LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS EXHIBITED BY FFA CHAPTER PRESIDENTS

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Abstract

This study identified leadership behaviors exhibited by FFA chapter presidents. It also examined the relationship between the chapter presidents' perception of their leadership behavior with the behaviors observed by their chapter officer team. The study included all chapter officer teams from the 2001-2002 school year in the Northeast Agricultural Education District of Oklahoma. These programs were notified of the study and were invited to have their officer teams participate while at the State FFA Convention. A quantitative descriptive design was employed to describe and compare the 35 chapter presidents and 136 other officers. Each completed a questionnaire to measure leadership behaviors exhibited by the chapter president. Findings indicated that chapter presidents and other officers believed that the behaviors of Enabling Others to Act, Modeling the Way, and Encouraging the Heart were the most often exhibited by the chapter president. The chapter presidents, however, held inflated self-perceptions of their leadership behavior when compared to their officers' observations. This was consistent among all 30 statements within the five leadership practices.

Introduction/Theoretical Framework

The premise of this study rests upon a combination of educational and leadership theories. The learning theories utilized are the constructivist theory of Bruner (1966) and the experiential learning theory of Chickering (1977). Team leadership approach, transformational leadership and the five leadership practices common to successful leaders by Kouzes and Posner (1987) are the main leadership theories from which the study is derived. All of these theories can be applied to the development of leadership skills and behaviors through the involvement in leadership development activities comprised in agricultural education and the FFA.

The constructivist theory, as given by Bruner (1966) implies that learning is an active process, where students construct new concepts or ideas based upon current and existing knowledge. Bruner reported that instruction should lead students to the discovery of principles and ideas on their own. The instructor should act as a translator, relating information to the learners' levels of comprehension. Knowledge will then, continually build from existing ideas, thus enabling the learner to construct hypotheses and make decisions.

Agricultural education is predisposed to first teach material in the classroom (Ricketts, 1982). Through Supervised Agricultural Experience and the FFA, the classroom learning is enhanced, reshaped, and reinforced (Ricketts & Newcomb, 1984). Learners follow a structure and sequence of events and through participation in events and contests; they may also receive rewards when developing their leadership potential. Through gaining experience in leadership development activities, students will be able to construct their own thoughts and ideas of appropriate leadership, just as the constructivist theory implies. The constructivist theory of learning in agricultural education promotes the idea of allowing students to be actively involved in their learning through their own translations, creations, and experiences. Boatman (1989) advocated that the principle of student

involvement in the learning process, and the incorporation of individualized experiences greatly enhance overall learning.

Phrases such as, *experience is the best teacher*, or *practice makes perfect* may best be used to describe experiential learning. Although there are various multifaceted models of this learning theory, Chickering (1977) placed it in simple terms, labeling experiential learning as an integral relationship between experience and knowledge. Walter and Marks (1981) described experiential learning as, "a sequence of events with one or more identified learning objectives, requiring active involvement by participants at one or more points in the sequence" (p. 1).

Experiential learning may even be considered a tool for carrying out planning, implementing, and evaluating within student learning and experiences. Steinaker and Bell (1979) suggested that experiential learning enhances the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor taxonomies. These taxonomies are widely applicable to the activities involved with planning, implementing, and evaluating an organized activity. Participants in experiential learning should be fully involved in relevant activities. They should develop responsibility for their own learning when the environment for learning is flexible and responsive (Walter & Marks, 1981).

Much cannot be learned without solid experience and practice (Chickering, 1977). This holds true for most of what is taught within agricultural education, including leadership. In theory, the utilization of many leadership skills and behaviors seems easy, but in actual practice they are more difficult; therefore, basic leadership theory and ideas have been taught in the classroom. The practice of leadership skills may take place within the FFA, and the experience gained through planning, implementing, and evaluating various organized chapter activities. These ideas all follow the principles of experiential learning.

Northouse (2001) describes the leader-member exchange theory as a leadership process that is centered on leaders and followers. Subordinates make contributions at a cost to themselves and receive benefits at a cost to other members or to the group as a whole (Bass, 1990). Communication and personal relationships between leaders and followers are key in conceptualizing this theory. Other variables relevant to this theory include power, status and esteem, and general relationships held between the leader and the followers.

Transformation leadership is considered one of the most current approaches to leadership. James MacGregor Burns (1978) popularized the transformational approach as he attempted to link followership to leadership. Transformational leaders help followers reach their full potential by tapping into followers' motivational needs. Transformational leaders tend to nurture personal and group improvement, share an inspiring vision and motivate towards important organizational goals. Research has shown that transformational leadership results in higher job satisfaction, and greater satisfaction with the leader (Bycio, Hackett & Allen, 1995).

Both theories involve skills deemed necessary by society and its workforce such as communication, teamwork, goal-setting, and motivation. Members holding roles as FFA chapter officers have many opportunities to practice and experience the skills important in defining the above leadership theories (Rutherford, Townsend, Briers, Cummins, & Conrad, 2002).

The team leadership approach refers to assisting the group in accomplishing a task or goal, along with the maintenance in continuing that goal (Northouse, 2001). Sally Helgesen (1996), in *The Leader of the Future*, saw a true team as one that both defines its objectives from conception, and discovers ways to meet these objectives through execution. Team leadership requires competent team members with similar goals and commitment levels, a compatible climate, set standards, outside support, and recognition (Northouse). This approach also accounts for the changing role of the leaders and followers within the organization (Northouse). Blake and Mouton (1985) recognized team management on their Managerial Grid® as work accomplished through a committed people, or a common stake. Participation, openness, trust and respect, involvement and commitment, consensus, management by objective,

mutual support, and development and change through feedback were all prescribed by Blake and Mouton (1981) for effective team leadership.

In the FFA, officers, committees, and members in general are encouraged to work as teams. Standards set by the team members usually take the form of goals for yearly activities, service, promotion, and fundraising. The groups' outside support stems from its advisors, parents, school, and community. Recognition and rewards from within may be those motivational tools used by the chapter president and other group leaders when individual or group performance is satisfactory, as explained in the path-goal leadership theory. These factors of team leadership are needed among FFA chapters and their officer teams to be functional and effective.

The theories described above provided clues to the operation of leadership within the group. Leaders and followers exhibit many leadership behaviors during the group's leadership process, no matter what theory the group most likely embraces. Little is known as to what specific leadership behaviors FFA chapter officers and their leaders utilize. Kouzes and Posner, however, have identified five exemplary leadership behaviors, as practices common to successful leadership. These five practices have much in common with behaviors deemed as integral among the four previous leadership theories. Kouzes and Posner's (1987) behavioral practices included:

- Challenging the Process
- Inspiring a Shared Vision
- Enabling Others to Act
- Modeling the Way
- Encouraging the Heart

<u>Challenging the process</u> infers that leadership is an active process. Leaders are pioneers, as they take risks in order to find new and better ways of doing things. When leaders take risks, they do not always succeed, and should not always expect to succeed. Instead leaders and followers must learn from their mistakes and failures. Successful leaders <u>inspire a shared vision</u> or goal with their group members. Leaders must not only be imaginative, but they must

have the ability to invoke their followers into the common vision. Leaders must also know their followers and their language to ignite them with the motivation and enthusiasm needed to be prepared to work toward the vision and goals. Successful leaders must also continue from the development of motivation to <u>enable others to act</u>. Leaders enlist the support and assistance of all members involved in the project. These leaders use the word *we* rather than *I,* and *us* rather than *me*. They establish a strong sense of teamwork within the group and among those supporters outside of the group. Successful leaders have detailed plans. They must guide projects as they happen, measure performance, and take corrective measures when needed. As the leader directs the course of action, he or she must also <u>model the way</u>. This means that leaders must lead by example. Leaders must not only tell others what they believe, they are obligated to show others as well. Lastly, successful leaders <u>encourage the heart</u> of their followers along the path to their goals. When followers become frustrated and disenchanted, they may wish to give up. Leaders that encourage the heart may offer these followers rewards, tokens, and simple upbeat words of encouragement.

Leadership opportunities and activities contained within the FFA and agricultural education utilize various components of the leadership paradigms, theories and the leadership practices explained above. The constructivist and experiential learning educational theories paired with successful leadership behaviors also aid in the development of further training methods for leadership utilized in the FFA. The understanding of all of these principles will better enable their implementation through further leadership training.

Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this study was to identify FFA chapter presidents' leadership skill development, and to describe the specific leadership behaviors they exhibited. In order to accomplish the purposes of this study, the following objectives were generated:

1. Describe the FFA chapter presidents' perceived levels of leadership behavior exhibited in five leadership practices, as described by Kouzes and Posner (1987).
2. Describe the FFA chapter officers' observations of their presidents' levels of leadership behavior exhibited in the five leadership practices.
3. Examine the relationship between the FFA chapter presidents' perception of their leadership behavior exhibited among the five leadership practices with the behaviors observed by their officer team.

Methods and Procedures

The population for this study consisted of FFA chapter presidents and other members of the corresponding chapter officer team from the Northeast Agricultural Education District of Oklahoma. The Northeast district contained 80 schools. This district was chosen due to the diversity of school size as well as a mixture of rural, suburban, and urban schools within the district. An invitation to participate in the study was extended to all 80 chapters. Of the total population of 80 chapters, 35 FFA officer teams completed the survey. Data was collected at the state FFA convention near the end of April. In some cases all 2001-02 FFA chapter officers did not attend the convention. Chapters could only participate if the entire chapter FFA officer team was available to complete the assessment.

The Statistical Software Package for Social Sciences® (SPSS) 8.0 for Windows was used to analyze all data collected within the study. Descriptive statistics were used in data analysis to illustrate observations while inferential statistics were utilized to organize and understand the relationships between and among the groups of variables. Means and standard deviations were also calculated for some scale items for the sole purpose of comparing the groups within the study as recommended by Kerlinger (1986). An 0.05 alpha level was set for this study, providing a 95% level of confidence.

The instrument utilized within this study was the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) "self" for leaders and the LPI "observer" for followers developed by Kouzes and Posner (2001). The LPI was employed to assess the strength of the five practices of exemplary leadership as exhibited by the FFA chapter presidents. This instrument used 30 questions with responses based on a ten-point scale ranging from 1=almost never to 10=almost always. Studies indicate that a "high" score is one of 7 or above, a "low" score is one at 3 or below, and a score that falls between 3 and 7 is considered "moderate." This scale was used to define objectives one and two, as it measured behaviors on the following five independent scales:

1. Challenging the Process
2. Inspiring a Shared Vision
3. Enabling Others to Act
4. Modeling the Way
5. Encouraging the Heart

Two forms of the instrument were used; the leader 'self' form was labeled Chapter President, and the leader "observer" form labeled Chapter Officer, as the instrument was designed to be used by multiple raters.

Kouzes and Posner (2001) have established the LPI as both a valid and reliable measure of a leader's performance. The LPI consistently has an internal coefficient of reliability of .80 or greater. The six statements related to each leadership practice were highly correlated with one another. Test-retest reliability was also found to be high. The LPI, if given again within a time span of a few months and without any further leadership training would yield consistent and stable results (Kouzes & Posner).

The instruments were pilot tested on seven FFA chapter officer teams not included in the population. Through pilot testing the instrument, some confusion was found in the generalized wording of the instrument. Therefore some headings and wordings on the directions of the instrument were changed to clarify respondent roles, and make the instrument more personalized to the FFA chapter presidents and officers completing this instrument. The meaning

and intent of the questions themselves were not altered.

Data gathered on this instrument from the pilot were statistically analyzed to test the grouped items. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined for each of the five scales to measure internal consistency. The reliabilities for each practice in the pilot were: Challenging the Process = .83, Inspiring a Shared Vision = .87, Enabling Others to Act = .82, Modeling the Way = .69, and Encouraging the Heart = .84. Cronbach's alpha for the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was determined for the five practices within the actual study as well. The reliabilities for each of the practices within the study were: Challenging the Process = .93, Inspiring a Shared Vision = .94, Enabling Others to Act = .92, Modeling the Way = .94, and Encouraging the Heart = .94.

Results/Findings

All 35 chapter presidents and 136 chapter officers responded to this portion of the instrument. The chapter presidents completed the leader portion of the LPI, as it was used to assess the self-perceptions of the president's own actions within the five exemplary leadership practices. The chapter officers' observer portion of the LPI assessed the officers' observations of their chapter president's leadership behaviors among the five exemplary practices. Responses to questions within the five practices of leadership were based on a range from 1 to 10, therefore creating a combined total that could range from 6 to 60 for each of the five practices.

In the area, Challenging the Process, the 35 chapter presidents possessed an overall mean response of 44.34, while the 136 chapter officers generated a total mean response of 34.28 out of a possible 60 points. The statement, *I experiment and take risks in my work even when there is a chance of failure* exhibited the highest mean response of 8.06 (usually often) by the chapter presidents.

The chapter officers also rated this statement as the highest they observed among their chapter presidents. The officers mean response, however, was 6.43 (sometimes). Adversely, the statement *I ask what can we learn when things do not go as expected* received the lowest mean response from both the chapter presidents and officers. The chapter presidents mean response of 6.77 (fairly often) for this statement was still higher than the chapter officers mean of 4.96 (occasionally). These differences are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Central Tendencies for Responses on "Challenging the Process"

Statement	Chapter Presidents (n=35)		Chapter Officers (n=136)		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Diff
Seek challenging opportunities	7.14	1.80	5.63	2.92	1.51
Challenges people	7.51	1.69	5.51	3.01	2.00
Looks outside organization	6.89	2.19	5.51	2.86	1.38
Asks "What can we learn?"	6.77	2.46	4.96	2.88	1.81
Experiments and takes risks	8.06	1.71	6.43	2.76	1.63
Takes initiative	7.97	1.89	6.23	2.54	1.74
Total	44.34	8.89	34.28	14.76	10.06

Note: 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, 10=Almost Always.

The practice of Inspiring a Shared Vision accumulated a mean response of 43.60 by the chapter presidents and 34.56 by the chapter officers. The phrase, *I am contagiously enthusiastic and positive about future possibilities* received the highest mean score among the chapter presidents of 8.11 (usually) and a mean response of 6.53 (fairly often) by the chapter officers. *I describe a compelling image of what our future could be like* obtained the lowest mean response of 6.71 (fairly often) by chapter presidents and 5.35 (occasionally) by the chapter officers (Table 2).

Table 2
Central Tendencies for Responses on "Inspiring a Shared Vision"

Statement	Chapter Presidents (n=35)		Chapter Officers (n=136)		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Diff
Talks about future trends	7.26	1.93	5.54	2.84	1.72
Describes image of future	6.71	1.99	5.35	2.97	1.36
Asks others to dream of future	7.03	2.11	5.67	2.97	1.36
Shows interests can be realized	7.09	1.87	5.74	2.89	1.35
Is enthusiastic and positive	8.11	1.55	6.53	3.04	1.58
Speaks with conviction	7.40	2.44	5.83	2.86	1.57
Total	43.60	9.65	34.56	15.37	9.04

Note: 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, 10=Almost Always.

The practice termed Enabling Others to Act held a mean score of 50.34 by the chapter presidents, and a mean response of 40.40 by the chapter officers. The statement, *I treat others with dignity and respect* earned the highest mean score among chapter presidents in the practice of 9.11(very frequently). Chapter officers also rated this statement the highest with a mean score of 7.32 (fairly often).The lowest mean response provided by the chapter presidents was obtained by the phrase, *I support the decisions that people make on their own* at 7.80 (usually). Chapter officers agreed with the statement as lowest, providing a mean response of 5.82 (sometimes). Table 3 shows these differences.

Table 3
Central Tendencies for Responses on "Enabling Others to Act"

Statement	Chapter Presidents (n=35)		Chapter Officers (n=136)		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Diff
Develops relationships	9.06	0.97	6.94	2.97	2.12
Listens to diverse points of view	7.91	1.48	6.74	2.80	1.17
Treats people with respect	9.11	1.39	7.32	2.88	1.79
Supports others decisions	7.80	1.37	6.48	2.56	1.32
Freedom to choose your work	8.43	1.07	7.07	2.66	1.36
Ensures that others grow	8.03	1.62	5.82	2.99	2.21
Total	50.34	4.46	40.40	14.26	9.94

Note: 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, 10=Almost Always.

The practice, Modeling the Way, elicited similar responses from chapter presidents and chapter officers, as it received a mean response of 49.11 from chapter presidents and a mean score of 38.38 from chapter officers. The statement, *I follow through on the promises and commitments that I make* earned the highest mean response of 9.17 (very frequently) by chapter presidents and 7.18 (fairly often) by chapter officers. The statement, *I spend time and energy on making certain that people's actions are consistent with the values and standards that have been agreed on* possessed a mean of 7.54 (usually) by chapter presidents and a mean of 5.68 (sometimes) by the chapter officers (Table 4).

Table 4
Central Tendencies for Responses on "Modeling the Way"

Statement	Chapter Presidents (n=35)		Chapter Officers (n=136)		
	M	SD	M	SD	Diff
Sets example of the expected	8.51	1.44	6.48	2.88	2.03
Holds people accountable	7.54	2.05	5.68	2.79	1.86
Follows through on promises	9.17	1.12	7.18	2.50	1.99
Clear on leadership	7.97	1.76	6.31	2.82	1.66
Ensures that goals are set	7.80	1.75	6.31	2.96	1.49
Makes progress toward goals	8.11	1.53	6.39	2.74	1.72
Total	49.11	6.82	38.38	14.57	10.73

Note: 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, 10=Almost Always.

The final practice of Encouraging the Heart yielded an overall mean score of 47.09 by the chapter presidents and an overall mean of 37.07 by the chapter officers. The highest scoring response, *I praise people for a job well done,* obtained the mean of 8.74 (very frequently) from the chapter presidents. This was the second highest statement rated among the chapter officers with a mean score of 6.51 (fairly often). The lowest scoring response in this practice was for the statement, *I publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values*, as it held a mean response of 7.06 (fairly often) among the chapter presidents and a mean value of 5.82 (sometimes) by the chapter officers (Table 5).

Table 5
Central Tendencies for Responses on "Encouraging the Heart"

Statement	Chapter Presidents (n=35)		Chapter Officers (n=136)		
	M	SD	M	SD	Diff
Praises people	8.74	1.40	6.51	2.96	2.23
Expresses confidence in others	7.83	1.98	6.05	3.14	1.78
Rewards people	7.86	1.59	5.99	2.66	1.87
Recognizes shared values	7.06	2.21	5.82	2.85	1.24
Finds ways to celebrate	7.37	1.99	6.10	2.87	1.27
Shows appreciation and support	8.23	1.57	6.57	2.91	1.66
Total	47.09	8.25	37.03	15.23	10.06

Note: 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, 10=Almost Always.

Descriptions of data from the Leadership Practices Inventory were provided for the purpose of defining objectives one and two. Table 6 shows the comparison of chapter president and chapter officer mean values for each of the five leadership practices. A two-tailed independent sample t-test was also performed at the 0.05 alpha levels to compare the mean scores, therefore testing the relationship between the chapter presidents and chapter officers' perceptions on each of the five exemplary leadership practices.

Table 6
Observed Differences Between Groups in the Five Leadership Practices (N=171)

Leadership Practice	Chapter Presidents (n=35)	Chapter Officers (n=136)	
	M	M	t-Ratio
Challenging the Process	44.34	34.28	5.122*
Inspiring a Shared Vision	43.60	34.56	4.298*
Enabling Others to Act	50.34	40.40	6.918*
Modeling the Way	49.11	38.38	6.315*
Encouraging the Heart	47.09	37.03	5.250*

* $p < .05$

Conclusions

The following conclusions were formulated based upon the interpretation of the findings:

1. Chapter presidents and their corresponding officers believed in the importance of leader's ability to gain assistance from the group when completing a project or activity, as both groups responded highest to statements describing the leadership behavior, Enabling Others to Act.

2. Although chapter presidents and their chapter officers identified the president as one willing to take risks, both groups rated the other five statements within the practice Challenging the Process as just moderate. It can be concluded that the chapter presidents within the study were not perceived to be great risk-takers, and they were less likely to pioneer new events or activities.

3. Leaders involve their followers in the group's vision. They are quick to act, and show progress as it happens. This practice was also rated as one of the lowest among both chapter presidents and chapter officers, concluding that chapter presidents were less likely to develop and share a strong common vision with their officers.

4. Chapter presidents and chapter officers almost always agreed upon the statement that most fit and least fit the chapter president in each of the five leadership practices.

5. Presidents held inflated self-perceptions among all 30 areas of the 5 leadership practices. This remains consistent with the findings of Bass and Yammarino (1989) and Krill, Carter and Williams (1997) who found that leaders tend to give themselves inflated ratings in contrast to their associates' observations of their performance.

Implications/Discussion

Leadership is a necessity in life, as it impacts work, family, education, and society. Productive thinkers, communicators and workers are needed now and throughout the future. Although, many youth organizations position some emphasis on leadership training, the National FFA Organization has placed great importance on leadership development as a directional goal since its founding. Today, the leadership development and behaviors that members gain through the FFA remains varied, and is therefore widely examined.

This study sought to gain insight into the leadership behaviors utilized by the chapter presidents, as well as the observations made by their chapter officers within the examined population. Among the five main leadership behaviors examined, several leadership behaviors were consistently ranked higher, while the participants of the study marked other behaviors as the lowest perceived and observed. One of the lowest perceived and observed behaviors exhibited by chapter presidents was that of challenging the process. This inferred that chapter presidents within the study did not take many risks. They may have also had little influence on the development of new chapter level programs and activities. The second lowest behavior exhibited by chapter presidents was inspiring a shared vision. This surmised that chapter presidents did not currently invoke practices that would include all FFA chapter members in future planning and visioning of chapter goals. This may limit the other chapter officers and members from providing input to important chapter goals and activities.

While many leadership behaviors were recognized by their frequency of use in this study, much more can be done to determine leadership components on a local chapter level. Chapter presidents and officers should periodically evaluate each other's job performance, equating such areas as leadership and organization. They should then provide each other with constructive

feedback. All officers should be encouraged by their chapter advisors to participate in leadership training activities that emphasize successful leadership behaviors, visioning, initiating innovation, risk-taking, and collaboration. Finally, chapter presidents should also be encouraged to take risks, by challenging their officer teams and members to develop new activities from those in the past.

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