ARE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE ACADEMIC PROGRAM LEADERS (DEANS) LEADERSHIP STYLES TRANSACTIONAL, TRANSFORMATIONAL OR LAISSEZ-FAIRE?

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if the leadership style of academic program leaders (deans) of Colleges of Agriculture at land-grant institutions is transactional, transformational or laissez-faire. Academic program leaders were defined as individuals listed by the National Association of State University and Land-Grant Colleges as the Dean of Academic Programs in School and Colleges of Agricultural and Life Sciences or Agriculture and Natural Resources. These academic program leaders were assessed using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2000) to determine their leadership style as well as elements of transactional and transformational leadership. Findings of this study imply that academic program leaders in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions have a more transformational leadership style. Additionally, males in this research use transformational leadership behaviors as well as transactional leadership behaviors more often than their female counterparts. Findings of this research show males scoring slightly higher then females in all leadership scale scores. Leadership scale scores included Contingent Reward, Intellectual Stimulation, Management-by-Exception (passive), Management-by-Exception (active), Idealized Influence (behavior), Idealized Influence (attributed), Individualized Consideration, and Inspirational Motivation. This research showed ethnicity had no significant effect on leadership behaviors.

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Universities and colleges in the United States are undergoing a time of change. The quality of their future depends on how well they respond to evolving realities in the larger world beyond their walls (Abelson, 1997). How college of agricultural and life sciences academic program leaders lead their colleges and faculty through the change and their style of leadership could ensure the success of their higher education institutions. The leadership of colleges will be a determining factor of whether the college will be able to successfully and effectively manage the change. The academic program leaders (deans) of colleges of agricultural and life sciences have been designated as the individuals responsible for guiding their organization during this time of change.

Leaders can not solve problems alone. In today's complex world problems call for the combined expertise of multiple resources and assistants. For these reasons, strong emphasis is placed on promoting teamwork and strong leadership. Due to the complex challenges created by globalization and technological advances, it is imperative for organizations to solve problems efficiently and make the most of available resources. Leaders must recognize the creativeness of all the organization's members across multiple disciplines. Suggestions and ideas need to be implemented quickly and efficiently. Leaders must promote collaboration and teamwork. In order to facilitate change, leaders must respect each other's expertise and find ways to identify and solve complex problems and challenges.

To lead people through this process in an orderly manner, leaders need to learn to become process leaders rather than relying solely on their content expertise. Effective leaders recognize they can not solve all their critical challenges alone and that assistance will lie within the faculty. Effective leaders will need to include their subordinates and employees, their peers, and perhaps even their superiors. In order to use the thinking skills of other people, leaders will have to engage them in the process of thinking innovatively and creatively, rather than telling them what to do. When leaders concentrate on the process of continuously finding and solving important problems, they concentrate on the process.

Effective leadership requires leading others to think innovatively and promoting the continual discovery of new solutions. Getting people to work toward a common goal is not easy. The leader must know when and how to synchronize the thinking of others. People tend to lack skills in problem-solving and divergent thinking, as well as the ability to create innovative solutions to complex problems. Research shows involving people in using their creativity is itself motivating. By encouraging people to think for themselves, the leader creates intrinsic motivation in their followers

> Good leadership fosters change that is both transformative and sustainable. It can be concerned with moral or organizational matters. It can define the college's role in the world beyond its walls, or it can determine their internal dynamics of the institution. Most importantly, it requires a worthy goal-vision, if you will--but it also requires persistence. (Ekman, 2003)

The dean's role may be multifaceted from college to college or university to university, yet there is one role that all deans must face: dealing with "change." While undergoing change, researchers have found that followers have to be empowered so that they are willing to work for new change. Research suggests that leaders need to have qualities that facilitate followers to transform from one situation to another, that is transformational leadership (Shamir et al., 1993; Yukl, 1999). Transformational leadership may motivate people to go beyond their own self-interest and to pursue goals and values of the collective group. Effective leadership is central to change and, in particular, to the ability to produce "constructive or adaptive change" as leaders "risk disorder and instability as they seek out opportunities for change" (Bedeian & Hunt, 2005). Leadership requires the development of a vision, communication of that vision, and the ability to set purpose or direction (Bedeian & Hunt, 2005).

Transformational leadership involves the ability to inspire and motivate followers. Research findings support the process-based approach to leadership. This approach posits that a person is influenced by activating internal motivators. A process-based view of leadership involves the ability to motivate followers to act, recognizing that the ability to successfully influence others is the essence of leadership (Yukl, 1999). The successful, effective leader has the ability to have his or her vision accepted, as well as to motivate followers to work toward a common end (Chemers, 2001). Effective leadership is enhanced when leaders can inspire their followers to accept change by communicating a compelling vision of the future and motivating willingness to work in the new manner.

It is important to provide followers opportunities to participate by having the chance to present their arguments. Those arguments can then be considered and incorporated into

management decisions. Followers are more willing to accept change when they have input in the change process.

House's (1971) Path-goal Theory sees the successful leader as someone who engages followers by reconciling their personal goals with those of the group. Leadership is not simply a matter of leaders or of leaders and followers. Leadership is the relationship between leaders and followers within a social group (Haslam, 2001). Effective leadership is about supplying a vision, creating social power, and directing that power so an individual can realize that vision.

Goal attainment is an issue leadership studies also address. Within the group, the leader influences or leads in the setting of direction or the attainment of goals. Therefore, leadership involves directing a group toward some end point or accomplishing some task. This direction includes defining and articulating a direction according to external and environmental contingencies for the leader's followers (Zaccaro & Banks, 2001). Transformational leadership theory includes the idea of inspirational motivation as one way of encouraging followers to envision attractive future states (Bass, 1998).

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of this study was to determine if academic program leaders in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions use transactional, transformational and/or laissez-faire leadership styles in performing their duties. An additional objective of this study was to determine if there is a difference in leadership styles of academic program leaders according to gender. A final objective of this study was to determine if there was a difference in leadership styles of academic program leaders according to their ethnicity.

Population

The population for this study was academic program leaders of colleges of agricultural and life sciences at land-grant universities. Academic program leaders of Colleges of Agricultural and Life Sciences were determined by using the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) 2005 directory. The colleges of Agricultural and Life Science academic program leaders included in this study represented both 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities. Each participant was contacted because he or she held the title of "Professional Academic Program Leader," "Dean," or a similar title. The directory identified 72 individuals as having the title or fulfilling the role of the academic program leader. Fifty-six individuals from the 1862 and 1890 land-grant colleges responded to the research for a 78% response rate. Two follow-ups over a two-month period for institutions that did not respond were conducted. Non-respondents were contacted by telephone, email, and fax.

Instrumentation

In order to accomplish the research objectives, Dillman' s (2000) Internet and Interactive Voice Response Surveys Design Methodology was followed. A packet containing the research instrument was mailed to each participant. Leadership styles and leadership behaviors of the study's participants were determined by scoring each participant's response to the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) is based on the

Full Range Leadership Model developed by Bass and Avolio (2000). The survey is a short and comprehensive assessment with 45 items that measure a full range of leadership behaviors. The MLQ has been repeatedly validated by leadership experts. The MLQ is strongly predictive of leader performance (Bass, 1997). The MLQ measures leadership styles, and designates behaviors ranging from transactional leadership to transformational leadership, including laissez-faire leadership. The reliability of the MLQ, as reported by Bass and Avolio for each leadership factor, ranges from .74 to .91.

The MLQ measures individual leadership styles as being transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire as well as scales of leadership. The MLQ was utilized to measure elements or scales of transformational and transactional leadership of the academic program leader. The MLQ scale scores are measures of characteristics, or behaviors of leaders. These characteristics include: Individualized Consideration; Intellectual Stimulation; Inspirational Motivation; Idealized Influence (attributed); and Idealized Influence (behavior) associated with Transformational Leadership; Contingent Reward; and Management by Exception (active); associated with Transactional Leadership; Management-by-Exception (passive); and laissez-faire; an inactive form of leadership characterized by a reluctance to become actively involved and a view that the best leadership is to disassociate from the action known as laissez-faire leadership. Transformational leaders exhibit high scores in the scales of idealized influence (attributed), idealized influence (behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Transformational leadership encourages followers to accomplish more than what would normally be expected of them. They become motivated to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization (Northouse 2001, Bass & Avolio, 1990). The following seven leadership scale scores measured by the MLQ represent transformational, transactional and/or laissez-faire leadership:

1. Individualized Consideration - associated with transformational leadership

2. Intellectual Stimulation - associated with transformational leadership

3. Inspirational Motivation - associated with transformational leadership

4. Idealized Influence - associated with transformational leadership

5. Contingent Reward - associated with transactional leadership

6. Management-by-Exception – associated with transactional leadership, a method of leadership associated with either solving or preventing problems

7. Laissez-faire - an inactive form of leadership characterized by a reluctance to become actively involved and a view that the best leadership is to disassociate from the action

The way in which followers react to the leader and his/her behavior is defined by the leaders idealized influence score. Idealized influence leaders have high moral and ethical values

and are able to provide their followers with a sense of vision and mission. Followers deeply respect the idealized influence leader (Northouse, 2001).

Inspirational motivation is shown in leaders when they inspire and motivate followers to demonstrate commitment to the shared vision of the group or team. The inspirational motivational leader engages in clearly communicating high expectations to followers and increases team spirit and enthusiasm (Northouse, 2001).

Intellectual stimulation is demonstrated by the transformational leader when they support followers to be creative and innovative, to try new approaches, and challenge their own beliefs and values. This type of leader promotes problem solving to find creative solutions to the task at hand (Northouse, 2001).

Individualized consideration is shown by the transformational leader by creating a supportive climate, listening to followers, and acts as a coach and mentor. The leader pays attention to individual differences and treats individual employees in a caring way. Leaders also help individuals achieve goals and grow personally. This type of leader also uses delegation to get followers to grow through personal challenges (Northouse, 2001).

Contingent Reward and Management-by-Exception (active) make up transactional leadership style. Contingent Reward is how the leader and followers exchange specific rewards for outcomes or results. Goals and objectives are agreed upon by both the leader and followers and the achievement is rewarded or punished. The MLQ measures a leader's degree of possessing Contingent Reward leadership attributes which are demonstrated by leaders that engage in a constructive path to goal transaction and exchange rewards for performance. These leaders clarify expectations, exchange promises and resources, arrange mutually satisfactory agreements, negotiate for resources, exchange assistance for effort, and provide commendations for successful follower performance. Management-by-Exception (active) is when a leader makes corrective criticisms or uses negative reinforcement. This leadership behavior monitors followers closely so they can point out mistakes and errors. Leaders with Management-by-Exception with "active" behaviors have characteristics of monitoring followers' performances and taking corrective action if deviations from the set standards occur. These leaders enforce rules to avoid mistakes.

Laissez-faire leadership has the scales of Management-by-Exception (passive) and laissez-faire leadership. In this leadership style, the leader uses Management-by-Exception (passive), which is only intervening when goals have not been met or a problem arises. The Managementby-Exception leader with a "passive" behavior would not intervene until problems become serious. The Management-by-Exception leader (passive) waits to take action until mistakes are brought to his or her attention. Laissez-faire behaviors are ones that delay decisions and give up responsibility. Laissez-faire leaders offer no feedback or support to the follower. Laissez-faire leadership is a "hands-off" approach to leadership (Northouse, 2001). Laissez-faire leadership is also termed a non-leadership style. The laissez-faire leader avoids accepting responsibilities, is absent when needed, fails to follow up on requests for assistance, and resists expressing his or her views on important issues. The laissez-faire leader gives the majority of control in the decision-making process to the followers. With laissez-faire leadership, the leader assumes that

followers are intrinsically motivated and should be left alone to accomplish tasks and goals. With laissez-faire leadership, the leader does not provide direction or guidance.

Findings

Each of the nine leadership scales measured by the MLQ as well as the transformational, transactional, and/or laissez-faire leadership style scores are presented in Table 1. Leadership scale scores have a range possibility of 0 to 4. A score of 0 meant the behavior was not used at all while a 4 was a behavior or style used frequently, if not always. A score of 0-1 represents a behavior or style used minimally or never. A score of 1-2 demonstrate behaviors used once in a while to sometimes. A MLQ score between 2 and 3 demonstrates behaviors or traits used fairly often. Leadership behaviors or styles used frequently, if not always scored between 3 and 4. Of the nine scale scores, Inspirational Motivation received the highest mean score (M=3.44, *SD*=.43), and laissez-faire scale scores received the lowest mean score (M=.59, *SD*=.44).

Leadership style scores also had a range of 0 to 4. The range of style scores for the respondents for transformational leadership was 2.40 to 3.95. Transactional leadership style scores ranged from 1.38 to 3.13. The laissez-faire leadership style had a range of .125 to 1.625. Transformational leadership scores reported by the participants were the highest of the leadership style scores (*M*=3.28, *SD*=.36), while laissez-faire leadership style was reported as having the lowest score (*M*=.88, *SD*=.37). Participants reported a score for transactional leadership style of (M=2.24, *SD*=.46). Table 2 presents the scores for the three leadership style scores; transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership.

Table 1
Leadership Scale Scores

Leadership Scale	*n*	*M*	*SD*
	56	3.13	.51
Contingent Reward			
Intellectual Stimulation	56	3.26	.52
Management-by-Exception (Passive)	56	1.17	.58
Management-by-Exception (Active)	56	1.37	.65
Laissez-faire Leadership Scale	56	.59	.44
Idealized Influence (Behavior)	56	3.24	.45
Idealized Influence (Attributed)	56	3.18	.46
Individualized Consideration	56	3.32	.44
Inspirational Motivation	56	3.44	.43

Table 2
Leadership Style Scores

Leadership Style			
Transformational Leadership Style	56	3.28	.36
Transactional Leadership Style	56	2.24	.46
Laissez-faire Leadership Style	56	.88	.37

Leadership Style and Gender

There were fewer female respondents (n=13) than there were male (n=43). Table 3 shows the leadership style scores by gender. No significant correlations were found between leadership style and gender. Leadership style scores had a possible range of 0 to 4. Females scored lower than males in all leadership style areas including laissez-faire leadership.

Table 3
Leadership Style Scores by Gender

Construct	Gender	*n*	*M*	*SD*
MLQ – Transformational	Female	13	3.20	.38
	Male	43	3.31	.36
MLQ – Transactional	Female	13	2.20	.43
	Male	43	2.26	.48
MLQ – Laissez-faire	Female	13	.84	.30
	Male	43	.90	.38

Leadership Style and Ethnicity

Most of the participants reported their ethnicity as White (n=43). There were four American Indians or Alaska Natives (n=4). Two participants responded in the Asian category (n=2), while six individuals responded in the Black or African American category (n=6). One participant responded in the Hispanic or Latino category (n=1). The mean of transformational leadership styles in the Whites category was 3.27 (n=43), the transactional leadership style had a mean of 2.22, while the laissez-faire leadership style had a mean of .90. The transformational leadership style of Non-Whites in this study had a mean score of 3.33 with a standard deviation of .34. Non-Whites demonstrated transactional leadership behaviors or styles with a MLQ score of 2.32 and standard deviation of .44. The mean score for Non-White laissez-faire leadership style and behaviors was .84 with a standard deviation of .29. When examining the leadership

style scores by ethnicity, no significant differences were found. Leadership style by ethnicity is shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Leadership Style Scores by Ethnicity

Construct	Ethnicity	*n*	*M*	*SD*
MLQ – Transformational				
	White	43	3.27	.37
	Non-Whites	13	3.33	.34
MLQ – Transactional				
	White	43	2.22	.30
	Non-Whites	13	2.32	.44
MLQ – Laissez-faire				
	Whites	43	.90	.38
	Non-Whites	13	.84	.29

The purpose of this study was to determine if the leadership style of academic program leaders was transformational, transactional and/or laissez-faire. Current academic program leaders appear to have a more transformational leadership style, as demonstrated by a mean score in transformational leadership (*M*=3.28), while exhibiting some characteristics of transactional leadership (*M*=2.24). Laissez-faire leadership (non-leadership) was minimally exhibited (*M*=.88), showing it is not a preferred leadership style. These findings are a positive sign for colleges and universities. The literature suggests the most effective and successful leaders use transformational leadership most of the time followed by some transactional leadership with a minimum use of laissez-faire leadership (Tichny & Devanna, 1990).

The findings of the research show males using specific leadership styles and behaviors more often than their female counterparts. Males had a mean of 3.31, and females had a mean of 3.20 in transformational leadership. Males had a mean of 2.26, and females had a mean of 2.20 in transactional leadership. In laissez-faire leadership style males had mean of .90, and females had a mean of .84. These research findings for transformational leadership behavior oppose earlier research suggesting transformational leadership is a more feminine behavior, demonstrated more often by females. Transactional leadership is characteristically a male leadership style. The findings of this study imply academic program leaders, both male and female, are using transformational leadership styles more often than transactional or laissez-faire leadership behaviors. This is a positive reflection of the current academic program leaders because the literature states transformational leadership behaviors are more successful for attaining and fulfilling goals (Tichny & Devanna, 1990).

In terms of leadership style and ethnicity, it was found that the Non-White population exhibited the highest transformational leadership style behaviors (M=3.33) followed by Whites (M=3.27). Similar to transformational leadership style, the Non-White population exhibited the highest transactional leadership style behaviors (M=2.32), followed by Whites (M=2.22). Laissez-faire leadership was the least demonstrated leadership style, but most often by Whites (M=.901). The Non-White population had a mean score of .84.

When relationships between gender, ethnicity, and leadership style were examined, no significant relationships could be found. This finding concurs with other studies examining demographic variables on similar populations (Wolverton et al., 2001; Moore, 2003; Stedman, 2004).

Conclusions

The findings of the current study found academic program leaders in colleges of agricultural and life sciences tend to use transformational leadership more often than transactional or laissez-faire leadership. This is an important finding for the higher education community as well as agricultural education. Eagly et al. (2003) reported effective-successful leaders use transformational leadership behaviors more often than transactional or laissez-faire leadership. Bass (1990) stated that transformational leadership is the prototype of leadership that people have in mind when they describe their ideal leader. Bass also stated transformational leaders are more effective and successful. This is good news for land-grant institutions. If these institutions' academic program leaders are using transformational leadership more often than transactional or laissez-faire leadership, the chances for success and the continued viability for agricultural education at higher education institutions is promising.

Further findings of this study revealed that academic program leaders engage in transformational leadership behaviors more often then transactional behaviors regardless of their gender or ethnicity. Using the theory of transformational leadership as the foundation for this study it is to expected that academic program leaders (deans) would use both leadership styles, transactional as well as transformational as was found in this study. Academic program leaders are using both transactional and transformational leadership in the completion of their jobs. It is encouraging that academic program leaders are using transformational leadership more often then transactional leadership behaviors.

Since gender and ethnicity did not significantly influence the leadership style or behaviors of the academic program leaders in regards to their being transactional, transformational or laissez-faire it becomes evident that higher education institutions should continue to recruit diverse leaders with diverse backgrounds.

It is important to note that this study looked at specific attributes of leaders (specifically gender and ethnicity) and their leadership styles and behaviors. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if additional factors relate to the development of their leadership style.

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