

Self Evaluation of Leadership Practices and Behaviors Used by Department Executive Officers in Agricultural Education

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The leadership practices required of the department chair have become more complicated as institutions of higher education struggle for their own survival as a result of change (Tucker, 1984). According to Mannebach (1990), changes have occurred at an unprecedented rate within agricultural education, agricultural industries and educational systems. Dramatic changes in student enrollment, as reported by Bowen (1987), in secondary, post-secondary and university programs in the colleges of agriculture and agricultural education have stimulated concerns for accountability at all levels.

McLaughlin et al. (1975) found that DEOs perform three major roles which include academic, administrative and leadership responsibilities. Academic duties included student involvement, teaching, advising, development of curriculum, and encouraging research. Administrative duties included maintaining records, administering the budget, managing support staff and maintaining a linkage with central administration. The leadership role included such tasks as supporting, developing, motivating and evaluating faculty members. McLaughlin discovered that the DEOs is most comfortable in the academic role, prefers the administrative role least and obtains the greatest level of satisfaction from the leadership role. Tucker (1984) and McCarthy (1986) concurred that the leadership role of the department executive officer (DEO) is a critical element to the success of academic departments and the basic mission of higher education.

A study conducted by McCarthy (1986), confirmed findings of other researchers that: (1) chairpersons are generally drawn from faculty ranks and assume their position having little or no administrative experience; (2) few opportunities for orientation and training are available to them; (3) department chairpersons hold a "key" administrative and leadership role as first line managers that directly affect the success and growth of the department; and (4) department chairpersons need, want, and deserve pre-service and in-service development in specific areas. Cunningham (1985) stated that reliance on emergent leadership is no longer sufficient and suggested that more highly organized and deliberate attempts to develop leadership are needed.

In the field of education, administrators have used the reflective practice process to develop their leadership abilities. According to Osterman (1990), reflective practice is a critical assessment of one's own behavior as a means to develop one's own craftsmanship. Osterman emphasized the importance of self evaluation as a basic requirement for reflective practice, leadership effectiveness and continued professional growth. Through the use of the self evaluation in this study, DEOs in agricultural education can evaluate their leadership practices/behaviors and reflect on opportunities for application. Kouzes and Posner (1988a) concluded that given the opportunity for development and feedback, leaders can improve their leadership abilities. Results of this research can be used to identify existing and needed leadership practices and behaviors of DEOs in agricultural education.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to assess the leadership practices and behaviors used by Department Executive Officers (DEOs) in Agricultural Education. The following research objectives guided the study.

To identify leadership practices and behaviors used by department executive officers and departments of agricultural education.

To identify demographic characteristics of department executive officers and departments of agricultural education.

To identify and compare the utilization of five leadership practices in regard to selected demographic characteristics of DEOs and agricultural education departments.

Procedures

The population of the study consisted of all Agricultural Education Department Executive Officers (DEOs) including department heads, chairpersons, supervisors and coordinators. The population was selected based on the criteria that each DEO must have had at least one faculty member (assistant professor, associate professor, or full professor) with an agricultural education appointment under his/her supervision. At the time of this study, 98 colleges and universities were listed in the Directory of Teacher Educators in Agriculture as a department or program in agricultural education. As a result of the criterion set for this study, 56 DEOs were eligible for participation.

The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), developed by J.M. Kouzes and B. Posner (1988b), was used to identify leadership practices and behaviors used by department executive officers in this study. Research conducted by Kouzes and Posner (1988a) indicated that when leaders perform at their best they used the following leadership practices: (1) challenge the process, (2) inspire a shared vision, (3) enable others to act, (4) model the way, and (5) encourage the heart. Face validity of the instrument for this study was determined through an extensive review of the literature regarding leadership practices and behaviors of effective department chairpersons (Glueck and Thorp, 1974; Knight and Holen, 1985; Mitchell, 1987; Seagren et al., 1986).

Department executive officers responded to 30 leadership behavior statements which were grouped to determine a mean score for each of the five leadership practices. A five-point Likert scale was used to respond to each leadership behavior statement: "1" meant the leader "rarely or never" did this; "2" meant the leader did this "once in a while"; "3" meant the leader "sometimes" did this; "4" meant the leader did this "fairly often"; and a response of "5" indicated the leader did this "very frequently or always".

Demographic questions were asked to determine specific characteristics of each DEO and their impact on the use of selected leadership practices. Demographic questions included responsibilities for each DEO, number of years served as DEO, formal leadership training received, age, job description, and the existence of an orientation program.

The survey instruments were mailed to each department executive officer along with a cover letter explaining the purpose and confidentiality. After two weeks, follow-up contacts by telephone and letter were initiated to encourage participation. Two DEOs elected not to participate in the study and five DEOs could not be reached following several telephone calls and follow-up letters. At the conclusion of the data collection period, 49 DEOs (87%) provided usable returns.

Analysis of Data

Means, frequencies and standard deviations were computed for each demographic question, leadership practice and leadership behavior. Data were analyzed using the SPSSx Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Since data were obtained from the total population of department executive officers in agricultural education, theoretically, no need existed to use inferential statistics in the data analysis. However in certain cases, statistics were used to enable the researcher to discuss the differences among the population which can be used to make reference to future populations. Best (1989) discussed the importance of generalizing to populations in other times. The statistical procedures provided a method to further analyze the data for additional information. An alpha level of .05 was set to identify significant differences. Results from respondents and late respondents were compared; no significant differences were found.

Results

A Cronbach alpha reliability program was used to determine the reliability of the LPI instrument. As indicated in Table 1, the reliabilities for each of the five leadership practices were consistent with reliability scores reported as a result of extensive testing and retesting of the instrument by the authors.

Table 1. Reliability Coefficients for Scales Measuring Leadership Practices used by DEOs

Scale	Reliability Kouzes & Posner ^a	Reliability alpha this study
Challenging the process	.77	.80
Inspiring a shared vision	.88	.87
Enabling others to act	.84	.88
Modeling the way	.80	.78
Encouraging the heart	.90	.89

^aInternal reliabilities reported by Kouzes and Posner (N=1567)

Means and standard deviations for each of the five leadership practices evaluated in this study are provided in Table 2. All five leadership practices had means between 3.5 and 4.5 which indicated the DEOs used the leadership practices “fairly often” in their leadership positions. The leadership practice “enabling others to act” received the highest mean score (4.37) while the leadership practice “inspiring a shared vision” had the lowest mean score (3.72). The standard deviations reported for each of the leadership practices revealed a range of variation among the respondents.

Table 2. Mean Score for each Leadership Practice Reported by Department Executive Officers in Agricultural Education

Leadership practice	DEOs	
	Agr. Ed.	N-49
	Mean	SD
Challenging the process	3.73	.49
Inspiring a shared vision	3.72	.64
Enabling others to act	4.37	.41
Modeling the way	3.82	.51
Encouraging the heart	3.86	.66

Means and standard deviations for each leadership behavior are reported in Table 3. It should be noted that the leadership behaviors listed are abbreviated versions of the actual leadership behavior statements used in the LPI instrument (Kouzes and Posner, 1988b). The leadership behaviors with the highest mean scores were “treats others with respect” and “allows others to make decisions”. The lowest mean scores were reported on the leadership behaviors “assures values are adhered to” and “enlists a common vision”. The leadership behaviors identified as used most often included “treats others with respect”, “allows others to make decisions”, “practices what is espoused”, “involves others in planning”, “stays up-to-date”, “gets others to own project”, “creates atmosphere of trust”, “develops cooperative relationships”, “recognizes others’ contributions”, “gives praise for a job well done”, “communicates positive outlook” and “clear on leadership philosophy”.

Results of the demographic information indicated that 45 percent of the DEOs surveyed had six or less years of experience as department executive officer. Sixty-five percent of the DEOs surveyed had less than ten years of experience (Table 4). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to identify significant differences between leadership practices utilized when compared by years of experience as DEO: no significant differences were found.

An assessment of the ages of department executive officers in agricultural education indicated four DEOs were 30-40 years of age, 24 DEOs were 41-50 years, 19 DEOs were 51-60 years, and two DEOs were 61 years of age. Results of a t-test indicated no significant differences between the leadership practices utilized by DEOs when grouped by age (above and below 50 years of age).

DEOs indicated a broad range of job responsibilities beyond administration. Only five DEOs held a 76-100 percent administrative appointment, while eight did not have a specific percentage of their job allocated to administrative duties. The average distribution for DEOs in agricultural education was 40 percent of their job responsibility in teaching, eight percent research, seven percent service, four percent extension, 37 percent administration and nearly three percent to other responsibilities (Table 5).

There were no significant differences between the percent of teaching responsibilities of DEOs and their utilization of four of five leadership practices. DEOs with job responsibilities consisting of greater than 25 percent teaching responsibility had a significantly lower level of utilization of the leadership practice “inspiring a shared vision” than those DEOs who had 25 percent or less teaching responsibility.

Table 3. Mean Score for each Leadership Behavior Reported by Department Executive Officers in Agricultural Education

Leadership behaviors	Mean	SD
Challenging the process		
1 Seeks challenges	3.57	.84
6 Stays up-to-date	4.27	.70
11 Challenges the status quo	3.56	.71
16 Looks for ways to innovate	3.96	.71
21 Asks "What can we learn?"	3.57	.84
26 Experiments and takes risks	3.49	.92
Inspiring a shared vision		
2 Describes future we can create	3.78	.99
7 Shares future dreams	3.61	1.04
12 Communicates positive outlook	4.12	.67
17 Enlists a common vision	3.25	.99
22 Forecasts the future	3.94	.78
27 Contagiously excited about future	3.61	.84
Enabling others to act		
3 Involves others in planning	4.35	.72
8 Treats others with respect	4.71	.54
13 Allows others to make decisions	4.41	.57
18 Develops cooperative relationships	4.20	.79
23 Creates atmosphere of trust	4.27	.70
28 Gets others to own project	4.27	.53
Modeling the way		
4 Clear on leadership philosophy	4.04	.71
9 Breaks projects into chunks	3.86	.84
14 Assures values are adhered to	3.23	.95
19 Lets others know beliefs/values	3.63	.91
24 Practices what is espoused	4.39	.73
29 Sets clear goals and milestones	3.78	.77
Encouraging the heart		
5 Celebrates milestones	3.41	.98
10 Recognizes others' contributions	4.18	.88
15 Gives praise for a job well done	4.12	.78
20 Gives team appreciation/support	3.94	.53
25 Finds time to appreciate/support	3.53	.92
30 Tells others about group's work	3.96	.79

^aAbbreviated version of actual leadership behavior statement provided in the LPI self evaluation instrument (Kouzes and Posner, 1988b). Numbers represent items as they appeared on the instrument.

Table 4. Years Served as a Department Executive Officer

Number of years served	Number	Percent
Less than 6 years	22	44.9
6 to 10 years	10	20.4
11 to 15 years	7	14.3
16 years and over	10	20.4
Total	49	100.0
Mean = 8.89		

Table 5. Job Responsibilities Assumed by DEOs in Agricultural Education

Percent of total	Job Responsibility					
	Teaching	Research	Service	Extension	Admin.	Other
76 - 100	4	0	0	0	5	0
51 - 75	9	0	1	0	7	1
26 - 50	18	2	1	2	16	0
1 - 25	14	23	18	9	13	5
0	4	24	29	38	8	43
Total	49	49	49	49	49	49
Average	40.1%	8.4%	7.1%	4.4%	37.5%	2.6%

In a comparison of leadership practices utilized and the percent of job responsibility allocated to administration, results of a t-test indicated significant differences. Department executive officers who have more than 25 percent of their job responsibility dedicated to administration had significantly higher mean scores on the leadership practices “inspiring a shared vision” and “encouraging the heart” than DEOs with less than 25 percent of their job responsibilities allocated to administration.

Thirty-three percent of the DEOs had completed a college course in leadership and 51 percent had attended advanced leadership workshops. Thirty-six percent of the DEOs indicated they had not received formal leadership training during their administrative appointment. In an analysis of leadership practices utilized by DEOs and leadership course work completed, DEOs who had completed a course in leadership had a significantly higher level of utilization of the leadership practice “enabling others to act” when compared to responses from DEOs who had completed a course. It was found that DEOs who had completed a leadership course had a significantly higher level of utilization of the leadership practice “encouraging the heart” than DEOs who had not completed a course. DEOs who had received formal leadership training indicated significantly higher utilization of the leadership practice “encouraging the heart” than those DEOs who had not received formal leadership training.

When DEOs were asked about the content of their job description (Table 6), 46 percent responded that they did not have specific administrative responsibilities identified while 65 percent of the DEOs indicated there were no specific leadership responsibilities identified in their job descriptions.

Table 6. Job Description and Orientation Program of Department Executive Officer

		N	Percent
Administrative responsibilities in job description	Yes	26	53.1
	No	23	46.9
Leadership responsibilities in job description	Yes	17	34.7
	No	32	65.3

Eighty-three percent of all DEOs surveyed shared that they were not given a quality orientation program when they began their DEO responsibilities. Several DEOs indicated they were provided limited instructions and directions as to the specific responsibilities they were to assume.

Conclusions/Discussion/Recommendations

The mean score identified for each of the five leadership practices evaluated in this study indicated department executive officers in agricultural education use the leadership practices “fairly often” in departmental leadership. Only one leadership practice “enabling others to act” had a mean approaching the “very frequently” range of utilization. Research conducted by Kouzes and Posner (1988a) indicated that trust in the leaders is essential if other people are going to follow that person over time. Trust is developed through consistency in behavior. Considering the data, the standard deviations suggested a lack of consistency regarding the utilization of specific leadership practices in departmental leadership. Department executive officers in agricultural education should seek additional feedback from peers and subordinates regarding their utilization of specific leadership practices in their departmental and professional positions.

Data regarding leadership behaviors provided insight which DEOs can use to improve their overall leadership effectiveness. For the leadership practice “inspiring a shared vision”, the leadership behavior “enlists a common vision” received the lowest mean score of all leadership behaviors. As a group, this finding indicated that DEOs in agricultural education do not view themselves as Practicing this leadership behavior very often. Department executive officers in agricultural education should review individual leadership behaviors to identify behaviors which need to be improved. Department executive officers should seek out further feedback and information regarding benefits and methods of developing specific leadership behaviors.

The age range and level of experience of DEOs in the profession was representative of DEOs in other professions (Tucker, 1984). Results of this study indicated no significant difference in leadership practices used when DEOs were grouped by age and years of DEO experience. Based on these findings, current DEOs could easily be the leaders of the profession for the next ten years and could benefit from specific training to develop or enhance leadership skills in specific areas.

The job responsibilities identified by the DEOs included a broad range of duties beyond administration and leadership. Only five DEOs indicated a sole administrative appointment while many DEOs had primary responsibility in teaching. If DEOs are dedicating the majority of their time to teaching and research, they may not have an adequate amount of time to implement the necessary leadership practices required to move their departments beyond maintenance. DEOs should have a specific amount of their job allocated to specific leadership responsibilities. Department executive officers in agricultural education should also have less teaching responsibilities and more time allocated to fulfill their leadership responsibilities including inspiring vision and recognizing, supporting and motivating faculty.

DEOs who had completed leadership training indicated higher levels of utilization of certain leadership practices when compared to responses from DEOs who had not completed training. Information regarding leadership practices of successful leaders are more available now than ten years ago (Kouzes and Posner, 1988a; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Peters and Waterman, 1982). DEOs should seek out information and opportunities to improve their leadership abilities. Kouzes and Posner (1988a) concluded that effective leaders are constantly looking for ways to improve themselves and their departments.

Department executive officers in agricultural education should have opportunities to enhance their leadership skills through formal leadership training.

The majority of DEOs in this study did not have specific leadership and administrative duties identified in their job descriptions. Martin (1986), York (1984) and Morgan (1984) identified a lack of congruity between the perceptions of the deans and department executive officers in regard to multiple roles which results in high stress levels and role ambiguity. According to Martin, role ambiguity is problematic to effective leadership because the goals of the person leading are at odds with the expectations and perceptions of those being managed. Department executive officers, deans and faculty members should cooperatively evaluate basic leadership and administrative responsibilities in the DEO job description.

Eighty-three percent of the DEOs surveyed indicated they did not receive a quality orientation program regarding the roles and responsibilities of their new position. This finding supports research conducted by Brann and Emmet (1972) that most of the department executive officers are provided policy manuals and given instructions to call if they have any questions. Many DEOs in agricultural education commented that an orientation program did not exist when they started their position, and they were expected to perform on arrival. Agricultural education department staff and existing college administrators should prepare a quality orientation program for new DEOs to improve initial working relationships and reduce some of the ambiguity encountered in the early stages of a new position.

Implications for Further Study

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations for additional research are submitted for consideration.

Further research should be conducted to identify peer and subordinate perceptions regarding leadership practices and behaviors used by DEOs in agricultural education.

Specific leadership needs of DEOs in agricultural education should be identified in order to prioritize further training and development.

Research should be conducted to determine specific leadership and administrative responsibilities identified in current DEO job descriptions, and recommendations should be made for areas of improvement.

Research should be conducted to review the leadership practices used by DEOs in other departments in the College of Agriculture.

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