Perspectives on Leader Development: An Interpretive Qualitative Study of Virginia Military Institute

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Dedication

To the Nest of Vipers.

Acknowledgements

Clearly, this journey would not have been possible without the backing of my wife, Lynn, and my two children, Jacob and Victoria. Their tolerance for my absences and inattention over the years has not gone unnoticed or unappreciated. They are my heart and soul.

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Abstract of Dissertation

Perspectives on Leader Development: An Interpretive Qualitative Study of Virginia Military Institute

According to the publications of Virginia Military Institute (VMI), leader development is a key tenet of the unique education offered there and the education of leaders is the Institute's reason for being. The college maintains that it produces leaders for society and that leadership opportunities are imbedded in every aspect of a cadet's experience. This study addressed a gap in the research, that is, to examine the leader development program at a military college through the perspectives of staff and cadets.

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of the participants with regard to the leader development dimension of VMI. The feedback-intensive model of leader development and learning frames this study and will help to ascertain how a military college like VMI, given its constraints and limitations, develops the leadership capabilities of its cadets, how it produces graduates who are well-suited for leadership positions upon their graduation, and how its leader development ethos contributes to its organizational identity.

The primary research question was, "How do cadets and staff perceive the leadership instruction they teach and receive at VMI?" Additional questions were 1) How does Virginia Military Institute develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets in order to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation?; 2) How does the Institute utilize the feedback-intensive model of leader development and practical application?; and, 3) How do cadets and staff perceive the Institute with regard to organizational identity?

Throughout this study, the researcher collected a considerable amount of data, through document review, semi-structured interviews with both key Institute staff and with cadets from all four classes, and with focus groups representing each class. In connecting the data collected to the research questions, it is the researcher's opinion that VMI, while not necessarily adhering as a single entity to the feedback-intensive model of leader development, has managed to envelop its cadets in a leader development cloud, relying on them to seize the opportunities presented to them.

Table of Contents

Dedication…….....iii

Acknowledgements…….iv

Abstract of Dissertation…….....v

Table of Contents…….....vii

Chapter I: Introduction……1

Overview…….1

The Problem in Practice…….....2

VMI and Leader Development……...2

Initiatives……5

Problem Statement…….....7

Purpose and Research Questions……8

Significance of the Study……...9

Conceptual Framework……10

Leader Development and Leadership Development…….10

Summary of the Methodology…….....11

Delimitations and Limitations……...12

Delimitations……12

Limitations……12

Definitions of Key Terms…….....13

Assumptions…….....14

Organization…….....15

Chapter II: Literature Review…….....16

Introduction……...16

A Brief History of Virginia Military Institute……...17

Historical Significance……...17

Early Years…….....18

The Expansion of an Idea……..20

National Defense Act of 1916…….....21

Contemporary History…….....22

Leader Development…….23

Background…….....23

Leadership Instruction Models……..24

Experience and Learning…….....25

The Military Model of Leader Development……27

College Leader Development Research……29

Background…….....29

Early Research…….....29

Progress…….31

Organizational Identity…….38

What is Organizational Identity?.....38

Early Research…….....38

Organizational Identity Theory…….39

The Individual and the Group……...39

Organizational Identity Criteria and Categories……...40

Organizational Identity and Image…….....41

Recent Research…….42

Leader Development at VMI…….45

Background……..…….....45

Vision 2039……45

Leader Development Research at VMI…….47

Summary…….....49

Chapter III: Methodology…….51

Background…….....51

Overview…….....51

Research Paradigm…….....51

Theoretical Perspective…….....52

Feedback-Intensive Models of Instruction…….....53

Does the Feedback-Intensive Model Apply?.....55

Qualitative Research and the Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study.…….....55

Qualitative Research…….....55

Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study……...56

Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study Data Collection…….....56

Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study Data Analysis…….....57

Restatement of the Research Question…….58

Purposeful Sampling…….59

Virginia Military Institute…….....59

Study Participants…..…….....60

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures……..60
Preparation for Data Collection…….....60
Selection of Participants……60
Interviews……..62
Semi-structured Interviews……62
Conducting Interviews…….....63
Focus Groups…….....64
Rationale…….....64
Instrument Design…….....65
Conducting Focus Groups…….....65
Documents…….66
Data Analysis…….67
Coding Data…….....67
Strengths and Weaknesses…….67
Internal Validity…….67
Reliability…….....68
Ethical Considerations…….....68
General…….....68
Anonymity and Security…….....69
Participation and Purpose……..69
Bias…….....70
Summary…….....74

Chapter IV: Presentation of the Data……75

Introduction…….....75

Study Participants…….....75

Document Review……..76

Website…….....76

Marketing and Recruiting…….....76

Semi-Structured Interviews…….....76

Staff…….....76

Cadets……77

Focus Groups…….78

Focus Group 1……78

Focus Group 2……78

Focus Group 3……79

Focus Group 4……79

Data Collection Process…….79

Member Checking……..80

Coding Procedures…….81

Emerging Themes…….....82

Theme 1 – Multiple Perspectives on VMI as a Unique Institution……...82

Website…….....83

Recruiting Materials……...84

Superintendent……...85

Commandant…….....85

CLE Director…….....85

Cadet Interviews…….....86

Focus Groups…….....86

Theme 2 – VMI Surrounds Cadets with Leadership Opportunities……..88

Website…….....88

Recruiting Materials…….....92

Superintendent……...93

Commandant…….....94

CLE Director……..95

Cadet Interviews…….....97

Focus Groups……...100

Theme 3 – Cadets are Responsible for Leader Development……..105

Website……105

Recruiting Materials……106

Superintendent…….106

Commandant…….....107

CLE Director…….....107

Cadet Interviews……..107

Focus Groups…….....108

Researcher Assumptions..…….....110

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations…….113

Introduction……113

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings……...114

The Uniqueness of VMI…..…….....115

The Feedback-Intensive Model at VMI……..…….....118

VMI Produces Leaders…….....121

Practical Implications for Leader Development in Higher Education..……..124

Critique of the Study……...125

Sample…….125

Researcher Perspective……..……...126

Implications for Future Research…….…….....127

Studies Employing Other Data from Different Institutions…….....127

Further Analysis Using Data Collected in this Study…….128

Conclusion……...129

Appendix A: Proposal Letter……...130

Appendix B: Institutional Consent Form…….132

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form…….133

Appendix D: Interview Protocol (Faculty and Staff)……..135

Appendix E: Interview Protocol (Cadets)……...137

Appendix F: Interview Protocol (Focus Groups)…….....139

Appendix G: Document Description Form…….141

Appendix H: Email Recruiting Message…….142

Appendix I: Reviewed Documents…….143

References……...144

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Overview

Virginia Military Institute (VMI) has established itself as a "leadership school" and this study will examine the opinions of cadets and staff concerning their perspectives of the leader development dynamic there. The purpose of this study is to examine how cadets and staff view leader development at VMI. This study of VMI's leader development program is a basic, interpretive qualitative study. This study will be organized into five chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Presentation of the Results, and Conclusions and Recommendations.

According to the publications of VMI, leader development is a key tenet of the unique education offered there and the education of leaders is the Institute's reason for being. The college maintains that it produces leaders for society and that the development of such leaders is the result of integrated and coordinated experiences throughout their four-year cadetships at VMI (VMI: VMI General Education, November 13, 2011).

According to VMI, leadership instruction is presented through a variety of methods. First, there is a base, mandatory Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) requirement for all cadets. Those cadets pursuing commissions as officers in the Armed Forces follow one track, which consists of classroom instruction as well as a laboratory period of practical application of leadership skills. Those cadets opting to follow the non-commissioning track take the classroom portion of their chosen ROTC program (Army, Navy, or Air Force) but replace the ROTC leadership laboratory periods with one taught by the Institute's Department of Psychology.

The leadership instruction conducted by the Department of Psychology for those cadets not pursuing a military commission addresses leadership theory and application, specifically addressing topics associated with teaching cadets how to survive in the post-graduation job market. In addition, there is no Corps-wide leadership instruction curriculum, consolidated program of practical application, nor staff dedicated to provide feedback to cadets on their leadership performance. There are other methods of leadership instruction, such as the chain of command of the Corps of Cadets, club and varsity athletics, and other cadet-run organizations.

The Problem in Practice

VMI and leader development. In 2004, both the Commandant of Cadets and the Deputy Commandant believed that VMI cadets are exposed to excellent leadership opportunities throughout their tenure as cadets, especially through their ROTC instruction (Levenson, 2004). As stated earlier, cadets opting to follow the non-commissioning track take the classroom portion of their chosen ROTC program but not the leadership lab portion. The Institute's Department of Psychology leadership lab that replaced the ROTC leadership labs does not concentrate on leadership theory or its application (Eicher, personal communication, 2005).

The mission of the Department of Psychology's Non-Contracting Cadet Leadership Program is to "educate, train, and develop those cadets not being commissioned in the Armed Forces regarding self-awareness, career and leadership development and post-VMI career transition" (Eicher, 2005, January 18). However, the primary instructor in this program concluded that the main goals of the program are

"clearly in the context of career and personal development with an aim toward successful transition to the workforce" (Eicher, personal communication, 2005).

Some on the Commandant's Staff would argue that cadets receive practical application in leadership theory through the day to day operation of the Corps of Cadets. In fact, the Commandant, in 2005, maintained that he is the leader development program at VMI, and is, therefore, responsible for training cadets to be leaders (Eicher, personal communication, 2005). To some extent, he is correct. Cadets do gain valuable experience by serving in leadership positions within the cadet corps. However, there is currently no consolidated program of practical application whereby every cadet must successfully serve in leadership positions during his or her cadetship in order to graduate, nor is there a program or dedicated staff to provide feedback to cadets on their leadership performance. Thus, the key element of the ROTC and service academy curricula, the practical application of leadership theory and accompanying formal feedback (United States Military Academy, 2002), is missing from the Institute's substitute program.

Cadets have opinions of their own concerning their leadership experience at VMI. In surveys conducted in early 2004, cadets commented on leadership-related topics such as organizational climate, organizational ethics, the Institute's leadership "report card," and cadet leaders' use of power (Meriwether, 2004). The sample size was small (N=25) but these cadet responses shed some interesting light on leadership education at VMI.

These cadets commented on the organizational climate at VMI, defined as the quality of the internal environment of the organization (Meriwether, 2004), through the rating of ten dimensions: reward system, organizational clarity, standards of performance, warmth and support, leadership, communication, innovation, feedback and controls,

teamwork, and involvement. Cadets evaluated each dimension, scoring it according to the standard they believed it should be and the level they believed it actually is.

Cadet respondents generally reported that the organizational climate at VMI is characterized by negative reinforcement, poor organization, poor support, and lack of leadership at the lower levels of the organization, poor communication, lack of feedback on performance, poor teamwork, and lack of involvement in the running of the organization by other than a few individuals. Interestingly, the greatest discrepancy came in the score cadet respondents gave to the feedback and controls dimension. They believed that feedback and controls were used for policing and punishment rather than to provide guidance and to help solve problems (Meriwether, 2004).

Many respondents saw their immediate cadet leaders as "neither all good nor all bad" (Meriwether, 2004), though many were seen as relying solely on coercive power and not inspirational leadership (Meriwether, 2004). Eicher (2004) confirms this, stating that many cadets do not accept the leadership theory taught in ROTC or the non-commissioning program. Meriwether's study concluded, in addition, that many cadets responded that leadership was provided, accepted, or rewarded and that the cadet organization is dominated by a few individuals rather than leadership being a shared endeavor (Meriwether, 2004). Most indicated that the focus seemed to be on self-gain, avoidance of punishment, and conforming behavior rather than solid leadership.

In addition, many respondents reported that there is no commonly recognized cadet chain of command below the company commander level (Meriwether, 2004). The author of the survey, an instructor in the leadership program of the Department of Psychology, determined that the Institute must develop a more supportive organizational

climate, an effective cadet chain of responsibility, and a core leader development program in order to enhance leader competency (Meriwether, personal communication, May 15, 2004).

Initiatives. A document entitled *Vision 2039: Focus on Leadership*, recently published by the Institute, outlines the plans for the future of leader development in cadets at VMI. As with other VMI publications concerning the Institute's reason for being, *Vision 2039* points out that VMI has been extremely successful in developing leaders for all walks of life, including industry, government, and the military. In addition, *Vision 2039* begins with a commitment by the Institute to ensuring that its long tradition of leadership and service continues well beyond the Institute's bicentennial and that this commitment is the driving force behind the Vision 2039 concept (Vision 2039, 2006).

Vision 2039 specifically illuminates the fact that "what makes VMI distinctive in the world of higher education is its mission to prepare educated, honorable, and steadfast leaders" (Vision 2039, 2006, p. 4). This blueprint for the Institute, to be implemented over the next 30 years, is centered on "improving the academic, military, and athletic programs and the infrastructure of the Institute to enhance cadet leadership development and the environment in which it takes place" through the Institute's "time-tested, hands-on environment" that "develops leaders by combining education, experience and training" (Vision 2039, 2006, p. 5). Thus, leadership is looked upon as being more than a skill, but something that has moral and ethical dimensions and is "directly influenced by the prevailing culture of the Institute" (Vision 2039, 2006, p. 5).

The program focuses on 14 points with which to deliver excellence, centered on four principal areas: academic, military, athletic, and the cultural/physical environment at

the Institute. Specifically, *Vision 2039* describes VMI as a "Military Institute and a Military Environment…delivering a unique education" (p. 8) with "70% of the Corps Commissioning with growth in the Guard and Reserves – Citizen Soldiers" (p. 8). "VMI will utilize a "Leader Development System – Program Unsurpassed" (p. 8) which takes place over a "four-year journey that produces young men and women of character to lead and serve our nation in times of peace and peril" (p. 9).

According to *Vision 2039*, the heart of the Institute's academic program is leader development, which ensures that VMI graduates will be "broadly educated, adaptive leaders of character who contribute substantially to their communities, their nation, and the world" and where a "major academic goal is to ensure that every VMI cadet, regardless of academic major, is properly prepared for leadership and citizenship in the 21st century" (Vision 2039, 2006, p. 10).

The Institute will educate cadets in a "structured military environment that places responsibilities on cadets and offers numerous leadership opportunities," adding value to the VMI diploma (Vision 2039, 2006, p. 12). In addition, VMI will "encourage cadets to pursue commissions in the National Guard and other Reserve components of the U.S. military," as "service life grows leaders by placing in their hands responsibility for the welfare of other young Americans as well as the care and readiness of major pieces of materiel" (Vision 2039, 2006, p. 12).

Vision 2039 is not a construction plan but a leadership plan. In addition to the methods already described, the new Center for Leadership and Ethics (CLE) will contribute to VMI's standing as a "leader in issues of the day by providing a venue for conferences and events of statewide and national prominence" (p. 16). In addition, a

"formal leadership program emanating from this facility will enhance cadet learning, civility, and ethics" (p. 16).

In addition to the CLE and as part of the Institute's recent focus on leadership, The Department of Psychology has added a new required course for all cadets. Beginning with the Class of 2010, all cadets are required to successfully complete a Leadership in Organizations course to graduate. This course, described as a "research-based academic course that is focused on the dynamics of character based leadership in an organization," integrates "both theory and practice, focusing on the interaction between leaders, followers and the situational context of the leadership process" (Lovell, 2007, p. 10). The new course includes self-assessment, self-disclosure, and small group exercises and is designed to make cadets aware of their "blind spots" in order to make them stronger leaders.

Problem statement. Colleges and universities are these days confronted by various and sundry challenges, and VMI is no different. Among the challenges facing the Institute are maintaining academic standards, addressing ongoing facilities maintenance issues, expansion, attracting high quality students, and operating under ever-challenging financial constraints.

Perhaps the most challenging issue facing VMI today is the requirement to continue to deliver a relevant education to its cadets. Specifically, VMI must provide an education that has value in today's national and cosmopolitan society, that is, one that transforms its graduates into people who are confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership, as its mission statement claims.

This study addresses the problem that VMI, and institutions like VMI, faces, that is, understanding the perceptions of stakeholder groups with regard to a critical component of the school's ethos. This study addressed a gap in the research, that is, to examine the leader development program at VMI, a military college, to explore its characteristics through the perspectives of two major stakeholder groups: cadets and senior staff.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study is to examine the perspectives of the participants with regard to the leader development dimension of VMI. The feedback-intensive model of leader development, in which students learn in an environment characterized by instructor and peer feedback and their own reflection, frames this study. This model will help to ascertain how a military college like VMI, given its constraints and limitations, develops the leadership capabilities of its cadets, how it produces graduates who are well-suited for leadership positions upon their graduation, and how cadets and staff perceive the Institute's organizational identity.

The primary research question is, "How do cadets and staff perceive the leadership instruction they experience and receive at VMI?" Additional questions are a) How does VMI develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets in order to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation?; b) How does the Institute utilize the feedback-intensive model of leader development and practical application?; and, c) How do cadets and staff perceive the Institute with regard to organizational identity?

Significance of the Study

The primary audience for this study is the leadership of VMI as well as education professionals, both at military colleges as well as civilian institutions whose organizational identities are centered on leader development. In addition, individuals who wish to initiate leadership programs and faculty interested in ways to engage students in contemplating the idea of entering into a leadership curriculum may find this study useful.

The information gleaned from this study is important for multiple reasons. First, the benefits of studying the critical element of the unique education offered at VMI supports the Institute's mission of producing leaders by exploring the perceptions of a limited number of cadets and staff members concerning leader development. Such information and perceptions may actually lead to changes being implemented. At the very least, this study may corroborate some of the Institute's current methods.

Putting another set of "eyes" on a project, a document, or a program often results in the discovery of issues that were overlooked, inadvertently or deliberately, when viewed through an internal lens. Therefore, an additional view, through the eyes of two stakeholder groups, may offer opportunities to understand the leader development program at VMI and would, in turn, produce cadets and graduates who are better prepared to assume positions of leadership, while at VMI and upon graduation. In addition, this study might assist anyone concerned with the future roles of our colleges and universities and, most importantly, with the future of our country from both a military and a civilian perspective.

Conceptual Framework

Organizational identity is that which is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization (Hatch & Schultz, 2004). In short, it is the one element that makes an organization unique. The stated mission of VMI is to "produce educated, honorable men and women, prepared for the varied work of civil life, imbued with love of learning, confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership, possessing a high sense of public service, advocates of the American Democracy and free enterprise system, and ready as citizen-soldiers to defend their country in time of national peril" (VMI: Mission and vision of the Virginia Military Institute, 2011). The Institute's mission clearly includes the phrase, "confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership," signifying the importance of leadership instruction at VMI, its relation to VMI's educational values, its place as a student learning goal, and its place as the critical element of the Institute's organizational identity.

Leader development and leadership development. A critical piece to understanding the concept of leader development is the ability to differentiate among several terms that appear to mean the same thing but are, in reality, quite different. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) is an international, nonprofit educational institution dedicated to advancing the "understanding, practice, and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide" (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p. 523). The CCL defines leader development as "the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes" which are described as "those that facilitate setting direction, creating alignment, and maintaining commitment in groups of people who share common work" (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p. 2).

The U.S. Army's definition of leader development is similar, being a "deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process" that produces "competent and confident leaders capable of directing teams and organizations to execute decisive action" (Department of the Army, 2006, p. 8-9). The important piece in these definitions is the emphasis on the individual, that is, the leader.

The CCL describes leadership development as a broader concept that incorporates leader development. Although leader development is centered on the individual, leadership development is "the expansion of the organization's capacity to enact the basic leadership tasks for collective work: setting direction, creating alignment, and maintaining commitment" (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p. 18). Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy seem to meld the two terms, defining leadership development as traveling along a "spiral of experience" whereby a leader acts, observes the consequences of his or her actions, and reflects on how he or she could change his or her actions to become a more productive leader (2002). In this "feedback-intensive" program, students develop their leadership abilities through feedback, multiple activities, and personal assessment.

Interestingly, the U.S. Army does not use the term leadership development, but concentrates on the development of the individual leader and his or her ability to influence an organization. For purposes of this study, we will focus on the concept of leader development, that is, the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes.

Summary of the Methodology

This study of VMI's leader development instruction is a basic interpretive qualitative study because its aim was to "seek to discover and understand" the

"perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). In addition, this study emphasized both the investigator's and the participants' firsthand experiences.

VMI, the site of the research, is a small, state-supported liberal arts and engineering military college. Located in western Virginia, in Lexington, VMI enrolls approximately 1600 cadets who all live in a single barracks building and are members of the Corps of Cadets.

Participants for this study included senior members of the administrative staff, and, of course, cadets themselves from the Classes of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Data collection in this study was centered on a document review of Institute publications, interviews with key staff and cadets, and cadet focus groups.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations. Creswell (2002) defines delimitations with regard to the specific populations to which a particular study applies and for which a researcher can make generalizations. This study specifically applies to the faculty, administrative staff, and cadets at VMI. Because this is a qualitative study, any generalizations to other military colleges employing leader development programs will be left to the reader.

Limitations. Limitations address conditions that restrict generalizations due to their resistance to control measures (Creswell, 2002). Limitations associated with this study included access to cadets and staff as well as possible reluctance to respond candidly to questions posed.

Another limitation, particularly in qualitative research, is that of researcher bias. The researcher's relationship with, affinity for, and loyalty to VMI could not only have affected interaction with participants but could also have impacted what data were

collected, how it was collected, and interpretations, findings, and conclusions for the study. In particular, the researcher has been associated with leadership theory and leader development, as a student, an instructor, and a practitioner for 29 years. As a result, the researcher has developed perspectives and opinions, supported by the U.S. Army's doctrine on leadership, concerning how a leader development program should be implemented.

To reduce the affects of personal bias in this study, the researcher implemented a rigorous qualitative study design. This included triangulation of data sources, member checks, and the use of a neutral third party to review interview protocol and questions, as well as to insure that written transcripts matched recorded responses. Last, although the researcher's association with VMI and leader development may be seen as a liability, it can be used, in reality, as an asset, allowing him to utilize his experience to recognize subtle variations in findings as well as to provide otherwise untapped insights.

Definitions of Key Terms

Cadet: a student at a military college or service academy.

Commandant of Cadets: the individual responsible for the daily military regimen at VMI.

Corps of Cadets: the student body at VMI.

First Classman: a senior at VMI.

Fourth Classman: a freshman at VMI.

Leadership: the ability of a person to influence others toward the achievement of a goal.

Leader development: the expansion of a person's capacity to be effective in leadership roles and processes.

Leadership development: the expansion of an organization's capacity to enact the basic leadership tasks for collective work.

Military college: a public or private institution of higher education employing a military model for student organization and everyday life.

Military Junior College: a two-year military college where cadets earn an associate's degree upon graduation.

Organizational Identity: that which is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 3).

Rat: a first semester Fourth Classman at VMI.

Reserve Officer Training Corps: federally funded and staffed organizations on college campuses charged with the training and commissioning of entry-level officers for the Armed Forces.

Second Classman: a junior at VMI.

Senior Military College: a four-year military college where cadets earn a bachelor's degree upon graduation.

Service Academy: Federally supported four-year institutions of higher education solely dedicated to providing entry-level officers for the armed forces.

Stakeholder: An individual who is involved with or interested in an organization.

Superintendent: the Chief Executive Officer of VMI.

Third Classman: a sophomore at VMI.

Assumptions

Staff members assumed some risk in commenting on the leadership program in place at VMI. This same risk, albeit to a lesser extent, extends to cadets, as well. In

addition, if the cadets questioned were under the researcher's command or control, the possibility that the researcher could influence their responses would exist, as it would if the faculty and staff were under his control. As the researcher is not employed by the Institute and has no control over the staff and cadets, this risk is minimal. The assumption made in this case is that the responses given by staff and cadets to the questions posed were truthful and that the respondents were not hindered in their answers by their association with or employment by the Institute. Any negative opinions offered by participants would become public knowledge and therefore carry some risk.

Organization

This chapter provides an overview of the study including the purpose of the study, the research problem, and the research design and methodology. The conceptual framework, as well as terms unique to the study, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations are also included. Chapter 2 will provide a background and a literature review as relates to this study, specifically investigating the history of the Institute and leader development there, and VMI's unique features as well as several leader development approaches. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology employed in this study. Chapter 4 will describe the results of the study. Last, Chapter 5 will provide interpretations of the findings, as well as conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

Because VMI was founded in 1839, over 170 years ago, there is considerable information on this institution available. Most of the information on VMI concerns its place in America's history through investigations of its founding, its growth, and the contributions of its graduates. Specifically, researchers often focus on historical books concentrating on VMI's founding and early years, as well as the contributions of its alumni to the Confederate war effort during the War Between the States. Literature concerning VMI's leader development program, however, is mainly that produced by the Institute for its official website, recruiting products, and, most recently, the initiation and advertising of Vision 2039, a program for improving VMI's leader development infrastructure over the next 30 years.

There is a wealth of information available concerning the literature of practice of leader development programs, both at colleges and universities as well as at other organizations. Sources examined for this study include books, military manuals concerning leadership, journal articles, college and university publications in both print and electronic form, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations. In addition, the United States Military Academy (USMA) Cadet Leader Development System (CLDS) and the Army ROTC Leadership Development System (LDS) specifically address the approach used in these two programs and are readily available.

However, empirical research specifically on the topic of leader development programs at military colleges is rare to the point of being nonexistent. Searches of

computerized databases such as ProQuest, ScholarSearch, Google Scholar, and ERIC for research published over the past 50 years (1960-2012) and using terms such as "leader development," leadership development," and "military college leader development" for empirical research concerning leader development programs at military schools did not produce the same abundance of information.

Organizational identity is a concept that goes back over one hundred years and there is a considerable amount of research available on this subject. Although the roots of the concept of organizational identity began in the early 1900s, and early contributions appeared in the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of the early scholarly exploration took place in the 1980s and 1990s. Organizational identity researchers investigated multiple aspects of this field, including individual and group identity, organizational identity criteria and categories, and image. The majority of this research exists in the form of articles that address the concept of organizational identity as it applies to corporations, business, education, sports, and the military.

A Brief History of Virginia Military Institute

Historical significance. "Confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership" (VMI: Mission and vision of the Virginia Military Institute, 2011). As this mission statement reveals, since 1839 VMI has been pursuing its mission of producing educated and honorable men and, since 1997, women, for positions of responsibility and educating them for leadership roles in society. Leadership instruction and development has been a cornerstone of the VMI program since its inception, when the Institute began training young men to assume duties as teachers, engineers, and officers in the Virginia militia. The National Defense Act of 1916, which created Army ROTC, established a bond

between VMI, a state-supported school, and the federal government, requiring that all VMI cadets complete ROTC instruction as a graduation requirement and, in the years following the Second World War until the early 1990s, commission as an officer in one of the armed services upon graduation. The development of leaders is as important to VMI today as it was when the Institute was founded and it is important to understand this historical relationship between VMI and leader development if one is to understand the contemporary leader development dynamic there.

Early Years. H. Wise's 1978 work, *Drawing out the Man: The VMI Story* is perhaps the most comprehensive study of VMI from its early years through most of the 20th Century. Founded in 1839 along the lines of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, VMI was the nation's first state-supported military college. Built on the site of a federal arsenal in rural Lexington, Virginia, the Institute was the idea of Hugh Barclay, a Lexington merchant, and John Thomas Lewis Preston, a Lexington attorney. Both saw the value of a military college where the cadets would follow an academic course of study while guarding the arsenal.

Interestingly, the founders did not seek to create a carbon copy of West Point in the Institute. Unlike West Point, whose sole purpose was, and is, to produce officers for the U.S. Army, the objective of VMI "was not to fit its graduates for a single profession, but to prepare young men for the varied work of civil life" (Conrad, 1997, p. 4). The military system, VMI's "characteristic feature" (Conrad, 1997, p. 4), though necessary to the atmosphere of discipline, was not the primary purpose of the course of study, and there is considerable material concerning the early years of the Institute.

Virginia in the mid-19th Century was in great need of teachers and engineers to help expand and consolidate its western frontier. Initially, as Andrew (2001) described it in *Long Gray Lines: The Southern Military School Tradition*, there was a requirement for Institute graduates to serve Virginia in some capacity. Cadets were schooled in the military arts and sciences so that they could assume positions of responsibility in the state militia and respond to emergency situations, if needed. Cadets also served in leadership positions at the company and battalion level. As Conrad (1997) relates in *The Young Lions: Confederate Cadets at War*, cadets in such leadership positions were held accountable for not only their own actions but also for the discipline of those cadets in their charge, regardless of previous social standing.

On May 15, 1864 cadet officers and non-commissioned officers successfully led the VMI Corps of Cadets into battle at New Market, Virginia against Union forces invading the Shenandoah Valley during the War Between the States (Andrew, 2001, pp. 33-34). Citadel cadets, led by cadet leaders, were also engaged in combat in South Carolina at Tulifinny Bridge on December 7, 1864, several years after their having fired upon a Union ship attempting to re-supply Fort Sumter in the early days of the conflict (Andrew, 2001). Both were putting into practice on the battlefield what they had been taught in the classroom at their respective institutions. As J.T.L Preston, one of VMI's founders, said, military discipline

> was believed to have special advantages in promoting the health of its pupils, in training them in habits of subordination to lawful authority, to industry and punctuality, and to accustom them to prompt obedience to every call of duty, small or great, without regard to preference or self-indulgence (Conrad, 1997, p. 17)

Thus, the military environment and leadership program at VMI in its early years was not designed to solely produce military officers, but rather to produce graduates who could confidently assume leadership positions in the various fields of Virginia society, including the militia if need be. By educating cadets in such a manner, VMI would, as John Dewey said, prepare its graduates to execute a "continuous activity which renders service to others and engages personal powers on behalf of the accomplishment of results" (Dewey, 1916, p. 319). It was the relevance of education that was important to John Dewey and the relevance of a VMI education was, and is, that it makes one a leader.

The expansion of an idea. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 expanded the idea of the state military college and by 1860 there were 12 state-supported or private military colleges in the United States, in addition to the federal Military Academy and Naval Academy (Conrad, 1997, p. vii). Eleven of these schools were in southern states and only four of them, VMI, the South Carolina Military Academy, the Georgia Military Institute, and the University of Alabama, remained open throughout the War Between the States and produced officers for the Confederate Army (Conrad, 1997).

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, which is most remembered for its impact on the founding of state agricultural and mechanical arts colleges with the assistance of the federal government, was also important to the development of leadership programs at institutions of higher learning because it provided the impetus for colleges to offer military training in addition to the agricultural and mechanical elements. Specifically, the act "stipulated that military tactics had to be included in the curriculum of these institutions" (Coumbe & Harford, 1996, p. 9).

Colleges such as Texas A & M University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute were created during this time and offer military training through a corps of cadets to this day. Coincidently, the literature published by these colleges today maintains that leadership instruction continues to be an essential element of their respective programs. Texas A & M University claims that its purpose is to "graduate exceptional leaders possessing character and competence who we motivate for service to the State and Nation" (Texas A & M: purpose, mission, and vision, 2004). North Georgia College and State University maintains that it is both "an academic and a leadership institution" that offers "many opportunities" for students to "enhance their leadership ability" (North Georgia College: military and leadership program, 2004).

In the years following the War Between the States and up through the early 20th century, the bond between the federal government and state military colleges would grow ever stronger. Coumbe and Harford's (1996) work on the history of the U.S. Army Cadet Command describes the progressive relationship between the federal government and college military training. In 1866, Congress authorized 20 officers to teach military science at land-grant institutions; in 1870, small arms and equipment were issued to such colleges; in 1880, retired officers were allowed to teach; in 1888, the War Department extended military instruction to schools outside the land-grant community; and in 1893, Congress approved the number of officers for such instruction to be raised to 100 (Coumbe & Harford, 1996).

National Defense Act of 1916. The National Defense Act of 1916 created Army ROTC and established a firm link between VMI, still a state-supported military college, and the federal government, a relationship shared by other universities and state military

colleges around the country. At this time, graduates who followed the ROTC course of instruction were commissioned as second lieutenants in the Army Reserve. They would, as in the early days of the Institute, undertake varied endeavors and respond to emergencies when called upon. The difference after 1916 was that they would respond not to Virginia but to the federal government.

Since the enacting of the National Defense Act of 1916 and the establishment of ROTC, all VMI cadets have been required to complete ROTC instruction as a graduation requirement and, in the years following the Second World War until the early 1990s, have been required to commission in one of the armed services upon graduation, under the rule of "mandatory commissioning." The Commandant of Cadets, the individual charged with the discipline of the cadets, also served as the Professor of Military Science, the department head of the Army ROTC department and an active-duty Army officer. As such, he (to date, all have been male) could call on his staff of instructors, active-duty Army officers and noncommissioned officers, to serve as his staff in the Institute's barracks.

Contemporary History. The relationship between VMI and the federal government changed in the early 1990s with the departure of mandatory commissioning. Following the end of the Cold War and, as a result of reductions in the size of the Armed Forces, cadets were no longer required to commission in the Armed Forces upon graduation. The departure of mandatory commissioning also resulted in the Professor of Military Science relinquishing his role as Commandant. Now an employee paid by the Institute, the Commandant of Cadets is no longer an active-duty officer and, therefore, no

longer has around-the-clock access to the officers and noncommissioned officers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force ROTC detachments.

As the current Deputy Commandant explained, this has resulted in the college no longer benefiting from having trained, professional military officers, outside of their capacities as ROTC instructors, in daily contact with all cadets to teach, coach, and mentor them in the art of leadership (Levenson, personal communication, 2004) and, on the Commandant's staff, deployments of personnel who serve in the National Guard and Reserve in support of the Global War on Terrorism have further depleted the ranks (Levenson, personal communication, 2004).

In 1996, the United States Supreme Court nullified VMI's single-sex admissions policy and the first female cadets entered VMI in August, 1997. While this event brought about significant efforts on the part of VMI leadership to assimilate women with regard to facilities, physical fitness requirements, fraternization policies, and education on gender relations for the all-male Corps, it did not significantly affect leader development at VMI. Female cadets must complete the same courses to graduate and are offered the same leadership opportunities as their male counterparts.

Leader Development

Background. Leadership programs are appearing on American campuses in ever-increasing numbers and developing leadership skills and abilities in students is becoming more prevalent in college and university mission statements (Cress et al., 2001). In 1998, the CCL estimated that nearly 700 college leadership programs existed in the United States (Cress et al., 2001). In recent years, more research concerning the characteristics of effective leadership programs has been conducted. Because of this increase in the number

of leadership programs available to college students, a general consensus as to how to teach leadership and develop a student's leadership capabilities has arisen. Though not specifically oriented on military schools, these programs have applications at such institutions.

Leadership instruction models. The CCL has, over the past thirty years, developed multiple training programs and research initiatives designed to make people more effective leaders (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). Critical to the CCL's leadership development approach is the idea of the "feedback-intensive program," or FIP (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p. 25). In such a program, students develop their leadership abilities under an experience characterized by five defining features: "rich and comprehensive feedback," "challenging and relevant" content, the use of "multiple methodologies and activities," the establishment of a "safe and supportive learning environment," and the integration of "assessment, challenge, and support" (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p. 27). Although each element is crucial, the assessment element characterizes the best developmental experiences because they provide a start point for future development, and give people an "understanding of where they are now: their current strengths, the level of their current performance or leader effectiveness, and what are seen as their primary development needs" (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p. 6).

The "rich and comprehensive" assessment that McCauley and Van Velsor speak of comes in the form of behavioral assessment, "focusing on what managers do and how they are perceived," and personality assessment, the "insight into the deeper orientations and preferences that often underlie behaviors" (2004, p. 35). Assessment comes in almost limitless forms: performance appraisals, customer evaluations, surveys, 360-degree

feedback, self-assessment, peer evaluations, and reflection. This period of assessment allows students to address the gaps between their current capacities and goals.

The concept of challenge is often implemented through forcing a person to look inward while being observed and rated by others and having weaknesses exposed. Sources of challenge include structured activities that provide challenge through "goal-directed, live-action, task-based interactions" (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p. 41) that may involve an entire class or small groups that act independently or engage with each other to accomplish a task. These activities may take the form of leaderless group discussions, simulations, and targeted exercises.

Crucial to an effective feedback-intensive program is a safe and supportive environment where participants can "appreciate their strengths," "feel accepted and respected," and "view the feedback as relevant and useful" (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004, p. 46). The support element is critical to assisting participants in focusing on the data and not losing sight of what they are doing well and what they need to improve on. Without such support, participants may experience undue anxiety over getting rated which may affect their further participation and inhibit improvement. Creating a safe and supportive environment includes teaching to different learning styles, encouraging different perspectives, allowing time to practice new behaviors, and providing time for the consolidation of feedback (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004).

Experience and learning. Kolb's theory that people "learn more from their experiences when they spend time thinking about them" (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 2002, p. 49) supports this feedback-intensive model of reflection and assessment. His experiential learning theory is centered on the Action-Observation-Reflection (AOR)

model, which depicts leader development as being enhanced when one's experience involves the three aforementioned processes.

Kolb's model is based on four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and testing in new situations (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, in the instance of a cadet at VMI, if the cadet acts without observing the consequences of that action or without reflecting on its significance, he or she will not learn from that experience and may not develop into a more effective leader.

A critical element to this theory is a system of mentorship and feedback that supports student reflection and growth. As Kolb explains, learning is a continuous and ongoing process based experience and the job of the educator, or mentor, is "not only to implant new ideas but also to dispose of or modify old ones" (1984, p. 28). Kolb's theory model supports the feedback-intensive model, as both are based on a process "whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984, p. 38).

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors is a student development model that has applications in the leadership development arena, as these vectors support the CCL concept of assessments. Chickering and Reisser proposed that the vectors serve as "maps to help us determine where students are and which way they are heading" (1993, p. 34). The vectors are: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Chickering and Reisser maintain that, to be effective in educating the "whole student," colleges must "hire and reinforce staff members who understand what student development looks like and how to foster it" (p. 44).

Welch (2000) saw the need for leadership students to develop analytical and problem-solving skills, to learn to communicate and work effectively as members of a team, to have experience working in groups, to learn to work with people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and academic disciplines, to learn to establish goals and motivate others to achieve those goals, and how to speak and write effectively.

In outlining the Eisenhower Leadership Development Program at Texas A&M University, Welch explains that it is an interdisciplinary, one-semester course that blends classroom instruction, exercises and activities, and semester-long group projects where students are graded on both their individual contributions to the group and the group's performance as a whole. In addition, and most importantly, group members evaluate each other's contributions, allowing students to "better understand their leadership styles, strengths, and weaknesses" (Welch, 2000).

The military model of leader development. Another model of leadership instruction and development is the USMA program for transforming cadets into commissioned officers. The CLDS is "designed to coordinate and integrate cadet developmental activities across the entire West Point experience" (United States Military Academy, 2002, p. 1).

The leader development program at USMA is centered on five "keys:" readiness, developmental experiences, feedback and support, reflection, and time. Students must be ready to learn from their experiences. Developmental experiences must challenge students through novelty, difficulty, conflict, and the types of events that "set the occasion for growth" (United States Military Academy, 2002, p. 22). Students must receive feedback on their performances and experiences and they must feel secure

enough to make mistakes for the sake of growth. Again, as in other concepts, reflection is critical to understanding one's experiences and improving on one's abilities.

The curriculum followed by those cadets seeking to earn a commission in the U.S. Army through the college- and university-based Army ROTC program is another example of an experience-based leader development program. In 1987, the Army standardized its on-campus ROTC curriculum to consist of basic soldier skills, field exercises, physical training, and leadership instruction (Coumbe & Harford, 1996).

In 2003, the ROTC curriculum was adjusted again. Its name was changed from Military Science to Military Science and Leadership and it was further subdivided into classroom instruction periods and leadership lab periods. During these lab periods, cadets put into practice the skills they learn in the classroom by applying them in rigorous field training scenarios, and are then assessed on their performance. Known as the Leadership Development Program (LDP), this apparatus relies on an incremental exposure of cadets to leadership positions of increasing responsibility and requires cadets to complete self-assessments a part of their evaluations.

The cornerstone of the Army ROTC curriculum and the LDP since 1999 has been *Army Leadership*, the primer for leaders at any level of the Army. The first all-inclusive volume on leadership produced by the Army, Field Manual 22-100, described Army leadership through tenets that can be applied to any scenario or profession. The manual describes leadership as being the "influencing of people – by providing purpose, direction, and motivation – while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization" (Department of the Army, 1999, p. 1 - 4).

Army Leadership describes what leaders must be, know, and do, as well as the human dimension of leadership, direct leadership skills, organizational leadership, and strategic leadership. *Army Leadership* was revised and updated in 2006, as Field Manual 6-22. Interestingly, the Army's definition of leadership has not changed with the publishing of a new leadership manual.

The critical element to the Army ROTC curriculum is that of exposing cadets to the concepts associated with leadership (influencing, operating, and improving) in the classroom and requiring cadets to apply them in the leadership lab and on other field training exercises. The other service ROTC curricula (Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force) have similar leadership lab periods where skills learned in the classroom portions of the curricula are applied.

College Leader Development Research

Background. Campbell (1971) described the leadership training literature available at the time as "voluminous, non-empirical, non-theoretical, poorly written, and dull" (p. 565). Although the subject of leadership has been explored and defined and the analyzing of leadership programs has been ongoing for the past 40 years, most leadership training programs and philosophies have not been adequately validated.

A quarter of a century later, Fiedler (1996) concluded that, though the number of leadership training programs continues to increase, there still exists is a scarcity of research on leadership training with most training programs being both untested and of uncertain value. A review of the literature on the subject confirms this assertion.

Early research. Breen (1970) conducted a study of leadership programs at 148 mid-western (Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin) colleges and universities through

the use of a questionnaire. Of the 60 institutions that responded, 40 indicated that they had leadership programs. Breen determined, through the respondents, that these leadership programs had several characteristics in common, including the use of a small-group format, experience-based learning, an interpersonal and problem-solving setting, and feedback sessions built in to the program. Overall, Breen found that older students should be able to peer-educate underclassmen and that instructors must continually assess the skill level of student leaders. This study is limited by its focus on a few Midwestern schools. In addition, the use of a survey may not guarantee the level of detail needed to make such an assessment.

Gregory and Britt (1987) conducted a similar survey of over 1300 institutions across the United States and discovered almost 500 leader development programs. In cooperation with the CCL, they used not only surveys but also campus visits and interviews. The findings of this study would appear to be more representative, as the investigators actually set foot on the campuses and interviewed faculty and students associated with the program. Identifying roughly the same elements of an effective leadership program as Breen, they nevertheless concluded that it was impossible to select the best components from among those identified due to a lack of empirical data addressing program effectiveness.

This study would appear to be more applicable than Breen's, as it was conducted at a much larger number of institutions from all across the country rather than from an isolated area. However, the investigators may have missed a crucial element associated with a leader development program, one that addresses the idea that a student's growth as

a person and a leader varies based on the student in question and on his or her strengths and weaknesses.

Simonds (1988) reached much the same conclusion. In a survey resulting in responses from 87 colleges and universities, he noted that the majority of these institutions did not use scientific methods to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs, but, rather, used subjective evaluations to do so. Simonds concluded that these programs did not use scientific methods nor hold themselves to rigorous scientific standards, so their effectiveness could not be measured.

The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) (1994) Student Learning Imperative included the assumption that learning, personal development, and student development are interconnected and that college-educated persons can be identified by their cognitive skills and their ability to apply what they have learned. In addition, the ACPA outlined three common elements of leadership programs as having a direct impact on student development: opportunities for service, experiential activities, and active learning through collaboration. Critical to this process of development was self-reflection, evaluation of skills, values, and knowledge.

These studies pointed to a discernible pattern among leadership training programs at the college level. At the same time, they do not prescribe the components necessary for teaching leadership skills to college students.

Progress. The concept of peer-feedback was corroborated by Buckner and Williams (1995), whose study examined leader training programs for college students using a theoretical model of organizational effectiveness and leadership. The investigators developed a “Competing Values Instrument” to assess how student leaders

exhibit various leadership behaviors and perform various leadership roles. This questionnaire was sent to 300 leaders of registered student clubs and organizations at a four-year university in the southwest United States. A total of 76 students responded and the investigators concluded that "student leaders are able to supplement their traditional academic education and develop additional skills and abilities" (Buckner & Williams, 1995, p. 20). In addition, and most importantly, they determined that university leadership training can be improved through training on areas where a student has a self-perceived deficiency, that training should include communication, team building, and mentoring, that older students should be given the opportunity to mentor younger students, and that instructors should continually assess the students' skill levels (Buckner & Williams, 1995).

The study conducted by Buckner and Williams was limited in that it was conducted at only one institution. The study only asked students how they see themselves performing as leaders at the present time and not how they think they should be performing. Last, the investigation did not include an assessment of the student from his or her instructor to make a comparison of perspectives and opinions. Despite these issues, this study clearly required the respondents to reflect on their performance as leaders and corroborated the need for peer mentorship, reflection, and constant assessment based on participant responses pointing to the critical need to assess student skill levels to determine deficiencies and progress.

In a study of two leadership programs, at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs and the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, Hackman, Olive, Guzman, and Brunson (1999) found that both entailed a process that encouraged self-renewal,

improvement, and communication. Both programs pointed to the idea that leadership is a transformational process that must begin with the individual student, extending later to others. In addition, both programs were characterized by a full range of leader development opportunities and experiences.

Welch (2000) saw the need for students to develop analytical and problem-solving skills, to learn to communicate and work effectively as members of a team, to have experience working in groups, to learn to work with people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and academic disciplines, to learn to establish goals and motivate others to achieve those goals, and how to speak and write effectively.

In describing the Eisenhower Leadership Development Program at Texas A&M University, Welch explains that it is an interdisciplinary, one-semester course that blends classroom instruction, exercises and activities, and semester-long group projects where students are graded on both their individual contributions to the group and the group's performance as a whole. In addition, and most importantly, group members evaluate each other's contributions, allowing students to "better understand their leadership styles, strengths, and weaknesses" (Welch, 2000).

A study conducted from 1990 to 1998 by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation funded projects throughout the United States focused on leader development programs on college and university campuses. This long-term study utilized in-depth archival review, surveys, interviews, and site visits at 31 colleges and universities; however, despite the wide variety of institutions studied, the military college was not represented.

This study confirmed that leader development programs on college campuses can be effective if they make use of the certain "hallmarks," that leadership can be both

taught and learned using specific methods, and that such programs can be designed to fit a particular setting. The nature of this study was clearly more in-depth and dug much deeper into the leader development experience of students than earlier studies which only made use of an impersonal survey or questionnaire.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation study resulted in the researchers determining that the "hallmarks" of exemplary programs include: a strong connection between the mission of the institution and that of the leader development program, support for the program across the institution, a commitment among instructors to developing students, a coordinated leadership development strategy which includes experiential learning, and a clear evaluation plan. Common practices include self-assessment and reflection, skill building, problem-solving, intercultural issues, service learning and servant leadership, student leadership programs, and mentoring (Burkhardt & Zimmerman-Oster, 2000).

DiPaolo (2002) addresses two gaps in the research on leader development programs in his study of the experiences of students completing a leadership retreat as part of a leader development program at a four-year college. He identified the two gaps in the research as the assessment of initiatives and the type of assessments being utilized along with the information they provide. DiPaolo makes the argument that we do not really know what is happening in such programs and that the poor qualitative inquiry that does take place is typically in the form of a brief survey and includes no interviews or actual visits to the programs. This methodology does result in some understanding of the experience but does not provide any detail concerning a student leader's growth over time. In effect, we get a snapshot that requires deeper exploration (DiPaolo, 2002).

DiPaolo interviewed students at a mid-western school before and after they completed a five-day leadership retreat seminar. Six of the 60 retreat participants were interviewed; all were white males and each held a leadership position in a university organization. In addition, the researcher observed the six participants throughout their five-day program, resulting in six case studies. Through a cross-case analysis, the researcher identified three recurring themes, as identified by his participants, concerning their development as leaders. First, all viewed leadership as a group process. Second, all believed that leadership is performed best when rooted in a core system of beliefs. Last, the participants left the retreat feeling more confident as a leader because he had the opportunity to clarify his values and learn from his experiences (DiPaolo, 2002, pp. 32-33).

DiPaolo's research revealed that the study of leader development is much more than a set of metrics that can be applied without consideration of the environment. More important in the study of leader development is the in-depth investigation into the students involved, the environment, and the application of the curriculum. The researcher admits that the study was limited in scope, following only six white male subjects as they progressed through a short retreat at a single school.

The data gleaned from this study show us that the detailed study of the students involved and their reactions to the both curriculum and to the situations in which they found themselves, such as team building exercises, projects, and skills training along with their own reflection and growth over time, can be applied to other leader development programs. DiPaolo concludes that, to truly uncover the leader development experience, a researcher must undertake a qualitative investigation into his or her subjects' personal

stories rather than merely scratching the surface with a superficial study attempted through the use of an impersonal survey or questionnaire, though a study of six white men does not necessarily represent the student perspective on the leadership program, and caution must be exercised when generalizing these findings.

Cress, et al. (2001) conducted a study "specifically designed to assess whether leadership education and training has a direct effect on college students' leadership ability as well as their personal and educational development" (p. 15). Their study, a longitudinal examination of quantitative data from 10 institutions, was aimed at determining if leadership programs were effective in enhancing student knowledge and skills and determining if a relationship existed between leader development and other educational outcomes. The institutions studied varied in size and type, from a small, religiously affiliated school to a large, public research university, but did not include a military college.

The participating students in the study numbered 875 and included those who identified themselves as participating in a leadership program and those who did not. The students were surveyed during their first year in college and again during their last year. The survey questions asked students to describe changes they noticed in themselves with regards to their understanding themselves, their interest in developing others' leadership abilities, their civic responsibilities, their decision-making skills, and their understanding of leadership theories, among others.

Overall, participants who engaged in leadership programs rated their level of change as being much more significant than those who did not, particularly their understanding of "self." Importantly, those that were in leadership programs reported

positive growth and change on the developmental outcomes that were identified by the leadership program directors. In general, leadership program participants showed significantly greater growth in civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theory, and personal values compared with those who were not in the program.

Clearly, caution must be exercised when generalizing the findings of this study, as the researchers only looked at 10 institutions and there are variables that cannot be accounted for based on the data collected. For example, different schools incorporate leader training in different ways and student level of involvement in leadership programs can vary. As in other studies utilizing surveys, the details of the leader development experience are not fully investigated.

The implications for colleges and universities are readily apparent. Most importantly, institutions that are in the business of producing leaders for society must give priority to their leader development programs and ensure that such programs are an integral part of the academic curriculum rather than an addition to it. In addition, the role of faculty in student leader development should be addressed. The researchers themselves call for “additional qualitative studies” to “further examine the components of successful leadership programs as they differentially impact students within and across institutions” so that colleges and universities “interested in aligning their mission statements and goals for student learning and growth with tangible outcomes” can use such programs to do so (Cress, et al. p. 24).

Organizational Identity

What is organizational identity? Albert and Whetten (1985) put forth the idea that the phenomenon of organizational identity happens whenever members of an organization ask themselves, "Who are we?," What business are we in?," or "What do we want to be?" (p. 90). Organizational identity is defined as "that which is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization" by Hatch and Schultz (2004, p. 3). Organizational identity helps to create a sense of collective self, it makes a group or organization perceive itself as distinct and different from others, and it is also influenced by how others perceive the organization.

Early research. Originally, organizational identity research dealt with corporate marketing and communication. However, today organizational identity is seen as a critical element of an organization's brand by human resource managers, organizational change agents, strategic planners, and top executives (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 2). Also, potential employees, enlistees, and students want to see and hear positive things about the organization they are considering joining and they want to feel confident that they have made the right choice. Such information must come from credible sources. Of course, the opposite could also be true, should negative characteristics be associated with a particular organization.

Another critical element to this corporate branding is that of follow through by employees on the image put forth by a corporation's marketing effort. They "must personally subscribe to the messages that they are communicating with their behavior; this behavior must build a strong reputation and rest in the organization's identity" (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 2).

Until recently, social psychological theories of the self focused on the individuated self concept, that is, "a person's sense of identity was unique and different from others" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996, p. 66). Cross-cultural perspectives, on the other hand, tend to focus on the social aspects of the self where individuals more and more "define themselves in terms of their relationships to others and to social groups" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996, p. 66). Thus, individuals wish to identify or define themselves with respect to their relationships with others and with larger groups, deriving much of their identity from such groups.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) classified this fundamental need to belong as an innate feature of human nature. Prentice, Miller, and Lightdale (1994) referred to this phenomenon in terms of common bonds and common identities deriving from both an individual's personal self (aspects of self that differ from others) and his or her social self (aspects that reflect assimilation to others or social groups). Clearly, organizational identity is a concept that is both rooted in an organization's history and heritage and in its relationships to other identities and images (Hatch & Schultz, 2004).

Organizational identity theory.

The individual and the group. Organizational identity theorists tend to describe the concept of organizational identity in terms of the marrying of individual and organizational attributes. Hall, Schneider, and Nygren (1970) defined organizational identification as "the process by which the goals of the organization and those of the individual become increasingly integrated and congruent" (pp. 176-177). Similarly, Patchen (1970) labeled organizational identity as shared characteristics, loyalty, and solidarity.

Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin (1983) noted that organizational cultures "carry a claim to uniqueness – that one institution is unlike any other" (p. 438). Thus, an organizational identity that is both positive and distinctive will result in the recognition, support, and loyalty of both the members of the organization as well as from others.

Although the individual sees himself or herself partly in terms of his or her own characteristics, identification is more so the "perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group, involving direct or vicarious experience of its successes and failures" (Martin, et al, 1983, p. 153). People tend to wish to identify themselves with groups that are successful, distinctive, prestigious, and have good reputations. This desire to be associated with success "induces the individual to engage in, and derive satisfaction from, activities congruent with the identity to view himself or herself as the exemplar of the group and to reinforce factors conventionally associated with group formation" (Martin, et al, 1983, p. 153-154).

Organizational identity criteria and categories. Albert and Whetten (1985) defined the organizational identity concept as having three criteria. First, organizational identity addresses characteristics that are viewed as the essence of the organization (criterion of claimed central character). Second, organizational identity addresses features that distinguish the organization from similar organizations with which one might compare it (criterion of claimed distinctiveness). Last, organizational identity points to features that maintain a sense of continuity (criterion of claimed temporal continuity).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) developed the concept of social identity theory (SIT) whereby individuals classify both themselves and others into various social categories.

Some of these may include membership in clubs or organizations, religion, gender, and age. The purpose of this social classification is two-fold: "it cognitively segments and orders the social environment, providing the individual with a systematic means of defining others and it enables the individual to locate or define himself or herself in the social environment" (p. 135).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) also concluded that social identification is derived from identification with a group and that organizational identification is a specific form of social identification. An individual's social identity, therefore, may be the result of his or her association with the organization as well as his or her connection with any number of sub-groups.

Organizational identity and image. The concept of organizational identity extends to the arena of marketing, as well. For many years, there has been a strong focus on the image with regard to products, as well as organizations and corporations, with regard to marketing. Berg (1985) focused on outsiders' perceptions and defined image as the public's perception or impression of an organization. Fombrun (1986) defined reputation as the collective judgments by outsiders of an organization's actions and achievements. Dutton and Dukerich (1991) argued that organizational image is the way that organization members believe others view the organization. Whetten et al. (1992) argued that image is the way organizational elites, such as internal upper-level managers, directors, and executives, would like outsiders to see the organization. Dutton et al. (1994) relabeled this definition as "construed external image" (p.353)."

Alvesson (1990) emphasized "the role and significance of corporate images from an organizational perspective, emphasizing the management of images as a crucial skill

in the field of activity in a particular kind of socio-cultural context and in specific organizational conditions" (p. 161). Alvesson maintains that the strengthening of an organization's identity, and its image, will naturally result in the strengthening of the individuals' identities and their association with the organization, which will, in turn, strengthen the organization and its image.

The concept of image can simultaneously be defined as a person's picture of an object and the communicated attributes of an object; that is, what is being received and what is being projected (Alvesson, 1990, p. 163). Sometimes, the image lies in between what is being sent and what is being received. Bernstein (1984) tells us that image "means a fabrication of public impression created to appeal to the audience rather than to reproduce reality" (p. 13). Berg and Gagliardi (1986) suggest that there is a need for falsification so as to show an organization as something other than what it is. Boorstin (1961) says that an image is created to present and make a certain kind of believable impression, but that "an image is ambiguous" floating "somewhere between the imagination and the senses, between expectation and reality" (p. 193). This concept of organizational image extends not only to external individuals and groups but also to employees, who are an important audience.

Recent research. Hatch and Schultz (2004) concluded that recent academic research on organizational identity has led to the emergence of four central themes. The first is the theme of multiple identities. The second theme is that of stability and change in organizational identity. The third theme is the construction, management, and control of identity through narrative or discourse. The fourth and final theme is that of communicating identity to an audience through communication management.

Early notions of organizational identity suggested that all organizational members shared the same attitude towards the organization's identity. Recent research, however, has led to the perspective that an organization's identity may differ between the various members of that organization. Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) determined that, although the term "symbol" can include just about anything that conveys meaning, the focus on the "role of symbols in creating and maintaining meanings in organizations" (p. 276) has narrowed. Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) define organizational symbolism as encompassing the "examination of artifacts, language, metaphors, dramaturgy, rites and rituals, stories, and myths" (p. 277). Thus, an organization's identity is grounded in cultural assumptions and values because "culture defines the shared frame of reference that typifies organizations and guides members' perceptions and behavior" (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997, p. 277). Golden-Biddle and Rao (1997) corroborate this opinion by defining organizational identity as the "shared beliefs about the central, enduring and distinctive characteristics of the organization" and maintain that organizational identity "constitutes part of the shared meanings held by members and is "an important and collectively-held frame invoked by members to both interpret and to take action" (p. 315).

Looking through the lens of the second theme, stability and change, some researchers now see organizational identity as a dynamic process rather than a static, unchanging ideology. Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (1996) see organizational identity as both dynamic and durable, the former leading to the latter. Organization members label their organization but the meaning associated with these labels changes so that identity can actually change over time. They define organizational identity as a "potentially precarious and unstable notion that is frequently up for redefinition and revision by

organization members," something critical to the survival of the organization, "otherwise, the organization stagnates in the face of an inevitably changing environment" (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 1996, pp. 350-351).

The third theme is centered on the concept that both individual and collective identity is the result of narrative and discourse. The narrative aspect is the result of the use of language to develop meanings. Eventually, this use of language in the development of identity leads to ongoing discourses, or discussions (Hatch & Schultz, 2004). Czarniawska (1997) defines identity as "a continuous process of narration where both the narrator and audience formulate, edit, applaud, and refuse various elements of the ever-produced narrative" (p. 412). Alvesson and Wilmott (2002), too, claim that such narrative and discourse result in individuals being able to redefine work, skills, and organizational values.

The last theme, communicating identity to an audience, is concerned with ranking systems that compare organizations to others and attempts to influence the attitudes of others with regards to one's own organization (Hatch & Schultz, 2004). Elsbach and Kramer (1996) found that threats to organizational identity actually help to "affirm positive organizational and social identities" and also are instrumental in "shaping perceptions" (pp. 504-505). However, Cheney and Christensen (2001) argue that many organizations that use media-based advertising claim to be communicating to outside markets but are, in reality, trying to convince themselves of their own stated image and identity.

Revisiting the idea that organizational identity is "that which is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization" (Hatch and Schultz, 2004, p. 3), can

reveal how this idea relates to higher education. Colleges and universities can have organizational identities that are based on specific characteristics: academic disciplines, facilities, alumni employment percentages, research efforts, and athletic teams.

Leader Development at VMI

Background. Since 1839 VMI has been pursuing its mission of producing educated and honorable men and, since 1997, women, for positions of responsibility and educating them for leadership roles in society. Leadership instruction and leader development, according to VMI's literature, is the key tenet of the education offered at the college. The college claims that it produces leaders for society and that multiple leadership opportunities exist for all cadets (VMI: Common leadership grounding, 2011). The leadership at VMI has clearly labeled VMI as a leader factory, something that makes a VMI education different from that which can be obtained at other colleges and universities.

Vision 2039. *Vision 2039: Focus on Leadership,* recently published by the Institute (2006), outlines the plans for the future of leader development in cadets at VMI. As with other VMI publications concerning the Institute's reason for being, *Vision 2039* points out that VMI has been extremely successful in developing leaders for all walks of life, to include industry, government, and the military. In addition, *Vision 2039* begins with a commitment by the Institute to ensuring that its long tradition of leadership and service continues well beyond the Institute's bicentennial and by stating that this commitment is the driving force behind the Vision 2039 concept (Vision 2039, 2006).

Vision 2039 specifically illuminates the fact that "what makes VMI distinctive in the world of higher education is its mission to prepare educated, honorable, and steadfast

leaders" (p. 4). This blueprint for the Institute, to be implemented over the next 30 years, is centered on the improvement of the academic, military, and athletic programs, as well as the school's infrastructure, to enhance cadet leadership development by "combining education, experience and training" (p. 5). Thus, leadership is looked upon as being more than a skill, but something that has moral and ethical dimensions and is directly influenced by the prevailing culture of the Institute.

According to *Vision 2039*, the heart of the Institute's academic program is leader development, which ensures that VMI's graduates will be leaders who contribute to nation. A major academic goal of the Institute is to ensure that every cadet is prepared for leadership in the 21st Century (Vision 2039, 2006).

The Institute will educate cadets in a structured military environment that is characterized by numerous cadet leadership opportunities and responsibilities. In addition, VMI will "encourage cadets to pursue commissions in the National Guard and other Reserve components of the U.S. military" (Vision 2039, 2006, p. 9) so as to acquaint cadets with the experience of being responsible for both other people and for material and equipment (p. 9).

Vision 2039, according to the literature, is not a construction plan but a leadership plan. In addition to the methods already described, the new Center for Leadership and Ethics will contribute to VMI's standing as a "leader in issues of the day by providing a venue for conferences and events of statewide and national prominence" while a "formal leadership program emanating from this facility will enhance cadet learning, civility, and ethics" (2006, p. 16).

The mission of the CLE is to "advance the understanding, practice, and integration of leadership and character development at the Institute and to share insights gleaned from the VMI programs with a broader national audience" (VMI: Center for Leadership and Ethics, 2011). The CLE will be responsible for coordinating, integrating, synchronizing, and assessing VMI's leadership and character development programs and by developing and executing new programs. The end state of the Center's efforts will be an integrated and coordinated intellectual, military, physical, and character development experience for cadets. Husted corroborates this philosophy in *The Hard Corps* (2009), describing how at VMI, "a model exists and an effort is made to provide cadets with a series of leveled leadership experiences" where "every cadet has an opportunity to achieve those standards and develop those leadership qualities" (p. 79).

Leader development research at VMI. Atwater, et al. (1996) conducted a study whose primary purpose was to "assess leadership development over time to determine those individual characteristics and leadership behaviors that positively or negatively impact leader effectiveness" (p. vii). Their study was a longitudinal examination of quantitative data, collected from VMI cadets at multiple points of time over a four-year period, that measured self-esteem, hardiness, physical fitness, moral reasoning, and prior influence experiences, as well as ratings of leader behavior.

The initial sample of cadets numbered 401. However, by the end of the study only 236 cadets remained in the class. Because of the attrition of this class of cadets (165 cadets over four years) the researchers determined that the number of cadets for which they had complete measures over four years was too small to test, although 236 cadets would appear to be a solid number from which to glean statistics. In response, the

researchers “made comparisons over time for those cadets who remained at VMI throughout the four years and who had data at each time period” (p. 23). In addition, at this time in VMI’s history, women were not admitted, so the sample was all-male.

The cadets participated in data collection throughout their four years at VMI through such data collection procedures as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, a life experiences questionnaire, a life history questionnaire, The California Psychological Inventory, a Leader Potential Index, the VMI Physical Fitness Test, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and a Defining Issues test. With regards to leadership ratings, cadets were evaluated by the cadets of the class immediately ahead of their own (sophomores rated freshmen, etc.) and first classmen rated their peers.

This study identified some “predictive relationships between individual characteristics and leadership effectiveness and between leadership behaviors and subsequent leadership effectiveness” (p.64). Specifically, the study showed that characteristics such as self-esteem, hardiness, moral reasoning, physical fitness, and prior influence experiences can have a significant effect on an individual’s ability to be more effective as a leader as measured by participant scores on the instruments used in this study. The authors concluded that that it may be possible to develop and implement selection tests that can help identify the best leader candidates.

This study is salient for a number of reasons. First, it was conducted at a military school, specifically, VMI. Second, it followed a group of cadets for a four-year period, from their initial matriculation at VMI through their graduation. Last, this study addressed, and supported, the idea that leadership effectiveness could be predicted by specific characteristics, thereby potentially identifying the best leaders early in their lives.

Again, caution must be exercised when generalizing the findings of this study. Although the study followed a particular sample for its entire tenure as VMI cadets, it only looked at VMI cadets and did not study other military schools. In addition, the study only utilized surveys and did not report any observational data. Although this study is a valuable addition to the research on leader development at military schools, it does not address the question of how a school such as VMI develops the leadership abilities of its cadets.

Summary

Most of the information available concerning VMI is centered on the early years of the Institute, beginning with its founding, and the contributions of its graduates throughout the school's 170-year history. Literature concerning VMI's leader development program is limited to the Institute's website, recruiting material, press releases, speeches, and *Vision 2039*, VMI's initiative for improving its leader development infrastructure now and in the coming years.

Organizational identity literature is readily available in the form of investigations into individual and group identity, organizational identity criteria and categories, and image. The majority of this research addresses organizational identity applications to corporations, business, education, sports, and the military.

A review of the relevant literature and research on college and university leader development programs reveals little about how an institution like VMI, a military college, accomplishes its stated mission of producing leaders for the nation. The literature of practice clearly points to the feedback-intensive model of leader development, as used by

USMA, Army ROTC, and other programs at civilian leadership programs on college and university campuses.

Very little empirical research has been produced to address the questions concerning leader development. Most research on the subject of leader development programs makes use of surveys and questionnaires and does not delve significantly into the personal developmental experiences of college students, faculty, staff, and mentors. Most importantly, with regards to this study, there is no empirical data that addresses the leader development aspect of a military college.

There is an obvious need for continued research to address this gap in the literature and to produce empirical data. Such a study would investigate the perspectives of the stakeholders at a military school concerning the leader development experience there. The publication of *Vision 2039* leaves no doubt as to VMI's identity, at least from VMI's own perspective. However, what is important, and what researchers have yet to do, is to investigate the leader development function at a military college like VMI from the perspective of the staff, the leadership, and, most importantly, the cadets.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Background

Overview. VMI is one of six four-year military schools, not including the federal service academies, which claim to produce leaders for the nation. In addition, there are five military junior colleges in the United States which advertise leadership instruction and leader development as a key tenet of their educational programs. As at each of these other institutions, cadets at VMI live in a barracks, conform to an honor code, wear uniforms, and undergo a strict regimen of everyday activities.

This study examined the unique leader development environment that exists at VMI through the lens of the feedback-intensive model of leadership instruction. Though VMI does not specifically claim to use the feedback-intensive model, this model is in use at a significant number of leader development programs, to include USMA and Army ROTC. In addition, the study explored VMI's organizational identity from the perspectives of two stakeholder groups at the institution. As Merriam (2002) points out, "qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participants' perspective" (p. 6) and is characterized as a search for meaning and understanding. Merriam (2009) identifies the basic, interpretive study as the most commonly used research methodology in the field of education.

Research paradigm. Rival philosophical views concerning research are centered on one of several research paradigms. Swanson and Holton (2005) define a paradigm as "the dominant understanding of a particular class of phenomena at a particular time" (p. 18). They go on to describe the three research paradigms of quantitative research,

qualitative research, and mixed methods research. In addition, they describe the three philosophical views of positivism, interpretivism, and critical science.

Positivism "assumes that the world is objective" (Swanson & Holton, 2005, p. 19). Therefore, quantitative methods generally use a positivist or post-positivist perspective. Interpretivism seeks to understand the meaning one assigns to a situation based on his or her experiences and interactions at a particular point in time and within a particular context (Merriam and Associates, 2002). Thus, interpretivism maintains that there is no objective knowledge on a subject save the individual interpretations of the participants. .

Interpretivism was the paradigm of inquiry most suited to this study. The key focus of the study is to understand participants' perspectives on leader development and organizational identity at VMI. The goals were to explore individual members' experiences and viewpoints on leader development at VMI and examine the organizational identity of the institution through the use of a basic, interpretive qualitative study.

Theoretical perspective. In examining the area of leader development of college students, particularly at military schools, one is struck by the lack of research concerning such programs. There is, of course, a general consensus among scholars concerning the definition of leadership, that is, that it involves a person influencing others toward the achievement of a goal. Leadership programs are appearing more frequently on American campuses and in American corporations. Despite the paucity of empirical research on the subject, there does appear to be a consensus among scholars as to how best to teach leadership and develop a student's leadership capabilities. Specifically, the best leader

development programs are characterized by student experience, feedback from multiple sources, and student reflection (Kolb, 1984).

Many leadership programs utilize a system of instruction where students are placed in leadership positions, are observed by their instructors, and are critiqued on their performance with a critical element in the process being the student's own reflections on his or her performance (Kolb, 1984). The performance appraisal stemming from the instructor's commentary and the student's own reflection is then utilized by the student as he or she moves on to more challenging positions of leadership and responsibility. This feedback-intensive model of instruction and practical application of leadership theory is used by the CCL, USMA, and Army ROTC.

Feedback-Intensive Models of instruction. The USMA has, over the years, implemented an excellent leader development system that assesses all cadets as they earn their diplomas and commissions in the U.S. Army. West Point exists for one reason, to produce officers for the U.S Army, and its leader development system is a reflection of the Academy's mission, specifically, to "educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character" (United States Military Academy, p. 3). At the Academy, "every program and every experience must contribute to character" (Lipsky, 2003, p. 9) and the development of leaders. This organization of experiences, the CLDS, is "designed to coordinate and integrate cadet developmental activities across the entire West Point experience" (United States Military Academy, p. 1).

Beginning with their initial military training the summer prior to their first academic semester, cadets are progressively exposed to being in charge of other cadets in

rigorous field training environments as well as being in charge of their peers for the day-to-day operation of their individual cadet units. Each cadet is required to serve in a leadership capacity within the Corps at some point in his or her cadetship. In addition, upperclass cadets are responsible for planning and implementing the instruction and training of new cadets. This leader development takes place in addition to the academic and athletic programs of instruction cadets must undergo to graduate and earn a commission.

Crucial to the leadership development of these cadets are the TACs, Army officers and non-commissioned officers who bear the responsibility for the Academy's "trickiest mission," that is, "developing their subordinates into leaders" (Ruggero, 2002, p. 190). As Ruggero details in his excellent study of West Point TAC officers, *Duty First*, each cadet company of approximately 120 cadets has a TAC officer who is responsible for the discipline, law, and order of the cadets under his or her supervision. Most importantly, however, the TAC serves as mentor, counselor, and role model to each cadet, and must have the requisite skills and abilities to monitor the leader development of each cadet in his or her company.

Interestingly, aside from the commissioning requirement, VMI was developed on the West Point model, and the military atmosphere at the Institute could easily accommodate a leader development program such as the CLDS. In a sense, such a program already exists at VMI, in the form of the LDP in use by the Army ROTC Department at VMI and at 271 other colleges and universities hosting Army ROTC across the country. This program, like its cousin at West Point, is centered on incremental cadet exposure to positions of ever-increasing authority and responsibility. It is also

reliant on the critical element of cadet reflection, as well as instructor and peer evaluation and feedback.

Does the Feedback-Intensive Model apply? This study examined the experiences and viewpoints of two stakeholder groups concerning leader development and organizational identity at VMI. VMI advertises itself as an institution that produces leaders for the nation. Because many leader development programs utilize the feedback-intensive model of practical application of leadership theory, it is of particular interest in this study. Specifically, this model is used by USMA, after which VMI was modeled, and by Army ROTC, which operates as an academic department at VMI. The obvious connection is that VMI itself would utilize such a model in training its graduates to be leaders.

Qualitative Research and the Basic Interpretive Study

Qualitative research. The term "qualitative research" has been, and remains, an umbrella term to describe multiple forms of research. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p. 15). Merriam (1998) defined qualitative research as an "umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). Strauss and Corbin (1998) contrasted qualitative research to quantitative research as producing "findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (pp. 10-11).

Qualitative research is further divided into categories. Merriam (1998) divided qualitative research into the categories of basic or generic, ethnography, phenomenology,

grounded theory, and case study as her categories. Creswell (2007) categorizes qualitative research into the five approaches of narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) divide qualitative research into the six research strategies of case study, ethnography, grounded theory, life and narrative approaches, participatory research, and clinical research.

Basic interpretive qualitative study. Recently, Merriam (2009) addressed the six more commonly used approaches to qualitative research as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative analysis, critical qualitative research, and basic qualitative research. Earlier, Merriam characterized qualitative research as "the search for meaning and understanding" (2002, p. 6). In addition, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the researcher uses an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product is richly descriptive.

Basic, interpretive qualitative studies are found throughout many disciplines. According to Merriam, they are the most common form of qualitative research found in the field of education (2002). In a basic, interpretive qualitative study, the researcher is concerned with how the participants make meaning of a situation, how people interpret their experiences, and how they construct their worlds (Merriam, 2009, pp. 22-23).

Basic interpretive qualitative study data collection. Merriam (1998) refers to data as "nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment" (p. 69). Qualitative data can be collected through interviews, observations, and documents. Merriam goes further to say that in are "the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies in education" (p. 70). Creswell (1998) expands the list to include documents and records, interviews, observation, and physical artifacts.

Interviews, specifically, have the advantages of being targeted directly to the topic of the study and possibly revealing unanticipated but insightful observations from the interviewee. Some drawbacks to interviews include biased questions, biased answers to questions, inaccuracies due to poor recall, interviewees simply responding to what he or she thinks the interviewer wants to hear, and a dependence on the quality of the interview questions (Creswell, 1998, pp. 85-97).

Yin (2003) also describes three principles of data collection which will result in a more valid and reliable qualitative study. He recommends using multiple sources of evidence, or triangulation, creating a database, and maintaining a chain of evidence. As Yin explains, the use of these protocols is "intended to make the process as explicit as possible" (2003, p. 106) to ensure quality control during the data collection process

Basic interpretive qualitative study data analysis. The data collected in a qualitative study from documents, records, interviews, observations, and artifacts can be analyzed in a number of ways. Yin (2003) described analysis of evidence as "recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of the study," something that can be difficult given that there are not any well-defined strategies and techniques (p. 109).

Strauss & Corbin (1998) discuss the concept of microanalysis, or the "detailed line by line analysis necessary at the beginning of a study to generate initial categories and to suggest relationships among categories" (p. 57). Creswell (1998) tells us that analysis consists of describing the data in detail through establishing patterns, searching for connections between two or more categories of data, and developing generalizations

from analyzing the data so that "people can learn from the case either for themselves or for applying it to a population of cases" (pp. 153-154).

Merriam (1998) suggests that there is a right way and a wrong way to analyze data. The right way is to analyze data simultaneously with its collection. This analysis involves identifying recurring patterns or themes, supported by the data, with the "overall interpretation being the researcher's understanding of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 23-24).

Restatement of the Research Question

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of two stakeholder groups at VMI, senior staff and cadets, with regard to leader development. The experiential learning model (Kolb, 1984) and the feedback-intensive model of leader development framed this study and helped to ascertain how a military college like VMI develops the leader capabilities of its cadets, how it produces graduates who are well-suited for leadership positions upon their graduation, and how its leader development ethos contributes to its organizational identity.

The primary research question was, "How do staff and cadets perceive the leadership instruction they teach and receive at VMI?" Additional questions were a) How does VMI develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets in order to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation? b) How does the Institute utilize the feedback-intensive model of leader development and practical application?; and, c) How do cadets and staff perceive the Institute with regard to organizational identity?

Purposeful Sampling

Virginia Military Institute. Currently, there are six Senior Military Colleges and five Military Junior Colleges in the United States, with some being privately operated and some being state-supported. This number does not include the federal service academies. The population for this study was limited to the cadets and staff at VMI.

VMI, the site of this research, is a small, state-supported liberal arts and engineering military college. Located in western Virginia, in Lexington, VMI enrolls approximately 1600 cadets who all live in a single barracks building and are members of the Corps of Cadets. In addition to having a small student body, where most cadets know each other, VMI also has a very small faculty and administrative staff who can be suspicious of outsiders.

Being an alumnus, and having worked at VMI, gave the researcher access to faculty and staff that he may not have enjoyed otherwise. While serving there from 1999 to 2001, the researcher became acquainted with the Commandant of Cadets and his staff as well as several members of the Leadership Studies staff, the academic faculty, and the athletic department as well as the senior leadership of the Institute. Not all of these individuals were still at VMI during this study, as some had moved to different positions and some had left the Institute. The staff participants interviewed for this study were not part of the VMI staff in 1999-2001.

It is true that other military colleges, both four-year and two-year, exhibit characteristics similar to VMI. The researcher's affiliation with VMI, association with key faculty and staff members there, and its proximity made VMI the logical choice for this study.

Study participants. The Commandant of Cadets was interviewed. Working daily with cadets, the Commandant is in a unique position and is able to comment on the leadership capabilities of the cadets he is responsible for. It was absolutely critical to understand his perspective concerning VMI's association with leader development and the part it plays in making VMI unique, as he is part of the "face" of the Institute.

Further insight was gained from interviews with the Superintendent and the Director of the CLE. These individuals make up the senior leadership at VMI and understanding their perspective on the role leader development plays there was essential to establishing VMI's identity from their viewpoint. In addition, they are responsible for the implementation of Vision 2039.

Most importantly, interviews with cadets were the major source of data for this study. The researcher conducted focus groups, each comprised of four cadets from each of the four classes (i.e., Classes of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015). In addition, two cadets from each of the four classes were interviewed individually.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Preparation for data collection. Data collection in this study was primarily through semi-structured interviews with cadets and staff, cadet focus groups using a prepared interview guide, and document review of Institute publications. Yin (2003), Merriam (1998), and Creswell (1998) all refer to multiple data sources as being critical to qualitative research. As stated earlier, interviews involved the cadets themselves, the staff that interacts with them in the barracks, and the senior Institute leadership.

Selection of participants. The first step in the process of establishing individual interviews and focus groups was to contact the Institute's Office of Assessment and

Institutional Research. This organization reviews all requests for research involving cadets and required a basic project protocol explaining the nature of the study and what is hoped to be learned from it, an informed consent form, and documentation from the researcher's institution confirming that its review board has approved the study. The committee then reviewed the project to ensure that it is appropriate for cadets to participate, specifically, that it posed no physical or emotional danger and that it did not require cadets to spend an inordinate amount of time away from their daily schedules (Appendix B).

Once the researcher received approval, the next step was to work with the institutional representative to develop a list of participants. The researcher, through the institutional representative, contacted the members of the VMI Corps of Cadets through an email message asking for volunteers to participate in the study (Appendix H). The email explained the subject of the study as well as the basic protocol. In addition, the participants were informed that the interviews would be audio-taped. The last step was to work through the institutional representative with the participants to establish the dates, times, and locations of the interviews.

Critical to obtaining the in-depth data required for this study was to work with the institutional representative to ensure that a wide "variety" of cadets were represented in the data collection phase. Just as staff representing various aspects of the Institute were interviewed, it was also important to talk to cadets with different perspectives on the VMI experience. For example, it was important to interview fourth classmen, who had just begun their experience at VMI, as well as first classmen who had experienced VMI for almost four years.

In addition, cadets who were in Corps of Cadets leadership positions may have had different opinions on the VMI experience than those who are not. Likewise, female cadets may have presented a totally different point of view than male cadets, as may cadet athletes when compared to cadets who did not participate in varsity sports.

Distributing the email message asking for volunteers to the entire Corps resulted in an initial group that included both male and female cadets, varsity athletes and non-varsity athletes, and both cadets who held rank in the Corps and those who did not. In addition, the cadets who participated in both the interviews and the focus groups represented the wide variety of experience and activity necessary for this study.

Interviews.

Semi-structured interviews. Merriam (2009) refers to the interview as "the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies" (p. 86). She also divides interviews into three types: highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Highly structured interviews therefore comprise predetermined questions in a predetermined order while unstructured interviews utilize open-ended questions and are more conversation-like.

In between the highly structured interview and the unstructured interview is the semi-structured interview. Merriam (1998) describes the semi-structured interview as having "either all of the questions more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions" (p. 74). This type of interview has the advantage of being guided by questions or issues in an exploratory manner and not by specifically worded questions or a predetermined order of question. This allows the researcher to

react to each situation according to the perspective of each participant and to the rapport between the researcher and the participant.

The interview instrument in this study was based on the research questions and was designed to gain an understanding of each individual's perspective on the leader development program at VMI. The instrument was based on three general questions and was, of necessity, in two forms, one for staff and one for cadets. The first question concerned the opinion of the participant of VMI, that is, as an institution that produces leaders. The second question dealt with the participant's perspective on the leader development experience at VMI. The third question investigated the use of the feedback-intensive model of leadership instruction at VMI (Appendix D, Appendix E).

In addition, several lines of inquiry were utilized to assist in identifying recurring themes. These lines of inquiry included addressing the baseline organizational values of the institution, respondents' perspectives on the school's objectives, and the relationship between the leadership's perspective and the cadets' perspectives on the leader development experience. Specific questions for the respondents addressed their reasons for attending VMI, how they defined the key characteristic that makes VMI unique, how leader development contributes to the overall education at VMI, and how the VMI system makes one a better leader. Comparing participant responses to these questions would then point to the institution's organizational identity as seen from multiple perspectives.

Conducting interviews. As mentioned, interviews were scheduled through the institutional representative. In addition, participants were reminded of the purpose and duration of the interview, that the interviews were to be recorded, and that all responses would be kept anonymous.

Throughout the interview process, it was critical for the researcher to put the participants at ease through the establishment of a respectful, non-judgmental, and non-threatening environment. Towards this end, the researcher did not wear a uniform or any badges of rank or authority, lest they negatively affect the participants' responses and result in biased observations. Cadets were aware of the researcher's affiliation with the U.S. Army, based on his email address. In addition, one cadet in Focus Group 2 was familiar with the researcher from an earlier educational institution. The researcher had previously met the Superintendent, the Commandant, and the CLE Director, who were all familiar with the researcher's occupation, rank, and position.

The interview sessions with institutional senior leadership and staff took place in the individuals' respective offices. Interviews with cadets took place in a neutral classroom, away from the barracks, where the dialogue could occur without distractions or interruption. In both cases, it was important to allow enough time, 90 minutes, to complete the interview without rushing and at a time that is convenient to the respondents.

Focus groups.

Rationale. Clearly, one of the main reasons for conducting focus groups is the fact that they allow the researcher to triangulate the data collected with that from the document reviews and the interviews. In addition, a focus group can often yield elaborate details on topics discussed in one-on-one interviews.

Participants in focus groups may be more inclined to expand on the thoughts and ideas of other participants, or their own beliefs and perspectives, because they sense a safety and comfort that comes from being part of a group. In short, the security of being

part of a group, and not isolated with an interviewer, can result in more detailed responses.

It is important to note that the opposite may also be true. Some focus group participants may inhibit the responses of others participants who are intimidated by groups or specific people. Because some respondents may be intimidated by being part of a group, the researcher kept the group size to four people. As with the interviews with individuals, the focus groups were also be scheduled through the institutional representative

Instrument design. The focus groups were guided by the intent to collect the opinions of the staff and cadets at VMI concerning the methods that VMI uses to develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets, produce leaders, and how its leader development ethos contributes to its organizational identity. The focus groups were directed by the researcher using the question, "How does VMI develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets in order to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation?" In addition, focus group participants were asked to comment on questions concerning their perceptions on the leadership instruction they receive at VMI, the use of the feedback-intensive model of leadership instruction and practical application, and how they view the Institute's organizational identity (Appendix F).

Conducting focus groups. Focus groups were conducted with considerable attention being paid to the comfort of the participants. All participants were informed of the protocol before beginning. In order for the recording of the sessions to remain unobtrusive, both a primary and a backup recording device were utilized. This

ensured coverage and prevented the need to halt proceedings in the event of a technological failure. In addition, both the primary and secondary recording means were hidden from view, so as not to contribute to the anxiety of the participants.

Focus group participants were grouped with other "like" participants. Specifically, they were composed of cadets from the same class and included varsity athletes, both male and female cadets, and both cadets who do and those who do not hold leadership positions in the Corps of Cadets. Grouping respondents in this manner further reduced the stress level of the participants and, hopefully, resulted in more candid responses though such groupings always carry the risk of inhibiting some participants from speaking freely.

Documents. Documents, as described by Merriam (2009, p. 139), are "a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator." Letters, agendas, proposals, formal evaluations, and articles are all examples of documents that may be used to corroborate and augment evidence gained from other sources.

Document review analysis was a critical component of this study. It provided the researcher with a non-invasive analysis of the setting and provided a jumping off point for the interviews and focus groups that followed.

Document review in this project was centered on mission statement review of VMI and other military colleges, an earlier internal study of cadet reactions to leader development at VMI, and the publication of *Vision 2039*, the current superintendent's plan for transforming both the physical face of the Institute as well as the leader development program there. In addition, the researcher reviewed items that reflected the

"face" of VMI, such as the VMI website, published speeches, recruiting materials, and the curriculum. This analysis allowed for the triangulation of data gleaned from both individual interviews and focus groups.

Data Analysis

Coding data. The first step in coding the collected data was to transcribe the interview and focus group recordings and data from the document review into a single word processing program. Individual interview transcripts were then sent to the respective participants for comment. These member checks afforded the researcher with transcripts that were verified by both audio recordings and the participants.

Following return of the transcripts, each document was then logged into a document register and assigned a document number (Appendix G). Each transcript, as well as documents from the document review, was then read and color-coded to identify discernable patterns in the form of key words, phrases, and ideas, or, what Merriam (1998) refers to as "categories and themes" (p. 179). Following the transcription of all relevant documentation, the information was reviewed as a whole to determine, as Creswell (1998) describes, "a detailed view of aspects about the case – the facts" (p. 154).

Strengths and weaknesses.

Internal validity. Multiple methods were employed in this study to enhance the validity of the findings. The first method was the triangulation of data from different sources. In this study, the researcher utilized document review, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Similar questions were posed to both interview and focus

group participants and the responses corroborated against documents to determine consistency.

In addition, the researcher utilized both written notes and a digital recording of both interviews and focus groups to ensure accuracy of responses. Most importantly, transcripts of both interviews and focus group sessions were sent to the participants so that they might corroborate their comments.

Reliability. The most effective way to increase the reliability of a qualitative study is to develop and implement an effective protocol, which serves as a guide to the researcher as he or she undertakes data collection. Specifically, this qualitative study protocol comprised several sections: an overview of the study, a detailed description of field procedures, the study questions, and a guide for the study report.

The overview section includes project objectives, particular issues, and relevant background reading. The field procedures section addresses access to study sites, information sources, and procedural guidelines such as how recording takes place. The interview questions section provides the specific questions the interviewer must address, possible ordering of data, and possible data sources for each question. Last, the study report section addresses the data format, the presentation of other documentation, and relevant bibliographical information.

Ethical Considerations

General. The benefits of this study far outweigh any risks associated with it, though, as it is almost totally reliant on human subjects, some risks do exist. Specifically, staff assumed some risk in commenting on current policies regarding the leadership program in place. This risk extends to cadets, as well, but to a much lesser extent.

Anonymity and security. The issue of anonymity with regards to the participants in this study posed some challenges. The institution itself, VMI, is known as the site of this project, and cannot be concealed. As a result, and due to the small population of cadets, faculty, and staff there, total anonymity is not possible. However, through the use of pseudonyms to conceal participant identities as much as possible, a reasonable level of anonymity was attained and maintained. In addition, all documents, recordings, and correspondence were, and are, secured under lock and key with access limited to the researcher.

Participation and purpose. Prior to any research being conducted, the researcher coordinated through the host university's Office of Human Research Internal Review Board. This coordination summarized potential risks to respondents, measures taken to minimize said risks, and measures taken by the researcher to ensure informed consent (Appendix C).

Initial coordination with VMI for this study was coordinated through the Institute's Office of Assessment and Institutional Research and was made in accordance with VMI's protocols and with those of the researcher's own institution. Of paramount importance, of course, was that participants were protected and treated within established ethics protocols.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the methods to be used. All subjects were voluntary participants, were able to withdraw their participation at any time, incurred minimal risk by participating, and incurred no financial costs by participating. Furthermore, none of the participants were under the direction of the researcher. Had this been the case, the possibility existed that the researcher could have

influenced their responses. However, in this case, the researcher is not employed by the Institute and had no power over the staff or the cadets.

Bias. Researchers bring their own personal perspectives and biases to the field of qualitative investigation and the researcher's study of VMI was no exception. While it is critical to recognize when biases are intruding into the study, a researcher must understand that it is simply not possible to completely eradicate these biases as they are a part of our individual cultures, the times in which we live, our genders, our experiences, and our training and education. This recognition is often very difficult, especially when the researcher and the respondent share a common culture, background, history, or gender. In general, a researcher must be able to take a step back, examine the data objectively, recognize the indicators that may point to the fact that individual biases may be forcing their way into the analysis, and, most importantly, implement strategies to ensure trustworthiness of findings.

There are instances where researcher bias can be helpful. Merriam (2002) suggest that researcher empathy is a foundation for establishing rapport with participants. In this study, the researcher's familiarity with VMI, coming from having been a cadet and an instructor there, was beneficial to understanding cadets' daily lives and contributed to an "atmosphere of trust" (p. 23) during both cadet interviews and focus groups.

In response to the potential hazard presented by individual biases, the researcher implemented a rigorous qualitative study design that included distancing himself from the case in question, using appropriate data collection techniques, reporting all evidence equitably, using multiple sources of evidence to support triangulation of data, and ensuring that the custody of the data was rigorously maintained.

Qualitative study investigators must work especially hard to report all evidence fairly and not to simply use a study to substantiate or support a preconceived position. Qualitative study researchers are especially susceptible to this pitfall as they must have a solid understanding of the issues surrounding the study beforehand and may be tempted to form an opinion prior to actually conducting the research.

Moustakas (1994) supports this, calling for efforts on the part of the researcher to avoid preconceived notions while simultaneously using his or her intuition and imagination to understand the background of the participant's experience. He refers to the researcher's battle as one of listening to and understanding the perceptions of participants while using his or her own internal perceptions and judgments to make interpretations.

In this study, the researcher had already developed a perspective on leader development and anticipated that the participants' perspectives would support his own. Specifically, based on an earlier survey of cadets concerning leader development at VMI, and personal experiences as both a cadet and an instructor, the researcher believed that cadet responses would be decidedly negative and that they would point to VMI not incorporating a feedback-intensive model of leader development. What was critical to this study was the degree to which the researcher was willing to accept findings contrary to his own perspective and which he had not foreseen.

Yin (2003) also cautions against using certain data collection techniques in case study research as a way to reduce researcher bias. Specifically, the researcher avoided the use of the participant-observation technique in data collection. The danger in the use of this technique is that the researcher may become less of an observer and more of a participant, clouding his or her view of the case to all but that of one group or person and

eventually becoming an advocate of the individual or group he/she is supposed to be studying. This was a particular danger for the researcher, having been a cadet at VMI, having eaten in the same mess hall, having sat in the same classrooms, and having lived in the same barracks under the same regulations. Clearly, the tendency for the researcher to commiserate with cadets was strong and had to be guarded against in order for him to remain divorced from the case and avoid becoming emotionally attached.

An important factor in reducing researcher bias in this study was the equitable reporting of all data. One method of ensuring the researcher's own personal biases did not seep into the findings, supported by Strauss and Corbin (1998), was to report preliminary findings to colleagues during the data collection phase of research. These colleagues could then offer their own explanations concerning the findings which could then be factored into the analysis and thereby reduce the infiltration of the researcher's own biases. In addition, and particularly when interviewing cadets, it was important for the researcher to analyze words and phrases, which he may have thought he understood but which had changed since his time as a cadet, and not accept them at face value but investigate every response in detail.

Yin (2003) recommends the use of multiple methods of data collection, which was accomplished in this study through the use of document review, focus groups and semi-structured interviews, and the triangulation of data. Creswell (1998) confirms these techniques, requiring the maintenance of the raw data and the use of triangulation. Both suggest the use of a database to maintain the raw data for independent inspection by outside investigators. In support of this, the researcher rigorously maintained a chain of evidence, both to ensure that no original data were lost and to support efforts by any

external observer to trace the process from the research questions to the conclusions and back. Written notes were maintained as well as recordings, allowing for corroboration of both questions and responses and reducing the possibility of inaccurate transcriptions, assessments, and findings.

Last, it was vitally important in this study for the researcher to admit personal biases and perspectives up front, making his role and point of view apparent while simultaneously framing the study to present multiple realities and to present the participants' points of view. Merriam (1998) requires that researcher biases that cannot be controlled be discussed in the final written report. In addition, when the data only partly supported predictions, the researcher only included enough data to allow readers to draw their own conclusions and any influence by institutional leadership, which may or may not have an agenda of their own, was reported.

The most important guardian against researcher bias in this study was the researcher's awareness of both his own particular biases and those of the participants of this study and how they may have influenced the investigation. Specifically, the researcher has been associated with leadership theory and practice and leader development for twenty-nine years, as a student, an instructor, and a practitioner, beginning with his experiences as a cadet at VMI. The researcher's relationship with, affinity for, and loyalty to VMI could have affected not only his interaction with participants but also could have affected his interpretation of their responses and of findings. As the primary research instrument in this study is human, and all observations and analyses are filtered through that perspective, the researcher alone had the deciding

vote as to what was important and what was not, as well as what got reported and what did not. In the end, it was the researcher's own conscience that he had to answer to.

Summary

This basic, interpretive qualitative study was aimed at the leader development apparatus at VMI and its impact on the Institute's organizational identity, that is, an institution that produces leaders. Built around the feedback-intensive model of leadership instruction, the research questions were designed to glean as much information as possible concerning cadet and staff perceptions and opinions of the leadership development effort at VMI. The data collection method relied on document review and interviews with cadets and staff. This led to the "in-depth data collection" that is "rich in context" as described by Creswell (1998, p. 61) and the "rich, thick description" of the subject of the study (Merriam, 1998, p. 29).

CHAPTER IV

Presentation of the Data

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to examine the perspectives of participants with regards to the leader development dimension at VMI. The data were obtained, as described in Chapter III, through a document review, 11 individual interviews with cadets and members of the VMI staff, and four cadet focus groups. Staff members were referred to by their positions (Superintendent, Commandant, Director of the CLE) and cadets were referred to by a letter designator (Cadet A, Cadet B, etc.). This chapter will describe the demographic characteristics of the study participants, the data collection process, coding procedures, member checking, emerging themes, and assumptions made by the researcher.

Study Participants

VMI was selected by the researcher as the site for this study as it is representative of the 11 state-supported and private military colleges, excluding the federal service academies, in the United States. All of the participants voluntarily engaged in the study. Staff participants represented several offices at VMI and the interview data were obtained from three administrators. Cadet interviews were conducted with eight cadets, two per class (fourth class, third class, second class, and first class). Last, four focus groups were conducted, each consisting of four cadets from a particular class. Participant demographics are discussed in more detail below.

Document Review

Website. A review of the Institute's website revealed a wealth of information concerning the various manners in which leader development is incorporated into the VMI experience. Specifically, the researcher reviewed the Superintendent's welcome letter, the VMI mission and vision, and the VMI philosophy. This review also included several recent speeches given by the Superintendent, at commencement, commissioning, a facility dedication, and at the 50th reunion of the Class of 1962.

In addition, the researcher examined documents concerning the military system at VMI, to include the role of ROTC; the regimental system, which describes how the Corps of Cadets is organized; the General Committee, which consists of the class officers from the upper three classes and which monitors every aspect of cadet life; and the honor court. Also, the researcher looked at the admissions page, the Center for Leadership and Ethics, and the Quality Enhancement Plan, which describes in detail the VMI core educational curriculum.

Marketing and recruiting. Last, the researcher examined various marketing products. These came in the form of fact sheets, school profiles, information sheets for parents, invitations to recruiting events, gift solicitations, an ROTC information booklet, and several recruiting pamphlets. In addition, the researcher reviewed a newly produced recruiting video.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Staff. The Superintendent is a retired Army general and VMI graduate. He possesses a master's degree and has been serving at VMI in his current position for eight years. As the chief executive officer of VMI, the Superintendent is responsible to the

Board of Visitors, appointed by the Governor of Virginia, for the operation and strategic direction of the Institute. The Commandant of Cadets, who is a retired U.S. Army colonel and a VMI graduate, reports to the Superintendent and is responsible for the day-to-day military regimen at VMI. He possesses a master's degree and has been serving at VMI in his current position for five years. Working in conjunction with both the Superintendent and the Commandant is the Director of the Center for Leadership and Ethics, a retired U.S. Navy captain. She possesses a doctorate and has served at VMI for a total of six years, two of which have been in her current position.

Cadets. Cadet A is a male, African-American first classman. He is a platoon leader in the Corps of Cadets, responsible for approximately 40 other cadets, he intends on commissioning in the U.S. Army upon graduation, and he is not a varsity athlete.

Cadet B is a male, Caucasian first classman. He is the Regimental S-4 (supply officer) for the Corps of Cadets, he takes Navy ROTC but will not commission in the U.S. Navy at graduation, and he is not a varsity athlete.

Cadet C is a male, Caucasian second classman. He served as a cadre corporal during his third class year, responsible for training a squad of approximately 10 incoming rats, and has also been a volunteer elementary school tutor and a Christian youth group leader. He takes Army ROTC but is not planning on commissioning in the U.S. Army and he is a varsity football player.

Cadet D is a male, Caucasian second classman. He takes Army ROTC but does not intend to commission in the U.S. Army. He is a varsity athlete, participating in both cross country and track and field, of which he is the team captain.

Cadet E is a male, Caucasian third classman. He tutors other cadets in both electrical and civil engineering. He takes Army ROTC but is unsure as to whether or not he will commission in the U.S. Army. He is a varsity football player.

Cadet F is a male, Caucasian third classman. He is a corporal in the Corps of Cadets, responsible for approximately 10 other cadets. In addition, he is the Assistant Cadet in Charge of his company's New Cadet Military Training (NCMT), he is an Army ROTC cadet, and he is not a varsity athlete.

Cadet G is a female, Caucasian fourth classman. She is a Navy ROTC cadet and intends on commissioning in the U.S. Navy upon graduation. In addition, she is on the varsity rifle team.

Cadet H is a male, Caucasian fourth classman. He is an Army ROTC cadet who intends on commissioning in the U.S. Army at graduation and he is not a varsity athlete.

Focus Groups

Focus Group 1. Focus Group 1 consisted of Cadets I, J, K, and L. All four are first classmen. Cadet I is male, Caucasian, plans on commissioning in the U.S. Army, and is also a platoon leader in the Corps of Cadets. He is not a varsity athlete. Cadet J is male, Asian-American, and plans on commissioning in the U.S. Army. Cadet K is male, Caucasian, plans on commissioning in the U.S. Army, and participates in NCMT as well as having been a cadet corporal, platoon sergeant, and platoon leader. Cadet L is male, African-American, a platoon leader in the Corps of Cadets, and captain of the varsity basketball team.

Focus Group 2. Focus Group 2 consisted of Cadets M, N, O, and P, all of whom are second classmen. Cadet M is male, Caucasian, a battalion sergeant major in the Corps

of Cadets, and a class officer. Cadet N is male, African-American, a platoon sergeant in the Corps of Cadets and a varsity athlete on the track team who plans on commissioning in the U.S. Army. Cadet O is male, Caucasian and a company operations sergeant in the Corps of Cadets. Cadet P is male, Caucasian, a platoon sergeant in the Corps of Cadets, captain of the water polo team, president of the French club, an academic tutor, and a remedial physical training instructor. All four are part of the CLE's Leadership Focus Group, forum led by cadet volunteers from each class that meets weekly to discuss and recommend improvements in management of the Corps of Cadets.

Focus Group 3. Focus Group 3 was composed of third class Cadets Q, R, S, and T. Cadet Q is male, Caucasian, and a NCMT instructor. Cadet R is male, Caucasian, and a corporal in the Corps of Cadets. In addition, he is a varsity football player and the cadet in charge of the cadet emergency medical technicians. Cadet S is male, Caucasian, a Rat Challenge corporal, and an emergency medical technician. Cadet T is female, Caucasian, a cadre corporal, a varsity swimmer, and the first sergeant of the U.S. Marine Corps cadets who plans on commissioning into the Marines upon graduation.

Focus Group 4. Focus Group 4 was made up of fourth classmen, Cadets U, V, W, and X, all of whom had recently completed the initial semester at VMI known as the ratline. All were male, Caucasian, and, as they had only been at VMI for one semester, had not participated in any leadership opportunities. In addition, none were varsity athletes.

Data Collection Process

Before conducting any document reviews, interviews, or focus groups, the researcher secured the approval of the host university's Institutional Review Board. After

this approval was granted, the researcher then obtained the approval of the VMI Office of Assessment and Institutional Research and then met with the Superintendent to explain the nature of the study and to gain his approval. Upon receiving approval, the researcher then arranged several time periods in which to visit VMI.

Document review and semi-structured interviews with staff members were conducted over a period of four days. Staff interviews were conducted in the participants' offices. Cadet semi-structured interviews and cadet focus groups were conducted approximately two months later, over a period of four days. Cadet interviews and focus groups were all conducted in the same unoccupied classroom in an academic building. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in person, were recorded using a digital recorder, and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Prior to each interview or focus group, each participant was read the informed consent form (Appendix C), had his or her questions answered, and signed the form.

All individual participants were asked the same groups of questions (Appendix D, Appendix E) and all focus groups were conducted through the use of the same protocol (Appendix F). All digital recordings were sent electronically to a transcriptionist, who provided an electronic transcription of each interview and focus group to the researcher. The transcription process took approximately four weeks and, after sending the electronic copies of the transcripts to the researcher, the transcriptionist destroyed her copies.

Member Checking

Following the return of the transcripts from the transcriptionist, the researcher sent an electronic copy of each transcript to each respective participant for comment, additions, deletions, or elaboration. These member checks resulted in written transcripts

of both the interviews and the focus groups that were verified by both the audio recordings and by the participants. One staff member made some minor corrections to the written transcript, none of which affected the data collected in the interview.

Coding Procedures

Once the interview and focus group transcripts were finalized, the next step was to analyze them. The researcher chose to use the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) process as described by Seidel (1998). This particular QDA is built on a process composed of noticing, collecting, and thinking about things that become evident in the data.

Noticing things involves observations, notes, tape recordings, interviews, and examining documents to produce "a record of the things you have noticed" (Seidel, 1998, p. 3). This segment of the QDA was accomplished by the researcher during data collection, which included document review, individual interviews with staff and cadets, and cadet focus groups.

Once the data has been noticed, the next step was collecting the data through a process of sorting it into categories of similar, or related, pieces. Seidel compares this process to a "common strategy" of "working on a jigsaw puzzle where you start by sorting the pieces of the puzzle" (1998, p. 3).

The third part of this QDA process is thinking about the things that have been collected. In this phase, the researcher examines the things that have been collected to "make some type of sense out of each collection," to "look for patterns and relationships both within a collection, and also across collections," and to "make general discoveries

about the phenomena you are researching" (Seidel, 1998, p. 5). Critical to this QDA process is that it is a process, or a cycle, that continually repeats itself.

Once the data had been compiled, the researcher read the transcripts three times. The first reading was simply for familiarization and comprehension. During the second iteration, the researcher looked for trends in vocabulary or phrases among the different transcripts and documents and made marginal notations. During the third reading, the researcher highlighted portions of the participants' responses and began to identify recurring issues, trends, and themes.

Emerging Themes

To connect the data collected with the purpose of the study, the researcher revisited the primary research question, "How do cadets and staff perceive the leadership instruction they teach and receive at VMI?" This primary question, and the three additional questions: How does VMI develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation?; How does the Institute utilize the feedback-intensive model of leader development and practical application?; and, How do cadets and staff perceive the Institute with regard to organizational identity?, resulted in the identification of three major themes.

The first theme to emerge was that different participants held different views concerning VMI's uniqueness. The second theme was that VMI surrounds its cadets with leader development opportunities. The last theme was that cadets themselves are responsible for their leader development.

Theme 1- Multiple perspectives on VMI as a unique institution. The idea that VMI is a unique institution was prevalent in every facet of the data collected. References

to VMI holding a special place in America's higher education system emerged throughout the data collection process. This perspective was mentioned in various places on the Institute's website, in speeches given by the Superintendent, and in VMI's marketing and recruiting products. This concept carried over to both the staff and cadets who were interviewed.

Website. The VMI website was the initial stop in the document review process, and the various sub-components of VMI all point to a prevailing perception of the Institute as a unique institution. The Superintendent's welcome letter refers to VMI as "America's oldest state-supported military college" that is being "retooled to meet the needs of the 21st century." He talks about the "nationally recognized academics," the "athletic opportunities," and the "military environment" that combine to make VMI "a special place." The honor system at VMI is centered on a code that states that "a cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those who do." The VMI website further elaborates on this code, describing VMI as having a single-sanction honor system, where cadets who violate the honor code are dismissed from the Institute, something else that distinguishes VMI from other colleges.

The admissions page of the VMI website claims that "Virginia Military Institute is distinctive in the world of higher education because of its mission to prepare educated, honorable, and steadfast leaders" and that "VMI is not the everyday college experience." The Superintendent, in a recent speech at a class reunion, specifically referred to the form of education provided by VMI as "unique" (VMI: Superintendent's remarks, Class of 1962 50th reunion, 2011) and, at the Class of 2012 Commencement address, posited that people hold VMI graduates to a higher standard. At an alumni reunion committee

meeting, the Superintendent referred to Vision 2039, his vision for the future of the Institute, and described VMI as "A Military Institute and a Military Environment…delivering a unique education."

Recruiting materials. Following up on the theme of VMI being a unique institution, marketing and recruiting materials produced by VMI point out the aspects of the Institute that make it stand out in the world of higher education. A simple VMI fact sheet points out that VMI is the nation's first state-supported military college. In addition, it addresses VMI's mandatory ROTC requirement, its foreign exchange programs, and the unique aspects of cadet life, such as the fact that the Corps of Cadets is led by cadet leadership, and that all cadets live in the barracks, wear a distinctive uniform, and adhere to a strict honor code. Another, similar, fact sheet explains that "VMI embraces the challenges of no ordinary college" and appeals to prospective cadets who "imagine more," "achieve more," and who "don't do ordinary."

A pamphlet for the parents of prospective cadets informs that "VMI diplomas carry with them a reputation for academic excellence and leadership proficiency." An ROTC pamphlet describes how mandatory ROTC completion enhances VMI's unique college experience. It points out that VMI is one of the few colleges in the United States that offers Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps ROTC and, therefore, places VMI graduates at an advantage because they have served and trained alongside the other branches of the U.S. military and, because of VMI's ROTC assets, cadets receive military training at a higher level than at civilian colleges and universities.

Recent VMI recruiting pamphlets connect the unique life at VMI to the unique life of a VMI alumnus, as "VMI cadets embrace the challenge of no ordinary college"

and “VMI graduates experience lives that are far from ordinary.” In short, “It means something to be from VMI” because “VMI is no ordinary experience.” Last, “VMI is not for everyone.”

Superintendent. The opinion that VMI is a unique institution is also plainly evident in the perspectives of key staff. The Superintendent believes that there are several factors contributing to VMI’s status as a special place. He sees VMI as a school that provides “values-based education” where “the academics are not fluff.” He also sees “the option for commissioning” and the emphasis on varsity and club sports as contributing to VMI’s reputation. As he succinctly puts it, “If you want a different experience, come here.”

Commandant. The Commandant of Cadets also supports the idea that VMI is a unique institution by his description of VMI as “a place of high character and honor.” He described how “when you come here as a cadet, it’s not one system, because we’ve got all these systems. We’ve got the regimental system. We’ve got sports systems. We’re NCAA Division 1. And then you wrap this whole adversarial system around the ratline, the bonding. You know, we produce leaders. They will get a jump on life.”

Center for Leadership and Ethics Director. The Director of the CLE responded to the question of what makes VMI unique by placing it in the context of contemporary American society. She describes VMI as “a place that has never compromised its honor” and “a place where hope still lives.” In addition, she looks at VMI as a school that presents a test, or a challenge, and is “a place where leaders are grown.”

Cadet interviews. The cadets interviewed also thought that VMI was a unique place. However, they find it unique for a multitude of reasons. When asked what they thought made VMI unique, cadet responses ranged from Cadet A's "it's aloof from regular society" where "we have our own culture system" and "our own language" to Cadet D's "it's pretty easy to get a job after coming out of VMI." Cadet G agreed with Cadet D, claiming that what makes VMI unique is "a lot of little things such as the honor system and the military training that prepares you to succeed in civilian life, as well." Several cadets commented on the "structured environment," as Cadet H did. Cadet E agreed, describing the VMI experience as "a lifestyle built around discipline and organizational skills," as did Cadet B, who commented that VMI instills in cadets a sense of "time management and mission accomplishment regardless of obstacles." Cadet C was impressed by the fact that VMI "offers academic and athletic opportunities while also providing leadership experience." Cadet F thought that the personal attention that cadets receive, due to VMI's small size, and the emphasis on personal accountability are what makes VMI unique.

Cadet focus groups. The cadet focus group participants responded to the question concerning what makes VMI unique in much the same way as the individual cadets did, that is, with a multitude of examples. Focus Group 1 commented on the alumni network that exists for graduates, as evidenced by his interaction with an alumnus at a recruiting event, as well as the reputation VMI has in both the military and the civilian sectors.

The participants also pointed to the fact that VMI "definitely has its own culture" and that "it pretty much has its own language." One commented that VMI is a very

"tight-knit" community and "wasn't really something you could really label." Another commented that VMI offered the "best possibility of being trained and then becoming a military officer."

All four cadets in Focus Group 1 referred to the "sense of brotherhood" among VMI cadets and graduates as well as the importance of the honor system. In the end, all the members of Focus Group 1 agreed that the idea of doing something different than everyone else is prevalent among VMI cadets, though "people also come here for their own reasons," such as athletic scholarships or family history.

Focus Group 2 tended to lean towards the historical and leadership aspects of the Institute. One cadet responded that "the extent to which VMI sticks to its traditions, its foundations, the practices it's had since the 1840s, I think is one of the things that makes it kind of stand out." Another answered that VMI is unique because it attracts, like him, "others who want to spend more time focusing on developing themselves, becoming better leaders."

The cadets believe that VMI holds a "unique place in American society" and that the "special aspect" of VMI is that "it has this tradition of developing these citizen-soldiers, and it's embodied that concept all the way up to the present day." One pointed out that "VMI has this really distinct history of producing guys like George Marshall" and that "it stands out from other schools" because it "has a different purpose besides just educating," as "it's also to prepare" citizen-soldiers.

Focus Group 3 identified the honor system, which makes VMI a place "where you can leave your wallet out on your desk and you don't have to worry about anything getting taken" and "you don't have to worry about people cheating" as what makes VMI

unique. They were also attracted by VMI's "structured environment" that leads to "a lot of successful military people commissioning from here and doing really well" and "graduates who don't commission still do really well."

Focus Group 3 cadets also discussed the overall challenge of being a VMI cadet that creates a "lifelong bond." As one cadet put it, "you all go through a lot of stuff together, and I think that that's a really unique part of VMI, as well." They also pointed to "the fact that the alumni system was so strong" that you're basically guaranteed a job out of VMI." In short, one cadet thought that "this school just prepares you for life better, just because of the things you have to go through on a day-to-day basis."

Focus Group 4 cadets generally pointed to the freshman system at VMI as what makes VMI unique. As one commented, "the rigorous freshman indoctrination process, the ratline, provided me a challenge. It stood out, so I figured take the opportunity." Another supported this position, saying, "I felt the ratline was unique. I know other military schools have their own kind of subordinate line, but I feel like the one here is definitely different." The participants in Focus Group 4 also identified the VMI honor system and the "small school atmosphere" where "everybody knows everybody" as differentiating VMI from other schools.

Theme 2 – VMI surrounds its cadets with leadership opportunities.

Website. The theme of VMI as an institution that surrounds its cadets with leadership opportunities, and produces superior leaders, was supported by information gleaned from multiple sources. Beginning with the Superintendent's welcome on the VMI website (VMI: Superintendent's welcome statement, 2011), almost every facet of the VMI experience is described as contributing to cadet leader development. As one

cadet in a recent recruiting video entitled, “No Ordinary Life” puts it, “we all rise early to begin a day full of opportunities to lead and to learn.” A July 2012 Superintendent’s Update to Parents discusses how “from matriculation to graduation, every VMI cadet is afforded the opportunity to explore his or her own individual strengths and weaknesses” through the “hundreds of opportunities to experience leadership first hand within and across the three pillar areas of focus: the military environment, the academic setting, and the athletic field.”

The Superintendent, in his welcome letter, refers to VMI’s legacy as “a long line of educated, honorable, and steadfast leaders – a line that will continue far into the future” (VMI: Superintendent’s welcome statement, 2011). As with the Institute’s mission, which is, in part, to produce graduates “confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership,” the VMI academic program aims to educate cadets in an environment that “develops citizens of character who anticipate, respond, and lead in a complex and changing world.” In addition, the website informs that the cadet regiment, or student body, is “commanded and administered largely by cadets” where cadets drill “under their own company leadership” and where cadets “are appointed to non-commissioned and commissioned cadet rank on the basis of demonstrated qualities of leadership and proficiency in military and academic studies.”

The admissions page of the VMI website claims that “Virginia Military Institute is distinctive in the world of higher education because of its mission to prepare educated, honorable, and steadfast leaders. In addition, “VMI is not the everyday college experience. It is more: more challenge, more physical expectations, more mental and

leadership development…more" (VMI: Admissions, 2011). In support of this assertion, there are numerous cadet-led organizations.

The General Committee, which "consists of the class officers of the upper three classes," controls the class system at VMI" and "monitors every facet of cadet life." The General Committee is composed of several sub-committees. The Officer of the Guard Association "is dedicated to facilitating communication, harmony and discipline with the Corps." The Executive Committee "enforces standards of appearance and conduct." The Rat Disciplinary Committee is "responsible for molding the rats into a class." Last, the Cadet Equity Association "maintains a post-wide climate of respect and equitable treatment for cadets" and these cadets "receive training in procedures related to investigations and legal issues that involve gender, racial, religious, and ethnic discrimination." Perhaps most important, the Honor Court is responsible for training the Corps of Cadets regarding the honor code and honorable behavior and tries cases involving suspected infractions of the code, making recommendations to the superintendent concerning punishment.

Enhancing the leadership experience at VMI is the CLE. A fairly recent addition to the VMI experience, the CLE "seeks to provide programs that focus on realizing the full potential of the leadership and character development experiences available to the Corps of Cadets." Specifically, the CLE hosts leadership conferences and symposia; the Biennial Leadership Conference; a leadership book program; the Leader-in-Residence Program, where a "current or former leader in government, business, or the military spends two weeks immersed at the Institute" where he or she interacts with cadets and

faculty in a variety of formal and informal settings; a class lecture series; and a leadership focus group.

The focus on leadership at VMI is not restricted to cadet organizations. The VMI Core Curriculum, referred to as The Nucleus of Effective Citizenship and Leadership, is a four-year program built around four components: Key Competencies, Foundations of Citizenship and Leadership, Perspectives on Civilization and Human Achievement, and Integrative Experiences. This Core Curriculum, as a major element of Vision 2039, contributes to the preparation of graduates who possess the "ability to influence human behavior to accomplish organizational goals." In short, the ability to lead. The Foundations of Citizenship and Leadership component includes required ROTC classes, a mandatory interdisciplinary leadership course, and a "series of lectures, breakout sessions, and workshops" for rats, led by cadet mentors.

The central academic element of the Leadership and Human Relationships component of the VMI Core Curriculum is Leadership in Organizations, a course designed to provide all cadets with a common academic leadership experience. This course complements the leadership experience at VMI, enabling cadets to study leadership in an organizational context, learn about alternative leadership styles and approaches, and learn about leadership traits, behaviors, and relationships. In addition, the course is also a "leadership assessment center, providing personalized feedback" in the hope that cadets will "unconsciously stop and think about variables which influence a leadership situation without even being aware of them" (Meriwether, 2011, pp. 1-2).

In addition, the Leadership in Organizations course supports multiple core learning outcomes, as articulated in the VMI Quality Enhancement Plan (VMI: Mission

and vision of the Virginia Military Institute, 2011). Specifically, the course helps to prepare graduates who can "articulate a philosophy of leadership," "identify moral and ethical issues" in group tasks, design plans that consider moral and ethical issues, and understand the processes necessary to motivate a group to complete an assigned task," and help cadets to "evaluate a group's progress towards task completion."

Recruiting materials. Following the theme of leadership opportunities at VMI, the recruiting materials produced by the Institute all point to those available to cadets. A VMI fact sheet identifies VMI as "building leaders for all walks of life," reveals that "all cadets are required to participate in one of four (Army, Marines, Navy, or Air Force) ROTC programs," and explains how "several committees run the VMI cadet government and together handle issues of the Corps and enforce Institute regulations." Another such fact sheet claims that "cadets become leaders in the boardroom or on the battlefield," and that "all cadets complete leadership classes in the Institute's four ROTC programs."

In addition, an information pamphlet specifically aimed at describing the ROTC experience at VMI outlines the special programs and leadership opportunities attached to each of the four ROTC programs there. Some of these programs take place on-campus and some are run in the summer, such as the Army's Cadet Troop Leader Training, where cadets "serve in lieutenant-level positions with an active duty unit," The Marine Corps' Officer Candidate School, the Navy's Second- and Third-Class cruises on Navy ships and submarines, and the Air Force's Civil Air Patrol.

An overview pamphlet for parents tells them that "VMI diplomas carry with them a reputation for academic excellence and leadership proficiency." It also points out that

"all cadets participate in ROTC leadership training" and that cadets mature into "moral, courageous, and compassionate leaders" through experiences with "human relations," "adversity," and "personal values."

A recruiting pamphlet entitled, "Define Yourself" presents profiles of some cadets, outlining many of the activities they are involved in. These profiles include such activities as "New Cadet Trainer," "Cadet Equity Investigator," "Hockey Team Manager," Platoon Sergeant," Cheerleader," "Ranger Challenge Competition," and "Cadet Corporal." As elaborated on in a pamphlet entitled, "Don't Do Ordinary," a cadet's "day is full of opportunities to lead and learn." In another pamphlet entitled, "Don't Do Ordinary – No Ordinary Life," other cadets are profiled, again with their leadership positions outlined. In addition, the pamphlet lists 80 clubs and activities, broken down into the categories of Academic, Publications, Special Interest, Military, Cadet Government, Music and Theater, Service, and Religious, in which cadets can participate and gain leadership experience.

The publication also explains how the VMI ROTC leadership training and the VMI Regimental System "provide unique opportunities to lead." Cadets "focus on their objectives in the arena of leadership challenges," earning "not only a degree but also leadership experience that can only come from challenges overcome."

Superintendent. The Superintendent explained from his perspective exactly how leadership opportunities are presented to cadets. He referred to the "whole leader development thing, which as you know has an athletic component, has a regimental and class system component, has an ROTC and an academic component that

makes it all run together." He sees it as his "job to create the environment where these very different facets can grow in their own way and try to keep them in balance."

He admits to the challenge of every cadet getting the same leadership experience, something that is extremely difficult to achieve, but points out that "you don't just have to be the First Captain" because "there is leadership in running the Investment Club," as well. In fact, leadership "happens in a thousand different ways, some of which I don't even know about" because "if you look at cadet activities today, there are 16 times more than in my time, and some of them are significant." One activity is Cadet Life, where cadets "have a lot of responsibility in running admissions open houses," in addition to the class system and the regimental system.

The Superintendent also connected the leader development apparatus at VMI to the honor system there. His view is that the honor system "has a lot to do with leader development because the kids, men and women, can look at honor through that lens and think about that as being the first hallmark of leadership." In the end, he "thinks it generally works." We have some disappointments in our graduates, but I think we certainly have more positive experiences than negative experiences."

Commandant. The Commandant of Cadets echoed the Superintendent's comments concerning the connection between the honor system and leader development. He sees the leader development "system" at VMI as a "system of accountability and status for us to run this tough adversarial system that is dependent upon status tied to the honor system." In addition, he works closely with the ROTC leaders, "leaning heavily on ROTC, quite frankly, to get the professional, school book, positive role model, leadership piece."

Being practical, the Commandant admits that "not everybody's coming out of here destined to be a great, great leader, but at least the leader development model here, I think, is one where it exposes you to different styles" and "you can pick and choose." In addition, VMI is continuing to create more leadership opportunities. Rat Challenge, which is a confidence and team building program for rats led by upperclass cadets outside of the regimental system, is "one of the great leadership picks."

Ultimately, the Commandant believes that leader development is "all around you. His perspective is that it's happening at VMI "by osmosis because of both the class system (the system of seniority within the Corps based on one's class) and the regimental system (system of administrative leadership positions), but I don't have the documentation to show."

Center for Leadership and Ethics Director. The Director of the CLE agrees that the environment at VMI is one that fosters leader development. Her opinion is that leader development opportunities at VMI are "woven into every moment of the cadet's experience." Her opinion is that everyone at VMI must be "always keeping in the forefront of our mind that we all have that as part of our responsibility, sort of subsumed under whatever your primary responsibility is." In short, "we all have a role to play."

The Director of the CLE sees VMI as "a place where you can come and develop leadership skills." Understanding that every cadet is not going to be involved in every opportunity for leader development, she believes the important part is "about letting this stuff rise to the surface so we can say, 'Here's what's happening here.'"

In her capacity at the CLE, she has seen a phenomenon based on "creating a conversation around what somebody says." In several instances, cadets have approached

her with issues that she has turned into exceptional leadership opportunities. In one case, a senior cadet in the Corps approached her and, explaining that he and other cadets had some concerns about the Institute and the Corps, formed the Leadership Focus Group. This group meets regularly, addresses issues of concern to cadets, and proposes changes through a "very formal experience." Another cadet-initiated and -operated organization is the Leadership Book Program, which selects appropriate books, meets to discuss them, and arranges for authors and other speakers to visit VMI.

The Director's opinion is that the CLE is "identifying opportunities" and "enriching what is already happening. In her talks with cadets concerning why they came to VMI, "every single one of them says that they came here because they wanted to learn to lead. Every single one of them." In her words, "we all know something happens, but we don't really know what it is." As with the other staff who were interviewed, she believes that "we really do have some opportunities here," many of which hadn't been really considered. Her efforts, and those of the faculty and staff at VMI, have been directed towards a consolidated list of different leadership opportunities open to cadets during their time at VMI.

One of the most successful programs sponsored by the CLE has been the recent conference on honor held at the CLE in the spring of 2012. What is most remarkable about this conference is that the idea for it, and the ownership of it, belonged to cadets who saw a need to address the issue of the erosion of ethical and honorable behavior in college students. Another leadership opportunity that, as the Director explains, "speaks to what happens when you provide the forum and let these kinds of ideas rise to the top."

Cadet interviews. For the most part, cadets were unfamiliar with *Vision 2039*. Cadet A believes that *Vision 2039* is more about buildings than leadership. Cadet B is "not really sure about the specifics of it" and Cadet H only "vaguely" knows what it is, "a plan to make this place better one step at a time." Cadet C is familiar with "mainly the athletic side of it" while Cadet E is "familiar with just the engineering aspect, like the buildings and so forth." Cadet D knows it exists but doesn't concern himself too much with it "because 2039 is so far away." Cadet F hasn't read the "whole, official thing."

In addition, the cadets did not share the same opinion of the CLE as the Institute's leadership did. Most had little, if any, familiarity with the CLE and even less interaction with it. Cadet A refers to the CLE as "a bunch of buildings most of us will never use" that he reads about occasionally in the Alumni Review. Cadet B corroborates this opinion, referring to it as a "wonderful building" that gets used "maybe once or twice a year." Cadet C sees the Center as "a great advantage," while Cadet D admits that he is "not too familiar with it at all."

Cadet E only visits the Center only when required because he's only a private and "it's directed more towards the regimental staff." Cadet F goes a step further, referring to the Center as "a place to sink money" and that "you could find all the information that's in the CLE, the Center for Leadership Education or Development, whatever it is, you could find that on the internet." Cadet G has "not really had any interaction with it," though he agrees that it "does have a small effect because it puts a spotlight on leadership." Cadet H believes "it's kind of just used as an auditorium."

The cadet participants did, however, overwhelmingly corroborate the idea that VMI affords them with significant leadership opportunities. Cadet H pointed out that,

"every student has many opportunities to develop their own leadership roles." Cadet A spoke of the rank system, where, "with each year level, you are widened to the possibility – the possibility is widened for you for rank," and the class system, where, "by default, you are in a leadership position because you are a mandatory mentor for the freshman class." Cadet C added that he didn't "think you could escape this place without getting a lot of leadership training," a thought echoed by Cadet G, who said, "you can't go through this and not be presented with a leadership opportunity."

There are additional leadership roles, such as sports team captains, who "you can automatically identify" because "the team rallies around them." Cadet B agreed, saying "if it's a sports team, you have that captain and you have the guys who've been on the team for awhile working with those rats." Cadet D, who "leads more by example, from my behavior," added that the "coach expects us to address our teammates if there's an issue or anything like that" because "it's our job as team captains to let the rats know when they're coming in for preseason what the rules are." "You could be the leader of a club or team," or, "in the classrooms you can become a section marcher," Cadet F explains, becoming, in the words of Cadet H, one of the "people who, in a sense, take charge inside classrooms."

A considerable number of leadership opportunities concern the training of rats. Cadet B, explains, "you've got the lieutenants and those sergeants helping to train up the corporals," as well as "some upperclassman" who is always there to help rats with their academic classes. This extends to academic mentors, because "having solid leadership in academics is almost more important than the whole stuff on the hill." First classmen have a significant role in this effort because, as Cadet C pointed out, "the 'dyke,' or the senior

(though both the rat and the first classman are referred to by the term ‘dyke’ in this mentor-mentee relationship), is actually a mentor to the rats and they come to him for advice.”

Cadet E added, “there’s a huge emphasis on the dyke-rat system,” which is “a huge leadership position” because you learn a lot “teaching a whole new generation at VMI.” Cadet F suggested that “everyone has a responsibility to keep the rats in line, making sure they stay out of trouble, making sure they’re doing the right things” and that “people see first classmen as an example for everyone, good or bad.” According to Cadet F, his dyke was “a big part in mentoring me and producing me as a leader.”

Cadet C pointed out that, even if “you’re a private all four years, they’re still leadership positions” and, “on the athletic side, leadership is even more prevalent – in the locker room, in the weight room, guys stepping up or team captains.” At the very least, “you have underclassmen looking up to you” so “even if you try to avoid the rank system, you’re going to be a leader, like it or not.” Cadet F added that, “you’d have to work at it” to get through VMI without having been in a leadership position, but even then “you’d still be a leader in the class.”

Cadet E observed that “on the ROTC side, you learn a lot of leadership,” helping to “coordinate and direct under the ROTC heads.” Cadet F agreed, relating how “in your ROTCs you’re assigned turns to be a platoon sergeant.” Cadet G added, “for Navy, we have fire team leaders, and they are supposed to know us on a personal level so they can evaluate us adequately” and Cadet C confirmed that “in ROTC every week cadets get cycled for leadership positions.”

Cadet G observed that "it's very subtle with things we do," because "it's not like, 'okay, this is how we're going to expand on your leadership." In addition, "you also have the NCAA aspects, learning leadership there" and also by "showing the fourth classmen what's right, what's wrong" because "everything you say and do outside of VMI or inside, you are teaching them." In the end, "you exemplify leadership by just being a model cadet" because "if you do right, people will follow."

The cadets were not universally positive in their commentary on leadership opportunities, however. When asked if he thought all cadets had the same leadership opportunities, Cadet D replied, "I can't say that. Not everyone does." Cadet E expounded on this perspective, concluding that "if you hold the high positions and you're serious about the ratline and they're leading all the rats through the ratline, I feel like they get a huge learning of what leadership is all about. But on the other side, if you're a private, I feel like you're not really getting that leadership aspect."

Cadet F added, "The opportunities are there but a lot of things are based on favoritism," "a lot of things are based on who you know," and leadership positions are "hard to obtain for some people." Cadet G offered that, initially, all cadets are afforded the same leadership opportunities. Later, "once you see your natural leaders, I feel like they're given more opportunities than those who aren't the more outstanding leaders" and "if you're one of those troublemakers, you're not really given any of the responsibility."

Cadet focus groups. The cadets who participated in the focus groups had only a vague familiarity with Vision 2039. The Focus Group 3 cadets saw the plan as simply an "expanding on the Institute, kind of modernizing it" and pointed to what they remember as being the salient bullet points of "better facilities" and a "certain percentage

of women to go here." The Focus Group 4 cadets, who had recently finished the ratline, saw it as "being on a much bigger scope" than they were looking at, being more concerned with making it to spring break. They saw *Vision 2039* as having to do with academic, leadership, and athletic development but pointed out that, "as far as our perspectives go, we're kind of far down for that to directly affect us."

The cadets in the four focus groups contributed to the individual cadets' opinions concerning the CLE. Focus Group 1 cadets referred to the Center a "just a place to have conferences – as far as leadership goes, no influence at all" on their leadership experience at VMI. However, when reminded about the honor conference initiated by their classmates through the CLE, they admitted that there were a considerable number of events sponsored there by cadet groups. Focus Group 2 cadets see the CLE as "a huge opportunity that's not being taken advantage of by the corps." They see the CLE as having "these great spurts of energy" with conferences and retreats but not affecting their lives in a relevant manner. The Focus Group 3 cadets see the CLE simply for conferences, formations, and briefings. The Focus Group 4 cadets "haven't had that much there" and, one cadet, when asked if the CLE has affected their experience at VMI in any way, responded, "I'm sure it has, but not that I know of."

The cadets who comprised the four focus groups also supported the idea that VMI provides a significant number of leadership opportunities for cadets. One cadet in Focus Group 1 offered that "there's definitely a lot of opportunities for you to take that leadership role." Continuing, he described how "there's the Corps, like cadre, but outside of that there's the more relaxed, like Rat Challenge, where you can be a leader without having to be that strict."

One cadet pointed out that, because of the class system, “cadets are in charge of the Corps” and that “that’s how it’s supposed to be.” His classmate backed him up, opining that “it has something to do with struggling though challenge” because “you have people of rank who have the leadership roles, and then you have your first class privates who don’t have leadership, but they have rats” who they have to develop, because “it’s about building them both and teaching them how to get through.”

Another cadet, a varsity basketball player, admitted to having “learned a lot this year, taking a lot more responsibility” for the team. As he put it, “leading them by example” is “sometimes hard to do.” He pointed out that, “if it’s sports, or regimental, or branch, or some other thing, everybody has an opportunity to grow as a leader.”

When asked what leadership opportunities are available at VMI, a Focus Group 2 cadet responded, “infinite.” Expanding on that response, another cadet explained how the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School preparation program at VMI “really forces you to practice all the leadership traits, practice initiative, practice responsibility for not only yourself but everyone else, and everyone goes through it regardless of if you were a private or a ranker.” While this program is for aspiring Marine officers, the other services have similar summer training preparation programs for their cadets.

Another cadet pointed to other, less “traditional” forms of leader development available at VMI. He talked about volunteering to be a Big Brother or Big Sister in the local community. His classmate brought up a concept that was also voiced by cadets in Focus Group 1, that of the dyke-rat relationship, where a first classman is responsible to be a mentor for a rat throughout the rat’s first year. As he relates, “I think it is a

tremendous system for leadership" and a "leadership development opportunity" in which all classmen participate.

The Focus Group 3 cadets admitted that "it's hard to kind of put everyone in a leadership position" but that "there's a lot of opportunity to be a leader," being in charge of a club or being a corporal, to name just two. Another cadet talked about the preparation she received at VMI before going to Marine Corps summer training and how it "made me more confident" when called upon to accomplish a task. The Focus Group 3 cadets, however, pointed to their perspective that "some people will apply for cadre and not get it, but that's because they don't have a good VFT score, they don't have high enough grades, or they're just not really well-liked by the company." In addition, "they want a certain percentage of females" to hold rank, so "a lot of males who are more qualified than females won't get a position because they want a female in the spot."

Overall, the cadets in Focus Group 4 believe that, regardless of a cadet's position, VMI "teaches you how to set an example" through activities such as mandatory leadership class, sports, ROTC, Rat Challenge, and NCMT. One cadet elaborated that he gets leadership experience from helping to run Rat Challenge and by being a cadet Emergency Medical Technician because he gets to interact with people in different settings. One cadet, not a varsity athlete, commented that being a team captain or co-captain "could make the leadership position harder for them but also provide them with more training because they have to lead people who don't want to be led."

In the end, Focus Group 3 cadets believed that "VMI does, though, provide more leadership opportunities than a lot of other colleges would." They believe that "it's just

easier to get more experience here" and "it holds you more accountable, too, than at another college, as far as your actions."

The Focus Group 4 cadets commented on the "fully integrated" nature of the leadership opportunities at VMI. One cadet explained that "it's almost seamless" because "there's really no distinction between – like, there's not a distinctive educational time period and then a distinctive leadership period. It's kind of all meshed together."

Their perspective was that most of the day-to-day activities around running VMI were performed by cadets. One said, "If you go into a classroom, the teacher has nothing to do with taking attendance" because "it's all run by cadets." Another added, "it's just how the school is – it just calls for leadership because there's only so many faculty members to do stuff. And so it just leaves opportunity for leadership in the Corps."

Other Focus Group 4 cadets commented on the role of the class system at VMI. According to one, "by the time you are a first classman, whether you apply for rank or not, you're still kind of at the top of the food chain and then you get a rat assigned to you who is yours to mentor and keep track of and help him or her along, so that's definitely leadership." This revealed their perspective that, "even if you didn't apply for rank and avoided leadership positions, you'd be thrown into one sometime, anyway." In short, simply by being a cadet at VMI, leadership is thrust upon you, is "pretty unavoidable," and is "inescapable" because "even in ROTC we have first classmen who have been privates all four years but they end up being battalion commander for the ROTC."

Another cadet commented on the opportunities to lead that varsity athletes have and that other cadets do not, such as team captains and co-captains, many of whom are also involved in leadership in the Corps. The overall impression of VMI, from Focus

Group 4's perspective, is that the school "produces a more experienced, high-caliber leader" because "this school is all about leadership – it's just as much about leadership as it is about academics."

Theme 3 – Cadets are responsible for their leader development. The third theme, that cadets are responsible for their own leader development, is also addressed through the website, though in a slightly different fashion. The website claims that "the military system characterizes and distinguishes life at VMI" and that "by placing cadets on a uniform plane, it enables them to advance through self-reliance, initiative, and strength of character."

Website. Though the website does not mention it directly, in effect, cadets are responsible for their own leader development just as they are responsible to "ensure necessary academic, military, and physical training requirements are properly completed." Throughout the website pages, words such as "offer," provide," "available," and "encourage," with regard to the opportunities cadets have, appear regularly, suggesting that it is a cadet responsibility to take advantage of them. This concept is supported through recruiting materials and was corroborated by the cadets themselves.

In his graduation address to the Class of 2012, the Superintendent thanked the Class of 2012 for its leadership. He spoke of them as having "the distinction of having led the largest Old Corps in VMI's history," having "trained and dyked the largest matriculating class of 508 new cadets," and having "maintained a strong regimental, class, and honor system." He continues to recognize the graduates' achievements, such as being "scholar athletes," "leaders nationally in undergraduate research," and having "impressive graduate school attendance, impressive commissioning awards, and a large

number of top-tier academic awards." Though not addressing the idea directly, the implication is that the cadets he is describing, on their initiative, took advantage of the opportunities VMI presents because of the "lessons you have learned at VMI and the habits you have developed."

Recruiting materials. The recruiting materials produced by VMI also point to the idea of individual responsibility. A VMI profile sheet claims that "VMI instills the values of honor, discipline, self-sacrifice, perseverance, devotion to duty, self-reliance, and service." A brochure directed at parents describes how VMI "encourages cadets to reach beyond perceived boundaries" and "to test limits" in order "for each cadet to reach his or her full potential." A pamphlet on the ROTC opportunities available at VMI tells prospective cadets that it's "Your Future – Your Choice." Despite the opportunities provided by VMI, "cadets advance as a result of personal efforts."

Superintendent. The Superintendent reinforced the idea that cadets themselves are responsible for their leader development. When asked if there was any one specific person who was responsible for leader development, his reply was, "I guess there's always some guy that's responsible, so within there, that's probably me." However, he went on to elaborate that "nothing is specifically laid out there, except that I think it's certainly my job to create the environment" so that "at the end of the day, hopefully, most of the cadets get that experience."

He continued by admitting that not every cadet gets the exact same experience, relating how "it'd be nice if we could market that the whole Corps gets some kind of a leadership experience." He elaborated that the onus of responsibility is on the individual cadet, because "at the end of the day, some of these guys have got to step up and want to

do it." Ultimately, "if a kid wants to have some good leader experience, it's there for the taking."

Commandant. The Commandant corroborated this philosophy, explaining how "we're not going out there and grabbing you and making – and throwing you in" to a leadership position. From his perspective, with so many leadership opportunities in the Corps, in athletics, in academics, in clubs and activities, "there's no kid at VMI, for whatever reason, if they want to lead something, doesn't have the opportunity." Despite the efforts of the faculty and staff to provide such excellent opportunities, however, he also believes that "there are also young men and women who want to take no involvement at all."

Center for Leadership and Ethics Director. The Director of the CLE agrees. With regards to leader development, "it doesn't mean that every cadet has to do it, but it means that every cadet has the opportunity to do it." In the end, she believes that "every cadet has a chance and is given the opportunity to take it or not."

Cadet interviews. The cadets who participated in interviews also agreed on the importance of cadets taking responsibility for their leader development. Cadet A believes that "if you chase success in the personal areas to develop yourself into a better person, and you succeed, then you're setting yourself up for success and possible rank, so to me a lot of it depends on you." Cadet B agreed, saying," there's got to be some kids out there who probably don't do as much, but then again, it kind of goes back on them – VMI offers the opportunities, it opens the doors," but "you have to step through and you have to take the initiative and do it." A great example, he explains, is the ROTC departments, because "there's plenty of privates commissioning, but they have significant

leadership roles within the battalions" so "it's their initiative putting them in that position." He relates how

> people will ask me, "Oh, I really want to come to VMI because I feel like it could set you up with some good opportunities," and I hope people don't come here specifically to have VMI's name stamped on their transcript and expect that to get them everywhere because VMI will give you a ton of opportunities but you need to individually pursue them and go for it.

Cadet C believes that "a big part of VMI is that you get out what you put into it" and "if you give it your all and kind of put forth your best effort, you're going to get a lot out." In the end, "it definitely lies with the cadet" and "if you throw yourself into those leadership positions, you're going to learn from them." Again, while "they do all have the same opportunity," ultimately "it's just the guys with more ambition, I think, step up." Cadet D agreed, saying "there are a lot of different areas where you could go" and "I guess if anyone wants it, then it's there."

Cadet E believes that cadets themselves make their own opportunities,

> so if you're running with a '2.0 and go,' and you don't afford yourself the opportunity to get regimental commander or you can't pass a physical fitness test, you're not going to get that opportunity to be cadre, or whatever, so it's really on your shoulders – if you do well academically, physically, then you do have the opportunity to become a leader here at VMI."

Cadet F pointed out that, though there are countless leadership opportunities at VMI, "they won't be handed to you, you've got to find them – you have to dig a little."

Cadet focus groups. With regards to leader development opportunities, Focus Group 1 cadets were also of the opinion that "you can seek something out." In fact,

> if you don't try to go for something to try to push yourself, you're not going to find it. You're not going to get any growth. You're not going to do anything. You'll just stay the same bump on a log for all four years, and when you walk away from here you have a ring, you have a diploma, but what else do you have to show for it?

Others agreed, as "it's just a matter of who pushes an opportunity to do it," and "everyone comes in on a level playing field and what you do with it is up to you" because "it's equal opportunity but not equal results." Another cadet seconded this idea, saying "everybody has an opportunity to grow as a leader, it's just whether they take that or not."

Focus Group 2 cadets concluded that "leadership here at VMI is more self-oriented, you've got to go out and grab it and take it than to have someone like an officer manage your leadership development." Another cadet added that "one thing people don't understand is that there's no magic drinking fountain that spits out leadership" but, rather, "you just need to capitalize on maximizing the benefit of your opportunities." One cadet used the analogy that "VMI will give you the grindstone; it's up to you to polish yourself." Another summed up the situation by saying that "the current status of leadership development at VMI is that you get out of it what you put into it."

The cadets in Focus Group 3 thought that "cadets have a responsibility to seek out those opportunities for developing their leadership capabilities." One cadet added that "if you want to truly grow as a leader, you can." Another commented

> that a lot of people might just not look at it the right way. They might just kind of look at a position and say, "Well, that's not a good leadership position. That's just some – that's just a waste of time." But you get what you put in. So, if you want it, you can make it a leadership position if you do what you're supposed to.

VMI, in their opinion, "really helps you develop yourself as a leader if you really want to develop."

The cadets in Focus Group 4 agreed. Their perspective was that the opportunities for leader development at VMI are numerous; however, it is incumbent upon each cadet "to get out there and take it." One cadet commented that "everyone who comes here, I

think, has the same opportunity," that "the whole purpose of the ratline and all that is to level the playing field," and that "it's up to you whether or not you want to take a little bit of it or take the whole thing." One cadet related how a first classman had told his company as rats, "I open my hand to you. What's in it is opportunity. At this school, every day you have here is an opportunity. Take advantage of it. I put it out there but it's up to you to grab it."

Researcher Assumptions

The researcher began this study, aimed at examining the perspectives of the participants with regard to the leader development dimension of VMI, with several assumptions. First, because of VMI's emphasis on leadership, as described in *Vision 2039: Focus on Leadership,* the researcher assumed that the participants would point to VMI's ability to produce leaders as the salient characteristic that makes VMI unique; in short, it's organizational identity or, "that thing which is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization" (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 3). This assumption was incorrect.

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, both cadets and staff pointed to many aspects of VMI as being what they considered the characteristic that makes it unique. These included the honor system, the class system, the regimental system, the necessity for time management, the small size of the school and, by association, the small class sizes, and the academic programs. Interestingly, while some pointed directly to the leader development aspect, most pointed to how these other aspects made VMI unique and then commented on how they contributed to leader development.

The second assumption the researcher entered into this study with was that VMI implements some form of the feedback-intensive model for leader development. This

assumption was correct, though not in complete congruence with the model. Most noticeably, in a cadet's first two years, the feedback he or she receives is typically negative, pointing to a cadet's failures in an adversative manner.

Although cadets do receive feedback on their performance in multiple areas, such as military, academic, and physical, there is no set format or schedule for it. Cadets receive feedback in a number of ways: academic counseling, disciplinary action, performance in ROTC, and on the athletic field, to name a few. The feedback mechanism is, therefore, less structured but more comprehensive.

In addition, the concept of reflection, a key tenet of the feedback-intensive model was not extraordinarily prevalent in cadet commentaries. Most of their comments concerning reflection involved the struggle to determine how to approach different situations, based on the different feedback they have received. As Cadet A said, "You have to find what makes people tick, what makes people get the mission accomplished, and you have to decide about doing it." In the end, "you have to decide what you are going to do "with all this information thrown at you" and "you have to discern what's going to work, what's not going to work." Some cadets saw reflection as being based on other's performance. Focus Group 1 cadets offered that "sometimes the worst example of leadership can be the best example, because, 'you know, that's wrong and I will never do that.'" Cadet B agreed, explaining how "you can alter yourself and you can try another way of doing it." The cadets in Focus Group 2 however, offered that "there's no chance to improve or ameliorate your situation when you don't know that it needs improving."

Cadet C looked at making and reflecting on mistakes as being a "good thing because you're going to learn from them." Cadet D wasn't looking to throw himself into

leadership positions when he got to VMI but, after receiving some feedback from older cadets and instructors, and thinking about it, he thinks that "his mindset has changed." Cadet E had the same experience, wanting to simply stay away from leadership positions initially, "just to see how things were," and "apply for platoon sergeant or some kind of sergeant just to see what that's all about."

The system at VMI also teaches you, as Cadet F relates, how it feels to "listen to someone who doesn't know you" that "plants a seed in your head that'll tell you 'I should take it a little bit more careful' when dealing with others." He also pointed out that "if you wind up a company commander, usually you know you did something right in the way of leadership," but if your last leadership position was as a corporal, "then maybe you weren't the best at doing your job."

The last assumption the researcher made was that this study - the document review, the interviews with staff and cadets, and the focus groups - would be received with some reticence by staff members but well-received by cadets. This assumption proved to be correct. The Superintendent, the Commandant, and the Director of the Center for Leadership and Ethics were initially reluctant to participate until the researcher met with them and had the opportunity to explain the nature of the study. At that point, they graciously shared both their time and their experiences, providing invaluable insights. The cadets, as was expected, were more than willing to talk about their experiences, share their insights, and give their opinions.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this basic, interpretive qualitative study was to examine and analyze the perspectives of the participants, that is, key staff and cadets, with regards to the leader development dimension at VMI. This study examined the unique leader development environment that exists at VMI through the lens of the feedback-intensive model of leadership instruction and leader development.

As revealed in Chapter II, the literature of practice clearly points to the feedback-intensive model of leadership development, as used by USMA, Army ROTC, and other civilian leadership programs on college and university campuses, though VMI does not claim to use this model. In addition, the research on college leadership programs points to the effectiveness of the feedback-intensive model that makes use of experiences, reflection, mentoring, and growth.

Although there have been multiple studies concerning leader development programs on college campuses conducted over the decades, there are none to date that focus solely on such programs at a military college like VMI. This study addressed a gap in the research, that is, to examine the leader development program at a military college to explore its characteristics through the perspectives of both staff and cadets. The benefit of studying this critical element of the unique education offered at VMI supports the Institute's mission of producing leaders by providing some insight as to exactly how it does so. In addition, documenting the characteristics of such institutions contributes to the body of knowledge and, as a result, might assist those concerned with the future of

higher education, the place leader development holds higher education, and the future of our country from both a military and a civilian perspective.

The research design employed in this study was a basic, interpretive qualitative study. This study employed a rigorous qualitative study design that relied on a document review, interviews with key Institute staff, interviews with cadets representing each class at VMI, and focus groups of cadets representing each class at VMI, as described in Chapter III and presented in Chapter IV. In addition, the qualitative study design used in this study included member checks and the use of the QDA method of noticing, collecting, and thinking about interesting data points.

This chapter will present a summary and interpretation of the findings, theoretical implications, practical implications, a critique of the study, and ideas for further research.

Summary and Interpretation of the Findings

The summary of the findings of this study are organized and presented by means of the primary research question, "How do cadets and staff perceive the leadership instruction they teach and receive at VMI?" and through the three themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis: perspectives on VMI as a unique institution, VMI surrounds its cadets with leadership opportunities, and cadets are responsible for their own leader development.

Almost universally, the cadets and staff interviewed during this study were in agreement concerning their perceptions of the leader development dimension at VMI. As evidenced by the document review, and corroborated by the participants, VMI is perceived as a unique institution that surrounds cadets with an assortment of leader

development opportunities and provides developmental feedback through a variety of means.

The uniqueness of VMI. As described earlier, organizational identity is "that which is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization" (Hatch & Schultz, 2004, p. 3). This idea of a characteristic feature leads to the creation of a collective self and makes a group or an organization look at themselves or itself as standing out from others. Recent research on organizational identity has led to the emergence of four themes: multiple identities, stability and change, control of identity through narrative, and communicating identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2004). The data collected at VMI reflects these themes.

Although the participants were all in agreement that VMI is a unique institution, the word "unique" meant different things to different participants. Some of that data pointed to leader development as the characteristic that makes VMI unique. Both staff and cadets also identified leader development at VMI as contributing to its uniqueness, though not necessarily being the single aspect of the school that significantly differentiates it from other institutions.

The admissions page of the VMI website claimed that VMI's distinctive place in higher education is due to its mission of producing leaders. The Director of the CLE agreed, describing VMI as a place that grows leaders. The Commandant of Cadets took it a step further, pointing out the multiple systems at VMI, such as the military system, sports, and the ratline, that contribute to the making of leaders that makes VMI unique.

The Superintendent, however, answered that it was VMI's values-based education, academic reputation, emphasis on military service, and athletics that makes the

Institute unique. Both staff and cadets also singled out other aspects of VMI that they thought made the school unique. These included the honor code, the class system, the rat system, the small classes, the emphasis on personal accountability, the athletic requirements, and the adversative system, among others.

Stability and change, the second theme emerging from the literature, was also represented in the data. As Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (1996) described, organizational identity is something that "is frequently up for redefinition and revision by organization members," which is critical to an organization's survival (pp. 350-351). This concept of an organizational identity being both dynamic and durable, changing over time to ensure longevity, was not supported by the data.

The data collected in this study all point to VMI's success as being a result of the institution maintaining its values and not succumbing to convention. All of the participants pointed to long-standing characteristics of VMI, those of a values-based education, adherence to a code of honor, an adversative system, academic excellence, military service, and athletics, as being things that have made VMI withstand the test of time. Participant comments were, therefore, in direct contradiction to this theme from recent organizational identity research. VMI products, marketing materials, and recruiting information, in addition to the comments of the participants, also identify VMI's adherence to its standards, regardless of the prevailing attitudes of the times, as contributing to its brand as a place where ordinary is unacceptable.

The third theme is predicated on the idea that organizational identity is the result of a constant narrative and discourse, utilizing language to develop and convey meanings. Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) address the continual dialogue between the organization

and the audience that redefines the organization's place and image. This aspect of the organizational identity research does not seem to be supported at VMI. As with the previous theme, change to ensure stability, VMI is unconcerned with adjusting its narrative or in redefining its place and image.

The Superintendent offered that VMI always has been, and still is, a different place offering a different experience. The CLE Director was quick to point out that VMI has never compromised its honor. The cadets, for the most part, pointed to VMI's reputation in both the military and the civilian world. All of these comments lead to VMI's unapologetic stance concerning its methods. This attitude is prevalent in VMI recruiting materials that explain how VMI diplomas carry with them a reputation for excellence and how not everyone can earn one, because VMI is not for everyone.

Elsbach and Kramer (1996) discuss the idea that threats to organizational identity are instrumental in shaping perceptions. This addresses the last theme of communicating identity to an audience and comparing one's organization to others. A critical element concerning the organizational identity of an institution such as VMI, and communicating that identity, is the image the organization presents, its "brand." Vital to this "messaging" is the concept of follow through, or support, on the part of the organization's employees for the image proffered by the organizations' marketing effort.

Pratt and Rafaeli (1997), in addition, described the role of symbols in creating meaning in organizations. These symbols can be just about anything that conveys meaning and can differ significantly within the organization, from person to person. The data collected make a connection between the multiple pillars of the VMI experience, academics, athletics, and the military system, and the overall effort to produce leaders for

the country, either in the military or in the civilian world. The common idea is that VMI is unique not because it produces leaders, but because of the manner in which it does so which is the general difference between the VMI educational experience and that of other colleges.

Overall, the cadets and staff see VMI as a unique institution, though they may have different opinions concerning just what it is that defines what makes it unique. VMI offers cadets the chance to avoid the ordinary, as its recruiting slogan advises. The definition of ordinary, as well as that of unordinary, it leaves up to the individual cadet.

The feedback-intensive model at VMI. Effective leader development programs, as grounded in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory and described by the CCL (2004), are centered on the idea of the feedback-intensive program. Critical to both is a system of mentorship and feedback that supports student reflection and growth. This feedback can come in multiple forms: performance appraisals, 360-degree feedback, self-assessment, and peer evaluations, to name a few.

Kolb's (1984) theory is based on the four elements of concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts, and testing in new situations (p. 21). Taking Kolb's theory further, the CCL uses the five features of the feedback-intensive program: rich and comprehensive feedback, challenging and relevant content, multiple methodologies, a safe and supportive learning environment, and assessment, challenge, and support (McCauley and Van Velsor, 2004). In both cases, this model depicts leader development as being most effective when the student's experiences involve the three-part process of action, observation, and reflection.

VMI does in fact utilize a feedback-intensive model of leader development. It does so, however, through a combination of leader development activities, supervised by different departments, each of which provides feedback on cadet performance through a different method. Importantly, though, there is no consolidated feedback-intensive program that encompasses all the activities of every cadet.

A considerable amount of the feedback that cadets receive is negative. Cadets are told what the rules are and they are told, in no uncertain terms, when they violate them. Cadets are not often told when they are performing well, especially early in their tenures at VMI.

The Commandant, who is in daily close contact with cadets, admitted that feedback and counseling of cadets by his staff is a challenge. One of the reasons for this is his job of maintaining discipline in the barracks. The result of this relationship is counseling only taking place when cadets are in trouble. This idea was supported by the Director of the CLE, who commented that one of the areas in which the Institute is lacking is explicit leadership feedback for cadets.

The cadets themselves corroborated this perspective. They explained how performance feedback at VMI comes in a multitude of forms. There are both quarterly and yearly evaluations, specific evaluations for cadets who want rank, ROTC evaluations and peer evaluations, feedback from dykes to rats, feedback from coaches, and informal peer checks from classmates. The issue with the system is that the quality of performance feedback varies and that feedback is irregular.

In another example, cadets pointed out that, contrary to the feedback-intensive model, if a cadet had no rank in the Corps, then he or she did not really get any

performance feedback. Their perspective was that, if a cadet was continually selected for higher rank each year, then he or she must be doing well. However, if a cadet was selected for rank one year, but was not selected the next year for a higher position, then he or she would not find out about this until the decision had been made and it was too late to adjust behavior. In addition, depending on which company a cadet was part of, he or she may or may not get any feedback from the company leadership and, in any case, this was described as an informal, indirect and trickle-down system.

Associated with the feedback issue at VMI is the effect it has on another key aspect of the feedback-intensive model, that of reflection. Cadet reflection can, and does, take place in response to both negative and positive feedback. However, the lack of feedback often results in cadets not knowing exactly which of their actions they need to reflect on, leading to frustration.

The ROTC departments, however, do a good job of providing regular, performance-based counseling to cadets, in accordance with the model. In particular, the Army ROTC cadre utilizes the Army ROTC LDP, which is built specifically on the feedback-intensive model. Again, the problem here is that, even among the four ROTC departments, the standard varies. In addition, not all cadets are oriented on commissioning upon graduation, so the ROTC instructors will tend to concentrate their efforts on their contracted cadets.

The major difference, then, between the VMI system and the literature concerning the feedback-intensive model of leader development as described by the CCL (2004), is that there is no coordinated and consolidated feedback-intensive model applied to cadet leader development. Cadets do receive feedback, through venues such as their cadet

leaders, coaches, professors, the Commandant's staff, and ROTC instructors. In fact, some of these sub-groups that make up VMI utilize the feedback-intensive model. The ROTC departments are an example of this, where cadets receive regular appraisals of their performance. However, the use of this model is by no means universal at VMI. Like the leadership experiences of each cadet, the feedback each cadet receives is unique.

VMI produces leaders. The data obtained during the course of this study repeatedly point to the perception that the Institute is producing

> educated and honorable men and women, prepared for the varied work of civil life, imbued with love of learning, confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership, possessing a high sense of public service, advocates of the American Democracy and free enterprise system, and ready as citizen-soldiers to defend their country in time of national peril (VMI: Mission and Vision, 2011).

Significantly, the recent publication of *Vision 2039: Focus on Leadership* points to the Institute's renewed commitment to integrating leadership opportunities and leader development throughout the academic, athletic, and military pillars of the VMI experience in order to produce graduates "confident in the functions and attitudes of leadership" (VMI: Mission and vision, 2011).

VMI relies on cadets to seize leadership opportunities through their own initiative. In fact, there is an expectation that cadets will do so. Likewise, these leader development opportunities, although available to all cadets, are not distributed exactly the same for each cadet nor are they forced upon them. Similarly, cadets receive developmental feedback through multiple means, depending on the activities in which they choose to engage.

The Superintendent, the Commandant, and the Director of the CLE all identified the concept of providing a large menu of leadership opportunities, allowing cadets to

select which options to pursue, as the cornerstone of the leader development effort. Overwhelmingly, cadet participants were of the opinion that VMI provides a significant number of leadership opportunities for cadets to pursue. The document review yielded data that touched on the idea of cadet responsibility for their own leader development, and the staff interviews mentioned this concept, as well.

The cadets themselves, however, identified this idea as the critical element that, when coupled with the leadership opportunities provided by VMI, results in a superior leader development atmosphere. All of the data collected suggests that VMI develops the leadership capabilities of its cadets by providing an environment and an educational experience characterized by a number of various leadership opportunities.

The cadets did, however, point to an issue with the leader development environment at VMI. Specifically, the Focus Group 4 cadets, who were new fourth classmen, commented on the fact that "to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower." The Focus Group 2 cadets agreed, saying that "we don't develop followers enough and that's a big problem because if you can't follow then you shouldn't be leading." When everyone tries to lead, friction and frustration can be the result. This phenomenon is not as prevalent in cadets' first two years, as they are, for the most part, on the receiving end of the leadership of the more senior cadets. However, it is present as, for example, cadet corporals are third classmen in charge of a squad of 10-12 cadets, some of whom might be second class or first class privates with seniority in the class system. As a Focus Group 4 cadet pointed out, even in the early stages of a class' time at VMI, leaders are already beginning to emerge.

VMI, although not necessarily adhering as a single organization to one feedback-intensive model of leader development, has managed to envelop its cadets in a cloud of leader development opportunities, relying on them to seize those opportunities. Indeed, elements of the feedback-intensive model are being utilized in this "opportunity cloud," albeit in an unconventional manner and without a central, consolidated structure. The ROTC departments, for example, use it to great effect and they certainly are one of the many leader development mechanisms at VMI.

As the Commandant reported, VMI has been criticized by those who think that the school has simply "taken the easy way out" or doesn't "want to invest" in the infrastructure necessary for such a school-wide program. The reality is that the VMI way may be the more difficult road. As he pointed out, "we could all do this job for them" and "I think that's what you see at other institutions, you know, they're getting evaluated all over." However, "it's more high risk" to allow cadets to discover things for themselves and let them fail in order to learn. Regardless, VMI has created its organizational identity around this unique environment.

The perception is that the product, VMI's graduates, is proof that the system works. VMI has created its own organizational identity as a unique institution that produces leaders by surrounding cadets with opportunities and allowing them, even relying on them, to take advantage of those opportunities. VMI graduates are serving in positions of leadership in many areas of society, such as the military, government, medicine, the law, religion, and law enforcement. As a cadet in Focus Group 2 put it, "Obviously, somewhere inside that equation that seems to be hidden inside the walls of the barracks, something good happens."

Practical Implications for Leader Development in Higher Education

This study provided a lens through which college leader development program leadership can view their institutions' missions and the manner in which they accomplish those missions. The literature concerning leader development programs points to the need for feedback and growth, and most leader development programs on college campuses subscribe to this approach.

However, there are alternative strategies for implementing a feedback-intensive program, as this study on VMI illuminates. Convention shows the method of a directive approach, where each student progresses through a series of experiences and receives feedback on his or her performance. In this approach, each student's set of experiences, and progression, follows essentially the same path.

The VMI approach to a specific feedback-intensive model is unstated in the documents and the data but appears unconventional, at first. In it, each cadet is afforded a multitude of leader development opportunities, as provided by the VMI environment. As a result, each cadet can chart his or her unique course of leader development, based on his or her interests, utilizing the opportunities that support those interests, and sometimes without any planned or prescribed feedback or reflection. In effect, leader development is more self-directed at VMI.

VMI's surrounding cadets with so many opportunities results in their leader development being almost subliminal, something that happens without their even realizing that it is taking place. Some cadet participants automatically referred to leadership positions or opportunities as being solely connected with rank in the Corps of Cadets. Cadets have so many opportunities, and leader development is so pervasive, that

they often do not realize they are leading anything until they think and talk about their experiences. When asked about other potential leader development opportunities, they realized that they were in an environment that expects them to lead.

John Thomas Lewis Preston, one of VMI's founders and first professors, described his idea for VMI in 1836 as

> The healthful and pleasant abode of a crowd of honorable youths, pressing up the hill of science with noble emulation, a gratifying spectacle, an honor to our country and our state, objects of honest pride to their instructors and fair specimens of citizen-soldiers, attached to their native state, proud of her fame, and ready in every time of deepest peril to vindicate her honor and defend her rights.

This idea, which is inscribed on the parapet located on the south side of the VMI barracks, eloquently summarizes the manner in which VMI creates a vibrant leader development environment. This study explored perspectives on that environment and illustrates how VMI implements a conventional leader development model in an unconventional manner.

Critique of this Study

Although this study attempted to account for limitations, as presented in Chapter I, several others surfaced during the course of the investigation. This section will address the issues of the sample and researcher perspective.

Sample. This study investigated only the perspectives of the participants of one of the eleven public and private four-year and two-year military colleges in the United States. Although an investigation of the perspectives of participants from any of the other ten military colleges may have yielded different results, the data obtained from this study might form the foundation of future investigations of the leader development programs at those colleges.

In addition, this study examined the perspectives of two groups of stakeholders; specifically, several key staff members and cadets representing each class. This study did not incorporate the perspectives of academic faculty, athletic staff, ROTC instructors, or administrative staff, all of whom may have provided differing viewpoints on leader development. Interviewing alumni, other than the Superintendent and the Commandant, was beyond the scope of this study. In addition, alumni who might be serving in leadership positions could possibly confuse their experiences with those they had while cadets at VMI.

When taking into consideration cadet class, academic major, rank, ROTC affiliation, athletic team participation, club and organization participation, gender, and race, a researcher is confronted with an almost infinite number of sub-groups to which a cadet might belong. However, despite the small sample of participants, the fact that cadet participation was voluntary, and the fact that the researcher did not attempt to ensure specific quotas of group representation, this study did address a representative cross-section of major cadet sub-groups.

Researcher perspective. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the researcher during the data collection was the temptation to "speak for the participants." As Moustakas (1994) warns, it is a delicate balance between the researcher using intuition to understand a participant's experience while simultaneously resisting any preconceived ideas concerning the interview topics. As the researcher was a VMI cadet and had also served there as an Army ROTC instructor, he shared a common background with the participants.

This common background led to a temptation to finish participants' sentences for them, suggest responses in the form of specific words or phrases, and assume an understanding of participant responses simply because of a shared background. The researcher guarded against this temptation by implementing a rigorous case study design, using multiple sources of evidence, employing member checks with the participants, and framing the study to represent the participants' points of view.

Implications for Future Research

This study provided needed data in addressing a gap in the research concerning leader development programs by investigating the leader development dimension at a military college. The subject institution was a representative case, as VMI is one of eleven four-year and two-year military colleges and universities that employ leader development as a major facet of their educational experiences. The results of this study suggest two possible routes for future research: research employing new data and research using the data collected in this study.

Studies employing other data from different institutions. As VMI is only one of eleven military colleges and universities in the United States, studies utilizing the same methodology and conducted at other colleges might yield entirely different results. Additionally, a quantitative study conducted with VMI cadets, or with cadets at all eleven military colleges in the United States, might provide a broader view concerning the leader development dynamic at military schools.

There are also opportunities for further research at VMI concerning this subject. Additional qualitative studies that investigate the perspectives of specific sub-groups at VMI might prove to particularly revealing. For example, the same type of study might be

conducted with only cadet varsity athletes, cadets who are commissioning into the Armed Forces, female cadets, or cadets who do not hold rank in the Corps of Cadets. The same studies might also be conducted by investigating particular sub-organizations at VMI, such as the Athletic Department, the Commandant's Department, the Leadership Studies Department, the CLE, or the ROTC departments. Another possible group for such a study is VMI alumni, who could comment on their leader development experience at VMI after they have graduated and after they have been serving in the military or the civilian work force for a number of years.

Further analysis using data collected in this study. The data collected in this study form the foundation for further research, both at VMI and at other institutions. The data offer a starting point for research into specific cadet groupings and how leader development has affected their VMI experiences as well as their experiences after graduation. Utilizing the data from this study, researchers could conduct in-depth investigations into Institute departments or organizations. Such studies might address the impact of the VMI mission and the subsequent interaction between the institution and specific departments with regards to leader development.

This study of the leader development dimension at VMI opens doors and provides opportunities for future research. VMI leadership, as well as the leadership at other military colleges, can now consider a different perspective on how cadets and staff view the leader development experience at VMI. By investigating this dimension through the use of the basic, interpretive qualitative study format, this study provides descriptive and elaborative data, from the perspective of both staff and cadets, that supplements what could be gleaned from a quantitative survey. Furthermore, the data obtained from this

study contributes to the body of knowledge concerning leader development programs on college campuses.

Conclusion

In attempting to explain VMI over 40 years ago, an unknown cadet writer in 1970 described how

> there are many lonelinesses: one overwhelms, like the weight of towering and aloof walls that loom on every side; another manifests itself in the ultimate realization that the whole responsibility of succeeding, excelling…finally rests with you alone (Virginia Military Sesquicentennial Committee, 1989, p.55).

The purpose of this basic, interpretive qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of the participants concerning the leader development model at VMI and, throughout the study, the researcher collected a considerable amount of data through document review, interviews with key staff and cadets, and cadet focus groups.

In connecting the data that was collected to the research questions that drove the study, the themes that emerged seem to point to the idea that VMI, being a unique institution, does things in a unique manner. The perception is that VMI does develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets, produces graduates who are well-suited for leadership positions, and maintains an organizational identity focused on leader development.

Although not necessarily adhering strictly to the feedback-intensive model of leader development, VMI does, like the "towering and aloof walls" described in 1970, surround its cadets with opportunities and places the responsibility for succeeding and excelling on their shoulders.

Appendix A: Proposal Letter

Gerard P. Tertychny
118 Brookline Blvd.
Havertown, PA 19083

Date

Superintendent
Virginia Military Institute
Lexington, VA 24450

Dear General Peay,

The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance with my dissertation research project and to solicit institutional permission.

I am nearing the completion of my doctoral studies in Higher Education Administration at The George Washington University under the guidance of Dr. Marilyn Wesner and recently received approval on my dissertation proposal. My research will investigate the leader development environment at VMI through the lens of the feedback-intensive model of leadership instruction. Accordingly, I am writing to formally request permission to access your institution, along with several employees and cadets, to study this topic.

Though VMI will be mentioned by name in the study, no individual associated with the Institute will be identified by name in the study or in any potential subsequent articles. Titles, such as superintendent, commandant, and director, will be used instead.

I would like to conduct my research in three phases:

1. Document review. Document review will provide a historical context and will help to establish the setting for the remainder of my research. Document analysis would consist of a review of the Institute's mission statement, website, recruiting materials, press articles, speeches, and Vision 2039.

2. Semi-structured interviews. I would like to interview you, the Director of the Center for Leadership and Ethics, and the Commandant of Cadets to determine your perspectives on the leader development environment at VMI. In addition, I would like to interview two cadets from each of the four classes at VMI. Participation would be voluntary, a written consent form would be obtained from each participant, and the interviews would be conducted in person.

3. Focus groups. I would like to conduct four cadet focus groups, each comprised of four cadets from the same class. The intent of the focus groups is to collect the cadet perspective on the leader development aspect of their VMI experience. Again, participation would be voluntary, a written consent form would be

obtained from each participant, and the focus groups would be conducted in person.

Enclosed are two forms. The Institutional Consent Form seeks your permission for me to conduct my research at VMI. The second form confirms your willingness to participate as a subject in this study.

Upon completion of my research I will provide a copy of my dissertation for your files.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (757) 232-3731 or at gerard.tertychny@us.army.mil, or contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Marilyn Wesner at mwesner@gwu.edu. Again, thank you for your consideration and your help in this project.

Sincerely,

Gerard P. Tertychny, '87
Enclosures

Appendix B: Institutional Consent Form

Project: Dissertation Research

Title: Perspectives on Leader Development at Virginia Military Institute.

Investigator: Gerard P. Tertychny, Doctoral Candidate, The George Washington University, Washington, DC (gerard.tertychny@us.army.mil, 757-232-3731).

Participant Institution: Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, VA 24450

Virginia Military Institute (VMI) grants permission to Gerard P. Tertychny, a doctoral student at The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, to engage in dissertation research that will use Virginia Military Institute as the subject institution in the research. VMI grants Gerard P. Tertychny permission to use the research in creating a dissertation and in any subsequent research articles and publications.

The nature of the research involves the analysis of institutional documents concerning leader development made available by the superintendent, deans, administrators, faculty, and staff, three in-depth interviews, and four cadet focus groups. Submitted documents will mask participants' identities whenever possible. The research is expected to terminate in June 2011.

Individual subjects will be treated anonymously and will not be revealed in the dissertation or in any subsequent publication of the research.

Signed_____

Date_____
Superintendent
Virginia Military Institute

Signed_____

Date_____
Gerard P. Tertychny

Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form

Project: Dissertation Research

Title: Perspectives on Leader Development at Virginia Military Institute.

Investigator: Gerard P. Tertychny, Doctoral Candidate, The George Washington University, Washington, DC (gerard.tertychny@us.army.mil, 757-232-3731).

Participant Institution: Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, VA 24450

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to participate in this study, you must understand the risks and benefits associated with it. The researcher will be available to answer your questions and address your concerns. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be required to sign this consent form. Your participation in this study is purely voluntary. Your academic standing or employment status will not, in any way, be affected should you choose not to participate or if you decide to withdraw from the study at any time. While we cannot guarantee the privacy of the focus group discussion, we request that all present respect the group by not telling anyone outside the group what is said.

As a doctoral student at The George Washington University, I am investigating perspectives on leader development at Virginia Military Institute and my research will be conducted at VMI. You will be asked to participate in either a semi-structured interview if you are a staff member or in either a semi-structured interview or a focus group if you are a cadet. Interviews and focus groups will both take approximately one hour and will occur during your free time.

To the best of my knowledge, both the interviews and the focus groups entail no more risk than you would experience in everyday life. The questions asked will be oriented on how Virginia Military Institute develops the leadership capabilities of its cadets in order to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation?

There are no personal benefits to participating in this study. There are no costs associated with taking part in this study, you will receive no compensation for your participation, and you do not need to seek the permission of your supervisor in order to participate.

Your records will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in any report or publication derived from this study. Cadets will be referred to in direct quotes by class, rank, gender, and whether or not he/she is a varsity athlete. Data will be reported with all personally identifiable attributes masked, however, staff members will be indirectly identified as they will be cited with their job title. Both the interviews and the focus groups will be audio taped for the purposes of transcription. All records, including audio-tapes, will be destroyed one year from the conclusion of the study.

If you have any questions concerning the research procedures in this study, please contact Gerard P. Tertychny at (757) 232-3731 or gerard.tertychny@us.army.mil or the principal investigator, Dr. Marilyn Wesner, at (757) 269-2229. If you have any questions about the informed consent process or your rights as a research subject, please contact The George Washington University Office of Human Research at (202) 994-2715 using the IRB number 041112.

By signing this consent form, you affirm that you have read the form, that the study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You do not give up any of your legal rights by signing this form. You will receive a copy of this form.

_____	_____	_____
Print name	Signature	Date
_____	_____	
Email address	Telephone number	

I certify that the research study has been explained to the above individual to include the purpose of the study as well as the procedures, risks, and benefits associated with participation. Any questions have been addressed to the subject's satisfaction.

_____	_____	_____
Investigator: Gerard P. Tertychny	Signature	Date

Appendix D: Interview Protocol (Faculty and Staff)

Position_____

Years at VMI_____

Years in Current Position_____

Education Level_____

How do faculty, staff, and cadets perceive the leadership instruction they teach and receive at VMI?

How does Virginia Military Institute develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets in order to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation?

- What is the VMI mission?
- How does leader development fit in to the overall educational experience at VMI?
- Who is responsible for leader development at VMI?
- How is VMI organized for leader development?
- Are there any specific leadership requirements for graduation?
- In what manner are cadets evaluated on their leadership abilities?
- What is your role with regards to cadet leader development?
- How has the establishment of the Center for Leadership and Ethics affected leader development at VMI?
- How has the publication of *Vision 2039* affected leader development at VMI?

How does the Institute utilize the feedback-intensive model of leader development and practical application?

- What type of leader development feedback do cadets receive?
- How often do cadets receive leader development feedback?
- Who is responsible for leadership mentoring?
- Are all cadets afforded the same leader development opportunities?

- Are all cadets required to serve in a leadership position?

- Who ensures that all cadets serve in a leadership position?

How do cadets, faculty, and staff perceive the Institute with regard to organizational identity as compared with the Institute's view of itself?

- What makes VMI unique?

- How does VMI recruit cadets/market itself?

- Does VMI achieve its stated mission?

- Why do most cadets attend to VMI?

- Does the VMI system produce a better leader as compared to other colleges? If so, how?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol (Cadets)

Code_____

Class_____

Leadership Position_____

Male/Female

How do faculty, staff, and cadets perceive the leadership instruction they teach and receive at VMI?

How does Virginia Military Institute develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets in order to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation?

- What is the VMI mission?
- How does leader development fit in to the overall educational experience at VMI?
- Who is responsible for leader development at VMI?
- How is VMI organized for leader development?
- Are there any specific leadership requirements for graduation?
- In what manner are cadets evaluated on their leadership abilities?
- What is your role with regards to cadet leader development?
- How has the establishment of the Center for Leadership and Ethics affected leader development at VMI?
- How has the publication of *Vision 2039* affected leader development at VMI?

How does the Institute utilize the feedback-intensive model of leader development and practical application?

- What type of leader development feedback have you received?
- How often do you receive leader development feedback?
- Who is responsible for leadership mentoring?

- Are all cadets afforded the same leader development opportunities?

- Are all cadets required to serve in a leadership position?

- Who ensures that all cadets serve in a leadership position?

How do cadets, faculty, and staff perceive the Institute with regard to organizational identity as compared with the Institute's view of itself?

- What makes VMI unique?

- Why did you decide to attend VMI?

- Why do most cadets attend VMI?

- How does VMI recruit cadets/market itself?

- Does VMI achieve its stated mission?

- Does the VMI system produce a better leader as compared to other colleges? If so, how?

Appendix F: Interview Protocol (Focus Groups)

Focus Group #_____

Class_____

Leadership Positions_____

Males_____Females_____

Athletes_____

Thank you for participating in this focus group discussion today. My name is Gerry Tertychny, and I am a doctoral student at The George Washington University in Washington, DC. I will be the moderator for this session.

Each of you was selected to participate because you have your own perspective on the environment at VMI. My dissertation research focuses on the leader development aspect of the VMI experience and how it contributes to the education of VMI cadets.

It is important that you express yourselves candidly. There are no correct or incorrect answers, I want to know what you think. I will be tape recording this session in order to ensure accuracy in the transcription process. Remember that your responses will not be linked to you in any way and that I will keep the information that you provide anonymous. For this reason, and to ensure candid discussion from the other groups, I ask that you not repeat any parts of this discussion outside of this focus group.

Because this session is being recorded, I may ask you from time to time to speak up and to speak one at a time so I can hear you clearly while reviewing the tapes. Again, I am your guide for today's session but the interaction should be among you.

First, I would like each one of you to introduce yourself, but please use only your first names.

How do faculty, staff, and cadets perceive the leadership instruction they teach and receive at VMI?

How do cadets, faculty, and staff perceive the Institute with regard to organizational identity as compared with the Institute's view of itself?

- What do you think makes VMI unique?

- Why did you decide to attend VMI?

- Do you think most of your classmates came here for the same reason? If not, why do you think they came here?

- How did VMI recruit you? How does VMI advertise itself?

- Why do you think VMI exists? Do you think that VMI achieves that mission?

How does Virginia Military Institute develop the leadership capabilities of its cadets in order to produce graduates who are prepared to assume leadership roles upon graduation?

- How does leader development fit in to the overall educational experience at VMI?

- Who is responsible for leader development at VMI?

- How is VMI organized for leader development?

- Are there any specific leadership requirements for graduation?

- In what manner have you been evaluated on your leadership abilities?

- What is the cadet role with regards to cadet leader development?

- How has the establishment of the Center for Leadership and Ethics affected your experience at VMI?

- Have you seen *Vision 2039*? What does *Vision 2039* mean to you?

How does the Institute utilize the feedback-intensive model of leader development and practical application?

- What type of leader development feedback have you received?

- How often do you receive leader development feedback?

- Who is responsible for leadership mentoring?

- Are all cadets afforded the same leader development opportunities?

- Are all cadets required to serve in a leadership position?

- Who ensures that all cadets serve in a leadership position?

- Does the VMI system produce a better leader as compared to other colleges? If so, how?

Appendix G: Document Description Form

Document Number:

Date Received:

Document Provided By:

Document Subject:

Applicability:

Document Title or Description:

Significance:

Appendix H: Email Recruiting Message

Dear Cadet,

I am a doctoral student at The George Washington University and I am investigating perspectives on leader development at Virginia Military Institute. You are invited to participate in this research study concerning your experience with leadership development while a VMI Cadet.

I you are willing to contribute your time and ideas, you will be asked to participate in either an individual interview or in a focus group consisting of four cadets from your class. Both interviews and focus groups will both take approximately one hour.

The questions asked will be oriented on how Virginia Military Institute develops the leadership capabilities of its cadets and on your perspectives concerning your leader development while a cadet.

Your participation in this study is purely voluntary, your academic standing will not be affected should you choose not to participate, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, there are no personal benefits to participating nor are there any costs associated with taking part in this study. Both the interviews and the focus groups entail no more risk than you would experience in everyday life.

Both the interviews and the focus groups will be audio taped for the purposes of transcription; however, your records will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in any report or publication derived from this study. All records, including audio-tapes, will be destroyed one year from the conclusion of the study.

If you would like to participate in my research study, please contact Donna Young, VMI Office of Assessment and Institutional Research, at youngdh@vmi.edu or contact me at Gerard.tertychny@us.army.mil

Thank you for your time and consideration and I hope to talk to you soon.

Gerry Tertychny

Appendix I: Reviewed Documents

1. Superintendent Welcome Statement
2. VMI Mission and Vision
3. VMI Philosophy
4. Military System at VMI
5. Regimental System
6. General Committee
7. Honor Court
8. Admissions
9. Center for Leadership and Ethics
10. Superintendent's Remarks, Class of 1962 50th Reunion
11. Superintendent's Remarks, North Post Dedication
12. Superintendent's Remarks, 2012 Commissioning
13. Superintendent's Remarks, 2012 Graduation
14. Common Leadership Grounding
15. Nucleus of Effective Citizenship and Leadership
16. PS 344 – Leadership in Organizations course description
17. Leadership – ROTC at VMI
18. VMI Quality Enhancement Plan
19. Superintendent's Briefing to Class of 1987 25th Reunion Committee
20. VMI Fact Sheet
21. VMI Profile
22. VMI Overview for Parents
23. High Priority Candidate Reception Invitation
24. Institute Society Dinner Invitation
25. VMI Foundation Gift Solicitation
26. ROTC at VMI pamphlet
27. "Define Yourself" recruiting pamphlet
28. "Don't Do Ordinary" recruiting pamphlet (1)
29. "Don't Do Ordinary" recruiting pamphlet (2)
30. "No Ordinary Life" recruiting video
31. Vision 2039 pamphlet
32. Superintendent's Update to the Parents of VMI Cadets

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