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A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF JOHN F. KENNEDY'S PUBLIC
PAPERS BETWEEN 1960 AND 1963 ON THE PEACE CORPS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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This study examined the beliefs, values, and leadership attributes of John F. Kennedy regarding the Peace Corps, as well as how these qualities and his organizational vision helped guide the successful implementation of the program. The primary research materials were 81 public papers by John F. Kennedy that referenced the Peace Corps. They were examined using a qualitative content analysis to determine how the public messages on the implementation of the Peace Corps were aligned with components of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and tactics for organizational change (Kotter, 2008). The study also explored how additional themes that emerged inductively from the analysis may have contributed to the program's overall success. Additional supplemental materials were examined to support the findings in the public papers, and provide further insight into the research questions.

The study found evidence that John F. Kennedy frequently used aspects of the transformational leadership components of *idealized influence* and *inspirational motivation* (Bass & Riggio, 2006) within his public papers on the Peace Corps. Prominent themes around the former included: (a) world peace, (b) freedom and democracy, (c) improved human conditions, (d) moral purpose, (e) American idealism, and (f) self-sacrifice. Themes around the latter included: (a) Kennedy's challenge to

serve, (b) Opportunities in Government work, (c) importance of Volunteers' work, (d) vision for growth, and (e) defined purpose of program. Organizational change tactics (Kotter, 2008) most frequently used by Kennedy with the Peace Corps included his ability to *display a continuing sense of urgency* and *create an externally focused organization*. Additional themes were noted less prominently.

Although this study concludes that John F. Kennedy used effective leadership and vision to transform the Peace Corps from concept to reality, additional factors that may have contributed to the program's success included: (a) prior legislative efforts to create a Peace Corps type program, (b) Sargent Shriver's effectiveness as program director, (c) the context of American and world events at the time, and (d) a captive audience of young Americans who were receptive to the message.