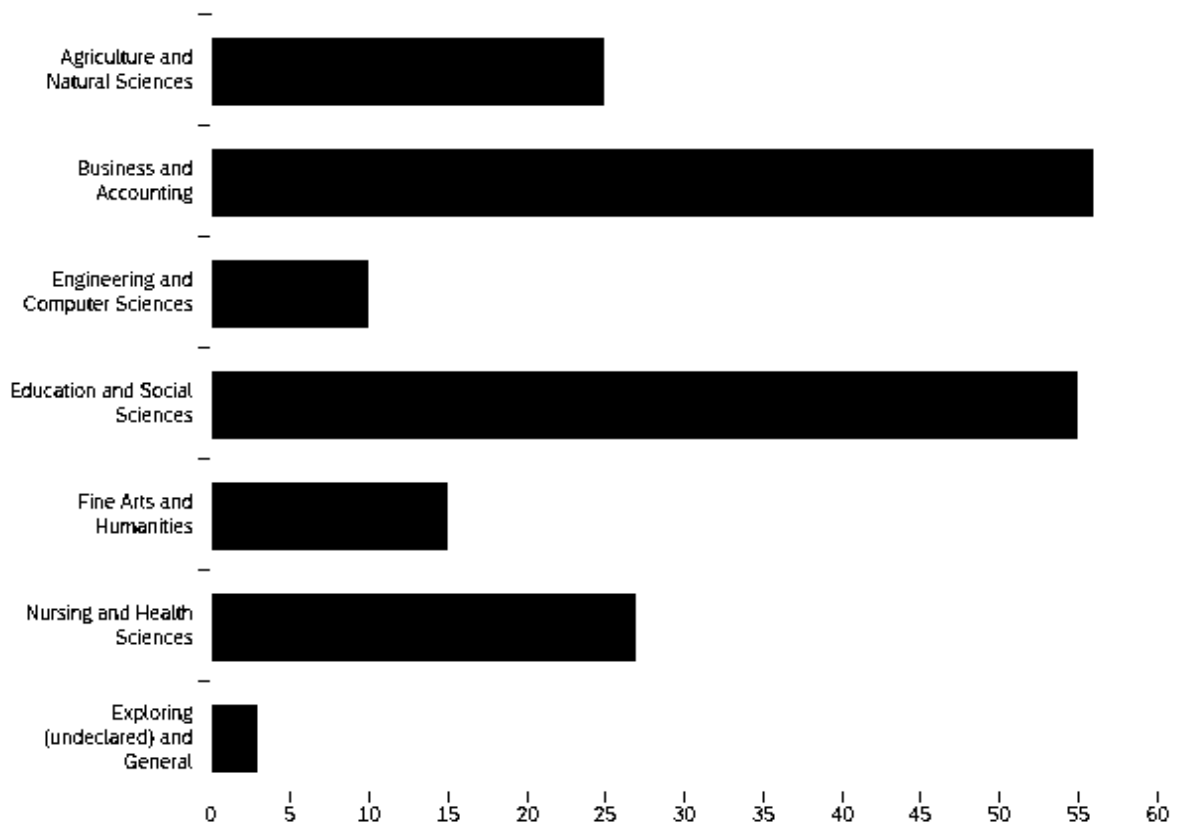
**Figure 1**

*Classifications of Undergraduate Survey Participants*



**Figure 2**

*College of Major for Survey Participants*



The actual enrollment numbers for the university in this investigation during the 2020-21 academic year were 19.2% freshmen, 17.1% sophomores, 27.5% juniors, and 36.3% seniors. And for the colleges, 15.2% were in Agriculture and Natural Sciences, 29.0% Business and Accounting, 7.4% Engineering and Computer Sciences, 18.8% Education and Social Sciences, 9.3% Fine Arts and Humanities, 14.8% Nursing and Health Sciences, and 4.9% Exploring (undeclared) and General majors. Freshmen were clearly underrepresented, and the colleges had varying representation with survey participants from the college of Education and Social Sciences over-representing their college by 10%.

In general participant response rates favored a VSL approach over the BML approach when thinking about how the governance of institutions of higher learning should be approached (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Percentages and Counts of Responses to Stem Question and Answer Sets*

Leadership Approach	When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?	%	#
VSL	Use effective listening skills and be responsive to the needs of others	72.87%	137
BML	Be an effective speaker who is able to give clear direction and persuade others easily	27.13%	53
VSL	Inspire excellence and commit to their followers' personal and professional growth	94.15%	177
BML	Coordinate various individual efforts and rely on own charisma to motivate followers	5.85%	13
VSL	Deliver supportive communication and clearly define a shared vision for the organization	84.57%	159
BML	Be competitive and industrious with high levels of self-awareness and ambition	15.43%	31
VSL	Pay attention to the strengths of people and believe in continuous improvement	83.51%	157
BML	Concentrate on organizational structure and resources to fortify against vulnerabilities	16.49%	33
VSL	Demonstrate modesty, self-effacement, empathy, community building, and stewardship	67.55%	127
BML	Demonstrate confidence, self-promotion, intellect, task-orientation, and motivation	32.45%	63

VSL	Enact ethical policies and fair practices that serve the welfare of people and community	77.66%	146
BML	Innovate and deploy resources to deliver more easily sustainable and profitable solutions	22.34%	44
VSL	Generate future-oriented energy and take knowledge-backed risks	59.04%	111
BML	Be concerned with current organizational stability and harmonious operation	40.96%	79
VSL	Avoid public praise and give credit for success to others, circumstances, or just good luck	84.04%	158
BML	Enjoy the public limelight and take full credit for their organization's success	15.96%	32
VSL	Channel their ambition into the long-term success of the organization and its employees	70.74%	133
BML	Pursue and create personal success through diligence and a strong work ethic	29.26%	57
VSL	Be promoted from within the organization	79.26%	149
BML	Be hired from outside of the organization	20.74%	41
VSL	Value shared decision-making, but also take sole accountability for failures	44.68%	84
BML	Lead by example, but can also take control of the activities of large groups of people	55.32%	106
VSL	Do whatever it takes to produce the best result for the organization, no matter how difficult	33.51%	63
BML	Analyze and then aggressively pursue the most efficient path to success for the organization	66.49%	127

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Fisher's Exact Tests were conducted to ascertain the statistical significance and effect size for the relational statistics of the binary cultural background variable and the study questions. There was only one statistically significant relationship between Question six and the students the researcher identified as collectivist. This question included the VSL answer "Enact ethical policies and fair practices that serve the welfare of people and community" and the BML answer "Innovate and deploy resources to deliver more easily sustainable and profitable solutions." And so, a McFadden's R-squared Test was performed as a follow up to model this relationship and determine the log likelihood of this choice behavior (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Advanced Statistical Tests of Answer Set Six*

Fisher's Exact Test	Basic	Advanced
Statistical Significance (P-Value)	Significant	0.00922
Effect Size (Cramer's V)	Small	0.191809
Sample Size		190
McFadden's R-squared	24.6%	Variable explained 40% of model (33% Collectivistic   7% Individualistic)

For a deeper look and to better explain these quantitative results, 11 doctoral students in an educational leadership program were interviewed. The interviews took between 25 and 35 minutes and were conducted through Zoom, during the second month of the fall semester, and both during the day and evening. The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed. Common main ideas were color coded such as red for concepts like "building capacity", blue for "care for human/personal needs", and yellow for "communication skills". After coding, the categorical data took shape within and across

each of the semi-structured interview questions. Table 5 shows the content of participant responses, which in turn revealed themes regarding the visionary servant leader.

**Table 5**  
*Matrix of Interview Questions and Thematic Content*

Interview Question	Coded-Categorical Content	Themes
Do you notice leadership styles? How do you see evidence of those styles on a campus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• Present, visible, interactive, welcoming</li> <li>• Shared, servant, relational, supportive</li> <li>• Transformational, build capacity, enrich community</li> <li>• My way or no way, status quo, task-oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal/Relational skills</li> <li>• Service/Support leadership</li> <li>• Transformational vision</li> <li>• Personal/Relational skills</li> </ul>
Do you think students are aware of these differences, and if so, in what ways are they noticed by students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, if present, authentic, best interests at heart, collaborative, preferential treatment</li> <li>• Not specific approaches, but drawn to similar qualities/behaviors and being heard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal/Relational skills</li> <li>• Personal/Relational skills</li> </ul>
Why do you think some students would prefer BML in HE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitive nature, take-charge personality, task-oriented, independent</li> <li>• Expect structure, quick and accurate answers</li> <li>• Don't like group work or group errors, lack understanding of social relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service/Support leadership</li> <li>• Personal/Relational skills</li> <li>• Personal/Relational skills</li> </ul>
Why do you think some students would prefer VSL in HE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service-oriented, care for human/personal needs, collaborative, BML is negative</li> <li>• Prefer empathy, listening, awareness, encouragement, openness, empowering</li> <li>• Social reality of latest generation, know they don't know it all, mistakes are okay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service/Support leadership</li> <li>• Personal/Relational skills</li> <li>• Transformational vision</li> </ul>
What characteristics do you believe should be present in every HE leader and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-minded to diversity, service, care, listen and respond, shared leadership/collaboration, be visible and approachable</li> <li>• Progressive improvement, transformation, vision, strategic, organized, balance</li> <li>• Excellent communication skill, integrity, honesty, morality, promote school community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service/Support leadership</li> <li>• Transformational vision</li> <li>• Personal/Relational skills</li> </ul>

Analysis began after the first interview. The transcript was read and reread to help with the familiarity of the content. The next step was to highlight important key words or phrases. After this process was completed the next interview transcript followed the same process. When the commonalities of the word or phrases between each transcript were detected, the color-coding process began. Each subsequent interview was examined, and its content was color coded then added to the analytical framework of the study. A second pass allowed the coded content to be categorized around similar concepts of behavior. As the process continued, three main themes arose from the data: transformational vision, service/support, and personal/relational skill. These themes are exemplified by a statement by Interviewee D, “I try to hire transformational people to build the capacity of our organization through personal and professional engagement and fostering an enriching environment.” Interviewee H equated being driven with initiative, shared vision with the increased power of a collective, and listening as the best way to show how one values others. And finally, Interviewee J said, “Everyone is part of the process. [To do] what is best for the group, we must get in the trenches.”

Interviewees offered some final insights into the preference of leadership styles. They acknowledged that VSL seemed highly preferred, but that this should also be tempered with the situational aspects of leadership. What works in some cases may not work in others and a thoughtful leader will be able to distinguish when to lead by this approach and when to employ a different method. They also expressed that the VSL approach represented many great traits, but that these are often not seen in reality. Many wanted to see more of these qualities as they move through the ranks of leadership and to

encourage their use. And the final insight that was echoed by many of the interviewees was that “there is hope for the future.”

## **Discussion**

### **Summary**

What was expected from this research did not turn out as anticipated. The quantitative results indicated a much higher level of preference for characteristics and behaviors associated with the VSL approach according to the undergraduate students who took the survey (Mean = 70.97%). Interestingly, these preferences were consistent regardless of cultural background. It seems as though generationally, contemporary college students would like to see more VSL in HE instead of the old business-as-usual, neoliberal approach. Lastly, these ideas were confirmed and supported by qualitative interviews conducted with 11 students in their final year of an educational leadership doctoral program. Support for the VSL approach was evident as each phase of this mixed method study produced similar viewpoints.

### **Conclusion**

There were three research questions at the onset of this research. Through the quantitative analysis of survey data, qualitative analysis of interview data, and combining these discoveries into a deeper understanding of the topics presented here, the answers are as follows.

***Research Question 1: Between VSL and BML, which leadership model more closely aligns with the self-reported HE governance preferences of undergraduate students at HSIs?***

According to the survey results, almost every measure of VSL versus BML characteristics and behaviors, a majority of undergraduate students reported that they prefer VSL over BML. The first 10 questions showed elevated leanings toward the visionary-servant leadership approach, while the last two garnered some favor for the depiction of the business-management leader. This may be explained by the wording of the answer sets, their placement in the survey, or some other unknown variables. Still, a preference for the VSL model was easily discerned from the data.

***Research Question 2: What, if any, are the differences in the self-reported HE leadership preferences of undergraduate students at HSIs when compared across demographics?***

Only one demographic was truly tested in this study – that between people who may come from more collectivistic backgrounds versus those who may come from more individualistic backgrounds. A portion of the literature review for this study concentrated on this dichotomy, and so attention was given to this comparison. What was surprising was that regardless of cultural background, the undergraduate students who finished the survey mostly favored the VSL approach. This went against much of the literature except for Anderson et al. (2017) who found the differences more pronounced along generational rather than cultural lines. Other comparisons may come from this research at a later date, such as the difference between students majoring in business versus

education and social sciences which were evenly split according to the demographics of this study (see Figure 2).

***Research Questions 3: According to the perspective of educational leadership students, what reasons are given for identifying one leadership style as better than the other for HE?***

The interview data explained much of this preference as generational. Today's students have been taught concepts such as social justice, shared leadership, serving others, and being the transformational agent for a better world. Through these teachings, they may have come to view the business-management approach as distasteful and/or unbefitting the role of the educational leader. For now, the participants indicated that they want someone in charge who serves, supports, and guides them along their academic journey, which is indicative of VSL.

***Three Themes***

The three main themes that arose from this study were transformational vision, service and supportive leadership, and personal/relational skills. Transformational vision speaks to the idea that leaders take an active role in building a better future for their organization and all of its stakeholders. Service and supportive leadership addresses the needs of those in the organization as well as those served. And finally, personal/relational skills are those that allow a leader to be approachable, to listen to the voices and feelings of those they work with daily, and then make decisions based on what is best for the organization and its stakeholders. These are the behaviors of the visionary-servant leader as discussed by Collins (2001) and throughout this study.

### ***How can leaders make the change to more visionary-service?***

Many people think of leadership only in a top-down power dynamic, but in reality, its nature is often wide-ranging and, in many cases, contradictory (Lumby, 2019; Northouse, 2019). Kezar (2012) examined the convergence of bottom-up and top-down leadership. They presented three cases that described the potential for positive, negative, and mixed outcomes when these opposing leadership groups work in unison on the same initiatives. Additionally, Ho and Ng (2017) described the tensions that can arise within a distributed leadership approach. Nevertheless, research on democratically accountable leadership (similar to distributed leadership) has proposed that combining these seemingly counterintuitive concepts reduced feelings of inequality among members of a team while strengthening harmony and social justice (Mullen, 2008).

A critical examination of the educational system and its leadership practices is important at this time because of the societal implications inherent in this system (Schofer et al. 2020; Wang, 2020). In an attempt to provide a holistic and multidimensional framework of social justice leadership, Wang (2020) used *The Art of War* as a backdrop for examining educational leadership. They found that using these teachings as a lens provided leaders with a means for interpreting and addressing issues “at a time when justice is being challenged by the new political events” (p. 96). And with so many major societal events happening on the world stage, the significance of this topic is further emphasized.

Sosa-Provencio’s (2019) idea of a revolutionary ethic of care spoke to a visionary ideal of service. That study helped to reframe a social justice revolution as a leadership approach to reshape sociopolitical issues for the advancement of marginalized

stakeholders in the educational system. Bolden and colleagues (2014) encouraged the idea that academic leaders should take a position of citizenship in their community. By doing so, they believed that leaders would be able to affect change from within their organizations through enhanced engagement. In addition, Ishimaru and Galloway (2020) supported the use of a “hearts-and-minds-first” approach before engaging in organizational change measures as a way to ensure their initiatives’ success and eventually fostering educational justice. Each of these examples lends support to the notion and behaviors of the visionary-servant leader – one who is a member of their organization’s community first, who carries a dream of catalyzing the most success for that organization, and who works with the other members of the organization to create that lasting vision.

By choosing a role of service, leaders helped to foster egalitarianism and altruism in their followers, organizations, communities, and beyond (Northouse, 2019). This approach also aided in the cultivation of a commitment to addressing the needs of those less privileged in society, which in turn potentially leads to numerous and varied “positive outcomes for many throughout the world” (p. 367). Eva et al. (2019) stated that servant leadership “is in stark contrast to other leadership approaches... [because of] their self-concept as an altruist, moral person” (p. 114). Linuesa-Langreo et al. (2018) found that group citizenship behavior mediated the integration of servant leadership into a managerial strategy. They revealed that social capital – the benefits of social relations based on sharing, trust, and collective goal orientation – was positively influenced by servant leadership via cultivating the willingness to work together toward a more effective, team-like functioning.



Trastek et al. (2014) explored the servant leadership approach from within the health care industry. They found a pragmatic potential to applying a servant leadership style that increased the quality of health care for patients, and at the same time, decreased its associated costs. These authors concluded that servant leadership is the best model for an industry of people caring for other people. Higher education should be no different because teaching is the practice of people caring for and nurturing the educational and socio-economic potential of other people (Catacutan & Guzman, 2015; Shek et al., 2015).

When considering how to implement or strengthen this type of leadership, Garcia (2017) promoted a restructuring of the HSI definition to include culturally enhancing success measures that encourage inclusive organizational systems. San Pedro (2018) advocated developing and incorporating culturally sensitive pedagogy to challenge ideologies that favor “Whiteness”, which admittedly may be viewed as culturally disruptive pedagogy to counter systemic Whiteness in education. Zambrana et al. (2015) encouraged mentoring to guide and protect these emerging leaders, which was mirrored in work by Daly et al. (2014) and Sosa-Provencio et al. (2020). Another (Kang et al., 2020) followed Kotter’s change model to guide their transformation efforts, which they concluded, found greater buy-in and success. Wang (2020) defined the multiple dimensions of social justice leadership and Powell et al. (2012) provided a tool to measure productivity and improvements in HE.

One possible option was proposed by Sosa-Provencio and colleagues (2020) in the form of “Body-Soul Rooted Pedagogy.” They argued that their change model encouraged a critical examination of institutions, which was followed by a call for educators to “practice education politically, enact empowerment, center silenced

epistemologies, shape critical frameworks, engage social action, and infuse hope, health, and healing into classrooms” (p. 355).

Hamlin and Patel (2017) found 17 positive and 21 negative behaviors surrounding the effectiveness of institutional leaders. Many of the positive characteristics overlapped with aspects of the visionary-servant leader, such as being organized and informative as well as supportive and understanding. They encouraged and empowered followers to enact the institution’s mission while offering their problem-solving expertise. Moreover, Rehbock et al. (2019) found that students’ concept of academic leaders included caring, competence, and ambition (or vision), which differed from their view of a business leader. Each of these examples rivals the traditionalists’ business model for educational leadership and speaks to “an ideological vision that is discrepant from the status quo” (Gumus et al., 2018, p. 31).

Collins (2001) went so far as to say that VSLs were all around. They are not as noticeable as the celebrity leader who is hired to save a company, simply because VSLs do not see themselves as saviors. Instead, they work hard from the inside to find the right people for each task and keep their eyes on the eventual and continued success of the organization. The presence of VSL has been identified, paths to develop this type of leadership were detected, and the tools to measure the existence, cultivation, and successful institutionalization were all ascertained.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

One of the most important strengths of this research was that a mixed-methods approach was implemented. It is believed by many researchers that combining the results from a quantitative phase with the findings from a qualitative phase can increase the

validity and reliability of a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). The questionnaire provided the quantitative information necessary to gauge the preference of leadership approaches for undergraduate students attending one HSI. Even though this was self-reported information, the qualitative material helped to offset this limitation. While the interviews were conducted with students in an online doctoral program, most of these individuals work as administrators in public and higher education settings and all had spent the past three years learning about educational leadership and its various approaches, so their input was valuable.

Another strength of this study was the addition to the literature of a critique regarding the neo-liberalization of higher education and its connection to culturally-related philosophical orientations. As the quantitative results have shown, undergraduates at this particular HSI favored those behaviors and traits that align with the VSL approach regardless of cultural background as assigned in the binned collectivistic/individualistic variable. The data suggests that White students are just as likely to align with a preference for visionary-servant leaders in higher education settings as their non-White counterparts.

As with most research of this type, the standard issues regarding researcher bias, online surveys, self-reported data, and socially appropriate answers were all possible. A little over 3% of the student population at this HSI took part in the survey portion of this study. While it was a low response rate and a limitation, this was not unexpected considering that the survey was deployed starting in the last part of a summer semester. And, as described previously, there were issues with representation of the undergraduate

student body at this HSI including higher rates of female and education/social science students as well as low freshman representation.

Some other important limitations to note were the fact that this study was conducted with students from a single, regional Hispanic-serving institution. The limited pool from which information was gathered, can only show a narrow picture of the leadership preferences of contemporary undergraduate students and would be difficult to generalize. This is further complicated by the disproportionate participation of certain groups like seniors and education majors. That is to say, this research prompts the need for more research to be conducted with varying institutions, like flagship and Ivy League schools, and larger samples that could fill in the representation gaps.

Two possible limitations could have been the structuring of the forced answer sets in a dichotomous array and the binning of cultural backgrounds into individualistic/collectivistic categories. Binaries such as these rarely exist in reality. In fact, much of the research that went into building the BML characteristics showed that researchers of leadership saw common characteristics in these leaders as were attributed to the VSL approach, such as charisma, drive, and a strong work ethic. Although, great care was taken to sift through the many leadership qualities to find those that seemed, at face value, to be divergent from one another, others may argue that this tactic creates problems because it pushes the boundaries of each model in opposite directions when there is actually more overlap than portrayed in the answer sets. The same can be said with a cultural dichotomy, which some may say reinforces racial differences and does not consider the many variations of the modern family and its mixed backgrounds.

The last and most important limitation of this study was the inability to validate the survey before deployment. It was hoped to have student focus groups take the survey, offer suggestions to ensure that the answer sets covered all relevant characteristics and dealt with the dichotomous nature of the study which may have forced responses that did not fully align with participants' views. However, complications prevented this crucial step.

### **Implications**

This research is important for education because it could lend support for altering the leadership approaches within the administrative structure of higher education institutions in general and for HSIs specifically. As demographics in the United States have shifted, Hispanics represent the second largest segment of the U.S. population (Flores, 2017). Revilla-Garcia (2018) found that nearly two-thirds of Hispanic undergraduate students attend HSIs and Nittle (2019) revealed that Hispanics are the primary minority population in California (40%), New Mexico (48%), and Texas (39%). Texas public schools were 52.4% Hispanic in the 2017-2018 school year (Nagy et al., 2018). Finally, Chun and colleagues (2016) promoted student success theory which emphasizes cultural support to limit the acculturative stress felt by many minority students. Taken together, knowing whether students who attend HSIs would welcome and benefit from academic leadership that is more aligned to a collectivistic ethos like VSL is a matter of some magnitude (Preuss et al., 2019).

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## Appendix A

### Consent Form & Interview Guide

#### Q1.1 CONSENT FORM

##### Leadership at Colleges and Universities Questionnaire

**Why you may or may not wish to participate:** You may want to participate in this research as it could be used to improve leadership practices at West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) and other institutions of higher learning. You may not want to participate for other reasons such as time constraints, concerns about privacy, etc. Participation is voluntary, and we respect your choice.

**Age:** I state that I am eighteen years of age or older and wish to participate in this survey conducted by Eric M. Sosa, Doctoral Candidate in WTAMU's Educational Leadership program.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the research is to identify a leadership style that may be used in post-secondary educational settings which most closely resembles the preferences of today's college students. I am seeking 600 undergraduate students currently attending HSIs. The answer sets will gather critical information related to undergraduate students' preference for business management or visionary servant leaders in higher education. Upon agreeing to participate, you will be asked to answer survey questions, starting with demographics and then a series of 12 answer sets for the same question regarding your preferred leader behaviors. In total, you will respond to 23 survey questions and should take no longer than 5-7 minutes. This research contains no elements of experimental procedures. The findings from this research will be reported in aggregate form 1) to the researcher's doctoral committee, 2) to WTAMU leaders, and 3) in publication and presentation by the primary investigator, Eric M. Sosa.

**Duration:** The survey will take about 5-7 minutes to complete.

**Risks and/or Discomforts:** I understand that there are no more than minimal risks associated with my participation in this survey.

**Benefits:** I understand that the survey is not designed to benefit me personally, but the investigator hopes to gain insight into the preferences of today's undergraduate students regarding college and university leaders which may improve administrative behaviors and practices in higher education.

**Opportunity to ask questions or to withdraw:** I understand that I am free to ask questions or to withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which I am entitled.

**Confidentiality:** Reports of the survey findings will not include any student identifiers.

**For more information, questions, or concerns, you may contact:** Questions about the survey or project may be directed to Eric M. Sosa directly at [REDACTED] or [esosa@wtamu.edu](mailto:esosa@wtamu.edu). The survey has been reviewed by the WTAMU Institutional Review Board (IRB). For any questions or concerns about your rights related to participation in

this survey, you may contact WTAMU's IRB Director at 806-651-2732 or ar-ehs@wtamu.edu.

<i>Q1.2 Consent:</i>	<i>Confirmation</i>	
<i>Do you understand the information provided?</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Are you at least 18 years of age?</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Do you wish to participate in this survey?</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>

*Skip To: End of Survey If Consent: Any: Confirmation = No*

Q2.1: Preferred identity:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ I identify as... \_\_\_\_\_

Q2.2: Cultural background: <select all that apply>

- ☐ Asian/Middle Eastern
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic/Latinx/Chicano
- ☐ Native American/Alaska Native
- ☐ White/European American

Q2.3: Marital status:

- ☐ Single/Separated/Divorced
- ☐ Married/Cohabiting with a partner

Q2.4: Children:

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

Q2.5: Low-income background:

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

Q2.6: Employment status:

- ☐ I do not work.
- ☐ I work part time.
- ☐ I work full time.

Q2.7: First-gen status:

- No, I have family members who graduated college.
  - Yes, I will be the first person in my family to graduate college.
- 

Q2.8: Classification:

- Freshman
  - Sophomore
  - Junior
  - Senior
- 

Q2.9: Main discipline of study:

- Agriculture and Natural Sciences
  - Business and Accounting
  - Engineering and Computer Sciences
  - Education and Social Sciences
  - Fine Arts and Humanities
  - Nursing and Health Sciences
  - Exploring (undeclared) and General
- 

Q2.10: Course load:

- Part-time: Less than 12
  - Full-time: 12 or more
- 

Q2.11: Relation to campus:

- I am all or mostly an on-campus learner.
- I am all or mostly an off-campus learner.

Q3.1: For the following Q&A, there are no right or wrong answers.

I am only asking for your preference.


Also, the concepts described in each answer set may overlap considerably.


Please, just pick the one that most closely matches your preferred ideal of leadership behavior. The same question is used for all answer sets.





Q4.1: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?


- Use effective listening skills and be responsive to the needs of others
  - Be an effective speaker who is able to give clear direction and persuade others easily
-


-  Q4.2: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?
- Inspire excellence and commit to their followers' personal and professional growth
  - Coordinate various individual efforts and rely on own charisma to motivate followers
- 

-  Q4.3: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?
- Deliver supportive communication and clearly define a shared vision for the organization
  - Be competitive and industrious with high levels of self-awareness and ambition

-  Q4.4: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?
- Pay attention to the strengths of people and believe in continuous improvement
  - Concentrate on organizational structure and resources to fortify against vulnerabilities
- 

-  Q4.5: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?
- Demonstrate modesty, self-effacement, empathy, community building, and stewardship
  - Demonstrate confidence, self-promotion, intellect, task-orientation, and motivation

-  Q4.6: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?
- Enact ethical policies and fair practices that serve the welfare of people and community
  - Innovate and deploy resources to deliver more easily sustainable and profitable solutions
- 

-  Q4.7: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?
- Generate future-oriented energy and take knowledge-backed risks
  - Be concerned with current organizational stability and harmonious operation
-





Q4.8: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?

- Avoid public praise and give credit for success to others, circumstances, or just good luck
- Enjoy the public limelight and take full credit for their organization's success

---



Q4.9: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?

- Channel their ambition into the long-term success of the organization and its employees
- Pursue and create personal success through diligence and a strong work ethic

---



Q4.10: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?

- Be promoted from within the organization
- Be hired from outside of the organization

---



Q4.11: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?

- Value shared decision-making, but also take sole accountability for failures
- Lead by example, but can also take control of the activities of large groups of people

---



Q4.12: When you think about executive leaders at colleges and universities, for example deans and presidents, do you believe that the ideal leader should...?

- Do whatever it takes to produce the best result for the organization, no matter how difficult
- Analyze and then aggressively pursue the most efficient path to success for the organization

## **Appendix B**

### **Recruitment Email Script**

Hello <student name>,

I am a doctoral student in WT's Educational Leadership program and would like your help. My research focus is on leadership styles and behaviors found at colleges and universities and specifically at Hispanic-serving institutions. I am asking for 5-7 minutes of your time to complete a simple survey that attempts to determine your preference for one of two leadership styles. Your input is greatly appreciated and will help me in my studies and perhaps influence leaders in higher education for years to come. The link to the survey is below along with a copy of the Consent Form complete with a description of this research, your rights as a participant, and my contact information.

Thank you for your support,

Eric M. Sosa, M.A.Psy and Doctoral Candidate

West Texas A&M University

<Link to Survey>

<Copy of Consent Form>

## **Appendix C**

### **Post-survey Interview Guide**

This survey seeks to capture participants' self-reported preferences for characteristics commonly found in either business-management or visionary-servant leadership.

1. Do you notice leadership styles? How do you see evidence of those styles on a campus?
2. Do you think students are aware of these differences, and if so, in what ways are they noticed by students?
3. Why do you think some students would prefer BML in HE?
4. Why do you think some students would prefer VSL in HE?
5. What characteristics do you believe should be present in every HE leader and why?