Leadership Practices of Formal and Informal Leaders in The Ohio State University 
College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive-correlational census study was to describe leadership practices of 67 formal leaders from the following areas: the Administrative Cabinet, Extension Administrative Cabinet, OARDC Director’s Cabinet, department chairs/heads, and the Vice President’s Advisory Council in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University. Relationships between personal and professional variables and leadership practices were investigated. Also, relationships between the respondents’ leadership practices scores on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and the Leadership Practices Inventory-Individual Contributor were investigated along with personal and professional demographics. A final response rate of 90.5% was achieved. All five groups indicated that they practiced the following leadership constructs “fairly often”: the five transformational constructs, the contingent reward construct which is a part of transactional leadership, and the outcomes of leadership. The five leadership constructs investigated were challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enable others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. All five groups practiced the five constructs “fairly often” which would indicate that the participants view themselves as leaders and practice the constructs of leadership on a routine basis.
Introduction

A decade ago, the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) at The Ohio State University (OSU) developed and implemented a series of plans and programs to prepare for the future that came to be known as Project Reinvent (Moser, 1988). Those in leadership positions in the college determined that change was necessary to redirect the college back to its original Land grant mission of serving the people of the state of Ohio and beyond. Leader and faculty initiated changes within the College’s organizational culture at that time were proposed affecting faculty, professional and clerical staff as they sought to fulfill the College’s holistic mission related to teaching, research, and Extension programs.

Concurrent to Project Reinvent, CFAES administrators sought to move away from a traditional, hierarchal style of transactional leadership (Bass, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985) towards a more values-based transformational leadership style (Apps, 1994; Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1998). In order for the College’s formal (e.g., deans, departments chairs, etc.) and informal (e.g., advisory council members) leaders to embrace this change of culture, new relationships between the College’s formal organizational system (i.e., formal leaders establishing policies, procedures, and funding priorities) and its shadow culture (i.e., informal leaders establishing grass roots movements, informal ideas and relationships) were developed.

Fundamental to this purposeful and desired cultural shift were the individual and unique leadership practices of the College’s formal leaders (consisting of the Dean’s Administrative Cabinet, Extension Administrative Cabinet, Research Station Director’s Cabinet, and department chairs) and informal leaders (consisting of the Dean’s College Advisory Council.) The researchers found no published literature describing leadership practices of formal or informal agricultural leaders. Exploring the current styles of leadership that these individuals practice was critical to the Project Reinvent initiative as the CFAES sought to reinvent its mission as a Land Grant University entering the 21st century.

Theoretical Base

In the literature, many attempts have been made to define leadership. In fact, Stogdill (1974) indicated, “in a review of leadership research, there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it” (p. 7). Northouse (1997) compared the word leadership to concepts such as love, democracy and peace. “Although each of us intuitively knows what he or she means by such words, the words can have different meanings for different people” (p. 2). When an attempt is made to define leadership, we discover it has many meanings.

Fleishman, Mumford, Zaccaro, Levin, Korotkin, and Hein (1991) discovered over the past 50 years, as many as 65 different systems of classification have been developed to define the dimensions of leadership. One view to which Northouse subscribed, is the scheme proposed by Bass (1990). He suggested some definitions view leadership as the “focus of group processes” (p. 2). This perspective suggested the leader is at the center of group change and activity, and embodies the will of the group.

Northouse (1997) summarized that even though leadership has been conceptualized in a multitude of ways, several recurring themes surface to describe leadership: (a) leadership is a process; (b) leadership involves influence; (c) leadership occurs within a group context; and (d) leadership involves goal attainment. Northouse defined leadership as “a process
whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Gardner (1990) defined leadership as “the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers” (p. 1).

Leadership also involves influence. Bass (1990) stated “leadership exercises a determining effect on the behaviors of group members and on activities of the group” (p. 13). It is also recognized leaders can influence other members by their own actions or behaviors.

Leadership is also a phenomenon of groups. Leadership cannot exist with an individual only. “Leadership involves influencing a group of individuals who have a common purpose” (Northouse, p. 3). The size of the group can extend from very small, consisting of three or four individuals, to the size of a large corporation.

The final portion of the definition of leadership involves the attainment of goals. Leadership has to do with assembling and directing a group of individuals and accomplishing a given task (Northouse, 1997). Leaders’ energies are directed toward individuals who are attempting to accomplish something together.

Bass (1990) defined leadership as the following:

Leadership has been conceived as the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behavior, as a form of persuasion, as a power relationship, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, as initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions. (p. 38)

Depending on the situation, the definition of leadership can mean different things to different people. Wren (1995) suggested although there are many definitions of leadership, it is important to understand that there is no single “correct” definition. The varying definitions can help us to understand the multitude of factors that affect leadership, as well as different perspectives from which to view it.

One of the more popular areas in leadership theory today is leadership in organizational groups or work teams. “Teams are organized groups composed of members who are interdependent, who share common goals and who must coordinate their activities to accomplish their goals” (Kogler Hill, 1997, p. 150). McGrath (1991) added time and argued that groups have a past, present, and future. Ilgen, et al. (1993) added a fifth component that teams exist for some task-oriented purpose. Some of the reasons for increased interest in work teams have resulted from the rapid changes occurring in today’s world. Organizations are facing restructuring, competition is global, an ever-increasing diversified work force is emerging, and technology is expanding (Kogler Hill). Parker (1990) has resolved through his research that with the rapidly changing business environment, the use of organizational teams has led to greater productivity, more effective use of resources, better decisions and problem solving, better quality products and services, and increased innovation and creativity. Teams have also failed; visibly. This has created a need for additional research on team effectiveness and team leadership (Ilgan, et al., 1993). Organizational restructuring in the United States today is shifting the decision-making process downward as opposed to the traditional hierarchy to self-managed teams, empowering the teams and individuals in new ways (Kogler Hill).

Burns (1978) is most often cited as the modern theorist for transactional leadership. His interpretation of a transactional leader begins by defining leadership. Burns suggested how some individuals define leadership as “leaders making followers do what followers would not otherwise do, or as leaders making followers do what the leaders wants them to do” (p. 100). He defined leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and
Leader-follower relationship is the interaction of persons with varying levels of motivation and of power potential, which includes skill, in pursuit of a common or joint goal or purpose. He described two different forms of the relationship between the leader and the follower: the first is transactional leadership and the second is transforming leadership.

Transactional leadership occurs when “one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things” (Burns, 1978, p. 101). The exchange of “valued things” could be economic in nature, political, or psychological, e.g., utilizing the barter system as one good is exchanged for another or money exchanged for a good or service, a swap of votes between political candidates, or one offering a listening ear to assist a friend in need of compassion.

The transactional leadership model is divided into two factors: contingent reward and management-by-exception. Contingent reward refers to an exchange process between leaders and followers in which the effort by followers is exchanged for specific rewards (Bass, 1985; Hollander, 1993; Northouse, 1997). The leader attempts to obtain agreement from the followers as to the goal to be achieved and what the rewards will be for those followers performing. A good example of contingent reward is in the university setting and the relationship between a department chair and a professor; a department chair negotiates with the professor about the number and quality of publications he or she needs to author in order to receive promotion and tenure. A contract is established between the leader and follower that rewards the followers for effort and performance and recognizes the accomplishments (Bass, 1990).

Another factor of transactional leadership is management-by-exception which refers to leadership that involves corrective criticism, negative feedback, and negative reinforcement (Northouse, 1997). The transactional leader who exercises management-by-exception can take two approaches, active or passive. The leader using the active form of management-by-exception watches and searches for deviations from rules and standards. If followers deviate from the norm, the leader could take corrective actions (Bass, 1990). An example is the leadership of a sales supervisor who monitors daily activity of sales associates and how the sales associates approach customers; if the manager notes a problem, the sales associate is immediately confronted and given the proper procedure on how to approach a customer.

Leaders using the passive form of management-by-exception intervene only if standards are not met (Bass, 1990) or problems have arisen (Northouse, 1997). An example of the passive form of management-by-exception is the supervisor who meets with an employee for an annual performance evaluation. It has been determined that the employee has not performed to standards without the supervisor ever talking to the employee about prior work performance. Both forms of management-by-exception, active and passive, use more negative reinforcement patterns than positive reinforcement patterns.

The transactional leadership theory does not individualize the needs of followers nor does it focus on personal development (Northouse, 2001). These characteristics may be considered criticisms of the theory. Transactional leaders exchange things of value with followers to advance the agenda of both leader and follower. Transactional leaders may accomplish tasks for the organization but there may be a coercive environment between the leader and follower to accomplish tasks.

A current theory of leadership that has been the focus of much research in the 1980’s and 1990’s is the transformational approach. The term transformational leadership was first
coined by Downton (1973). Downton explained in his book that Malcolm X experienced a transformation of character through the influences of a charismatic commitment. Downton also stated “this transformation of goals within the superego is likely to be accompanied by new values and norms, combined in a new moral code” (p. 260). Transformational leadership is a part of the new leadership paradigm researched by Bryman (1992). Burns (1978), in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book Leadership, defined what he termed as transformational leadership as:

Leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality…Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused. Power bases are linked not as counterweights but as mutual support for common purpose. (p. 101)

Burns continued by noting “transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspirations of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both” (p. 101). Transformational leadership is a dynamic leadership in that leaders engage into a relationship with followers who then feel “elevated” by the relationship and often become more active themselves, thereby creating a nucleus from which to build new leaders. Gardner (1990) stated, “Transactional leadership accepts and works within the structure as it is. Transformational leadership renews” (p.122).

Bass (1985), a prolific transformational leadership scholar, noted “transformational leadership can attempt and succeed in elevating those influenced from a lower to a higher level of need according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs” (p. 14). Bass also indicated the “transformational leader can move those influenced to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the group, organization, or country” (p. 15). Bennis and Nanus (1997) explained that a new transformational leader is “one who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change” (p. 3).

House (1976) published a theory on charismatic leadership. Charismatic, a form of the word charisma, is a term Weber (1947) borrowed from Sohm, the church historian, who had borrowed it from St. Paul (Gardner, 1990). As St. Paul used the term, the word referred to “gifts or powers that were manifestations of God’s grace” (Gardner, 1990, p. 34). Weber (1947) used the term charisma in a somewhat different way. “The term ‘charisma’ will be applied to a certain quality of an individual by virtue of which he is set apart from other men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (Gardner, 1990, p. 34).

In many ways, charismatic leadership has been described as being similar to, if not synonymous with, transformational leadership. “The concept of charisma was first used to describe a special gift that select individuals possess that gives them the capacity to do extraordinary things” (Northouse, 1997, p. 132). House’s (1976) theory suggested that charismatic leaders act in unique ways that have specific charismatic effects on their followers. According to House (1976), the personal characteristics of a charismatic leader include being dominant, having a strong desire to influence others, are self-confident, and have a strong sense of one’s own moral values.

Bass (1985) then supplemented to the model proposed by Burns (1978). First, Bass added the “expansion of the followers’ portfolio of needs and wants” (p. 20). Secondly, “Burns saw the transformation as one that was necessarily elevating, furthering what was good rather than evil for the person and the polity” (p. 20). Hitler was not a transformational leader according to Burns, despite the fact that Hitler energized a group of people to show aggression at the expense of personal freedom, persecuting those whom chose to dissent or were a minority. According to Bass (1985), Germany was still transformed, although the
leadership was immoral. An indirect transformation occurred with the Jews who were persecuted by Germany. The remnants of European Jewry were converted from a people who were scattered and a powerless minority, to the most powerful national state in the Middle East. From a conceptual standpoint, Bass (1985) put the “emphasis on the observed change in followers and argues that the same dynamics of the leader’s behavior can be short term or long term benefit or cost to the followers” (p. 21).

A third concept of Burns (1978) that Bass (1985) disagreed with postured transformational leadership as the “opposite end of a single continuum from transactional leadership. Conceptually and empirically, Bass (1985) finds that leaders will exhibit a variety of patterns of transformational and transactional leadership. Most leaders do both but in different amounts” (p. 22). Yammarino (1993) explained Bass (1985) also extended House’s (1976) work by focusing on the emotional elements and origins of charisma and suggested that charisma is a necessary but not sufficient condition for transformational leadership.

Northouse (1997) described the transformational leadership approach as a broad-based perspective that includes many facets and dimensions of the leadership process. “In general, it describes how leaders can initiate, develop, and carry out significant changes in organizations” (p. 142).

Research in the transactional leadership style (Bass, 1985; Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978; Hollander, 1993; & Kuhnert, 1994;) and transformational leadership style has been the focus of leadership research in the 1980s and into the 1990s (Ackoff, 1999; Avolio, 1999; Avolio & Howell, 1992; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bennis, 1994; Bryman, 1992; Chemers, 1997; Gardner, 1990; & Yammarino, 1993). Burns (1978) proposed the interaction between leader and follower takes two fundamentally different forms. The first, referred to as transactional leadership theory, suggested “leadership occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things” (p. 133). Contrast, the second form consisted of transforming leadership when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.

Transformational leadership theory is a relatively new form of leadership with its roots established in Downton (1973). Burns (1978) brought the theory to the forefront and the research has blossomed from that point. This theory emphasizes the relationship between the leader and follower (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). The behavior of the transformational leader is often associated with positive results within organizations and correlates to commitment and citizenship of the leaders and followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bryman, 1992).

**Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of this descriptive-correlational research was to investigate leadership practices of CFAES leaders. Specific objectives were to: 1) Describe leadership practices of the identified formal and informal college leaders; 2) describe the leaders’ selected personal and professional characteristics and variables; 3) investigate relationships between respondents’ leadership practices and the selected personal and professional variables; and, 4) investigate relationships between respondents’ leadership practice scores using two standardized personal leadership inventories.
Population:

The researcher used a census to gather data from the target population which consisted of leaders in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) at The Ohio State University (OSU). The five targeted leadership groups included the College Administrative Cabinet, the Extension Administrative Cabinet, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) Administrative Cabinet, department chairs, and the Vice President of agricultural Administration’s Advisory Council. The census consisted of 74 individuals. Permission was granted by the Office of Human Subjects Research to conduct the research.

A questionnaire package was either hand-delivered for those individuals located on campus or mailed for those individuals located off-campus. After 1 week a follow-up reminder was sent to all nonrespondents and after an additional 2 weeks a telephone call was made to those who had still not responded. Returns were obtained from 67 individuals giving an overall response rate of 91 percent. No follow-up of the 7 nonrespondents was conducted.

Instrumentation:

The questionnaire package contained three questionnaires. Questionnaire 1 consisted of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ, Bass & Avolio, 1995). Questionnaire 2 consisted of the Leadership Practices Inventory – Individual Contributor (LPI-IC, Kouzes & Posner, 2001). Questionnaire 3 was developed by the researcher to collect personal and professional information from individuals in the population.

The MLQ questionnaire measured transformational (5 constructs), transactional (3 constructs), and laissez-faire leadership styles. The five transformational constructs measured were 1) Idealized influence, Attribute (IIA); 2) Idealized influence, Behavior (IIB); 3) Inspirational motivation (IM); 4) Intellectual stimulation (IS); and 5) Individualized consideration (IC). The three transactional constructs measured were 1) Contingent reward (CR); 2) Management-by-Exception, Active (MBEA); and 3) Management-by-Exception, Passive (MBEP). The laissez-faire style of leadership contained only the single construct laissez-faire. The validity of this standardized instrument has been established through several factor analysis investigations and by researchers having used it in over 200 research programs, doctoral dissertations, and master’s theses around the globe. Cronbach’s alpha for internal consistency provided the following coefficients: Transformational leadership .85 with each subscale having a coefficient as follows IIA .53, IIB .52, IM .71, IS .59, and IC .44; Transactional Leadership .64 with each subscale having a coefficient as follows CR .18, MBEA .80, and MBEP .73; and Laissez-faire Leadership .55. Respondents responded to each item utilizing a 4 point Likert Scale (0 - Not at all, 1 - Once in a while, 2 - Sometimes, 3 - Fairly often, and 4 - Frequently, if not always).

The LPI-IC questionnaire measured leadership practices in five construct areas: (a) Challenging the process (CP), (b) Inspiring a shared vision (IV), (c) Enabling others to act (EO), (d) Modeling the way (MW), and (e) Encouraging the heart (EH). The validity of this standardized instrument has been demonstrated by the developers through consistent results of valid assessments for different leadership populations. The instrument was originally developed for corporate managers and executives/administrators, but it has also been used with non-profit managers and executives/administrators and shown to produce consistent outcomes for these groups. Cronbach’s alpha for internal consistency provided the following coefficients: Overall scale reliability was .95 with each construct having a coefficient as
follows CP .85, IV .89, EO .78, MW .82, and EH .87. Respondents responded to each item utilizing a 10 point Likert Scale (1 - Almost never, 2 - Rarely, 3 - Seldom, 4 - Once in a while, 5 - Occasionally, 6 - Sometimes, 7 - Fairly often, 8 - Usually, 9 - Very frequently, and 10 - Almost always).

Data Analysis:

All data was coded and entered into SPSS version 12.0 for analysis. Descriptive parameters (Measures of Central Tendency, Variability, and Correlation) were provided since the analysis is based upon a census. There is no need for inferential statistics.

Findings

Descriptive parameters relative to population demographics, leadership style, and leadership behaviors are presented in Table 1. Eighty-one percent of the population was male and 19 percent were female. The average age was approximately 53 years (S.D. 8.4) and the average length of tenure in their career equal to approximately 29 years (S.D. 8.7). Twelve percent of the population had Bachelor’s Degrees, 13 percent had Master’s Degrees, and 63 percent had Doctorate Degrees.

Overall, CFAES leaders exhibited (as measured by the MLQ) an above average score (Fairly often - Mn. 3.2; S.D. .34) on self-reported constructs associated with a transformational leadership style and a below average score (Sometimes - Mn. 1.8; S.D. .39) on the constructs which measured a transactional leadership style. These leaders also exhibited high scores on the constructs associated with effective leadership practices as measured by the LPI Questionnaire (Usually – Mn. 8.1; S.D. .91). The construct Enabling Others to Act (EO) on the LPI was the strongest leadership practice followed (Very frequently - Mn. 8.6; S.D. .81). The CFAES has allowed administrators to empower individual faculty and staff on day-to-day tasks. This style is associated with leaders encouraging followers to collaborate with others in order to improve the work environment. Even though Challenging the Process (CP) was the lowest rated construct on the LPI (Mn. 7.7; S.D. 1.18) it was practiced “Fairly often” to “Usually”. CFAES leaders may want to concentrate on this construct and develop training programs geared toward encouraging this concept.

Low to negligible relationships were found between transformational leadership style and age, gender (males = 1 females = 2), and tenure in career (.14, -.07, and .19, respectively). The same was true for relationships between leadership practices and age, gender (males = 1 females = 2), and tenure in career (.10, -.03, and .19 respectively).
Table 1. Descriptive parameters of selected variables by group (N = 67)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>College Cabinet</th>
<th>Extension Cabinet</th>
<th>OARDC Cabinet</th>
<th>Chairs/Heads</th>
<th>V. P. Cabinet</th>
<th>Overall</th>
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<td>59</td>
<td>55</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
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^1 Items scaled from 0 – 4
^2 Items scaled from 1 – 10
However, there was a moderate relationship between leadership style and leadership practices with highest level of education (.45, .36 respectively). A transformational leadership style as identified by the MLQ was very strongly related to the LPI constructs of “Inspiring a Shared Vision” (.74) and “Encouraging the Heart” (.70). The constructs of “Challenging the Process” (.68), “Enabling Others to Act” (.60), and “Modeling the Way” (.63) were substantially related to a transformational leadership style.

Educational Importance and Implications

Study participants self-rated their leadership practices. Thus, a subsequent study by raters (i.e., individuals who work directly with the leaders) may discover if followers’ assessments are congruent with those of the leaders. The research findings indicate that participants view themselves as leaders and practice the constructs of leadership on a routine basis. CFAES leaders should implement leadership training for all administrative units that support the mission and vision of the college as well as for new appointees in CFAES administrative positions in the college. CFAES administrators should require demonstrated transformational leadership experience when advertising for new administrative positions in the college, and consider a mentoring program for those hired in leadership positions. Finally, CFAES formal and informal leaders should look inwardly to make certain their individual and collective actions are congruent with the mission and vision of the College.

Findings and Conclusions

Overall, CFAES leaders exhibited above average self-reported leadership styles since they used the transformational, transactional, and constructs of the LPI “fairly often”. The construct Enabling Others to Act on the LPI was the strongest style practiced. The CFAES has allowed formal administrators to empower individual faculty and staff in day-to-day tasks. This style is associated with leaders encouraging followers to collaborate with others in order to improve the work environment. Even though Challenging the Process was the lowest rated construct on the LPI, it was practiced “fairly often” to “usually”. CFAES leaders may want to concentrate on this construct and develop training programs geared toward encouraging this concept.

CFAES leaders practiced the transactional behavior measured by the MLQ known as Contingent Reward “fairly often”. Contingent Reward is represented when a transaction occurs between leader and follower. Some reward is given by the leader to the follower that is contingent on job performance. Overall, CFAES leaders practiced the five transformational leadership constructs measured by the MLQ “fairly often”. Individual Consideration (explained as leaders coaching or mentoring others) and Inspirational Motivation (interpreted as leaders motivating and inspiring followers) had the highest ratings of the five constructs.

A very strong positive association was found for holistic participant scores on both the MLQ and LPI and the variable of “total tenure in career.” Other very strong associations discovered with Administrative Cabinet leaders included holistic MLQ and LPI scores and “highest level of formal education.”

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References


