

EXTENSION LEADERS' SELF-EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP SKILL AREAS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the importance of and level of proficiency in six leadership skill areas as perceived by current Extension leaders. For the purposes of this study, Extension leaders were defined as the individuals from 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions that were most responsible for the day-to-day operations of Extension in their states, and generally had the title of state director or administrator. Participants rated the Human, Conceptual, Communication, Emotional Intelligence, and Industry Knowledge skills areas between important to very important and rated the Technical Skills area between somewhat important and important. In terms of their proficiency within each skill area, participants rated themselves between above average to very proficient in the Human, Conceptual, Communication, Emotional Intelligence, and Industry Knowledge skills areas and between average and above average in Technical Skills. The smallest gap between perceived importance and self-perceived proficiency occurred in the area of Industry Knowledge Skills while the largest gap occurred in the Conceptual Skills area.

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Leadership skills can be taught and learned, yet skilled leaders continue to be in short supply (Pernick, 2001). Most employers, including those responsible for hiring state Extension directors, would agree that leadership skills are desirable in employees. Although an abundance of information about leadership exists, there is still a lack of consensus surrounding specific aspects of leadership. This lack of consensus related to facets of leadership such as leadership styles and leadership development models is especially true within the Extension system.

The Cooperative Extension System (CES) is a unique organization in that its leaders are promoted almost exclusively from within based on their performance in previous positions, often in subject matter disciplines (Ladewig & Rohs, 2000; Patterson, 1997; Pittman & Bruny, 1986). Ladewig & Rohs (2000) suggested that few Extension leaders have the leadership

competence appropriate for today's Extension organization.

Current Extension leaders must play a number of different roles. Competence in each diverse aspect of their job is expected, including leading the organization. In-depth leadership skill development training programs have been recommended for professional staff in Extension (Holder, 1990). However, the organization has made few attempts to define specific leadership skills it is seeking in its leaders, thus making the inclusion of specific competencies addressing such skills in training programs difficult.

Leadership Skills

According to Katz (1955), a skill can be defined as "an ability which can be developed, not necessarily inborn, and which is manifested in performance, not merely in potential" (pp. 33-34). Nahavandi (2000) expanded on this definition by including a training dimension. Nahavandi proposed that a skill is an acquired task a person develops

and can change with training and experience.

Just as there are a number of different approaches researchers can use to study leadership, there are a number of different classification systems of leadership skills. However, each involves some aspect of getting the work done, some aspect of seeing both the big picture and the small, and dealing with the human aspect of the leadership process either from a self or other perspective.

Katz (1955) identified three categories of skills needed by leaders: technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. Although the amount of human, technical, and conceptual skills may vary depending on the position within the organizational hierarchy, each is nevertheless important for successful leaders to possess.

Technical skills, according to Katz (1955), are the most concrete type of skills and are associated with understanding and being able to complete specific activities. In other words, these are the "how to do it" skills and involve methods, processes, procedures, or techniques. Leaders engage in technical skills when they perform the technical activities required of them. Technical skills are more important at the lower levels of administration (Goleman, 1998; Hicks & Gullett, 1975; Katz, 1955). As a leader moves up in the organizational hierarchy, he/she relies on the technical skills of followers more than on his/her own technical skills (Hicks & Gullett, 1975).

Human skills can be considered the "people skills." Katz (1955) defined human skills as "the ability to work effectively as a group member and to build cooperative effort within the team he leads" (p. 34). This skill is demonstrated in how a leader perceives and behaves towards those around him/her, including superiors, peers, and followers, and most importantly cannot be a "some-time skill," but rather must be demonstrated in every action of the leader (Katz, 1955). Leaders engage in human relation skills when they motivate individuals and groups. Human skills are essential throughout all management levels (Hicks & Gullett, 1975; Katz, 1955).

Conceptual skills can be thought of as the "thinking skills" needed by leaders. This

type of skill involves being able to see both what is going on within an entire organization, and how the various parts of the organization interact and depend on one another (Katz, 1955). Conceptual skills are perhaps most important at top management levels where policy decisions, long-term planning, and broad-scale actions are required (Hicks & Gullett, 1975; Katz, 1955).

Strand (1981) conducted a study to determine community leadership competencies, as perceived by community residents. A factor analysis of the 39 competency items contained in the instrument revealed nine broad competency areas. Four of the nine competency areas represented conceptual skills, three represented human skills, and two represented technical skills. Findings of this study suggested that conceptual competencies were the most important, followed closely by human competencies, with technical competencies being least important, supporting the notions of Hicks and Gullett (1975) and Katz (1955).

Newer approaches to leadership skills have been built upon the technical, human, and conceptual skill classification, but are slightly different. Goleman (1998) outlined three domains of leadership skills: purely technical skills, cognitive abilities, and competencies that demonstrated emotional intelligence. There are five components to emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill.

Goleman (1998) included emotional intelligence as a set of leadership skills because he saw it as the distinguishing competence of senior leaders. In fact, he reported emotional intelligence to be twice as important as the others when applied to all levels of jobs within the organizational hierarchy, and found emotional intelligence, rather than conceptual skills, to explain 90% of the difference in the effectiveness of star performers and average senior level leaders.

In addition to emotional intelligence, newer approaches to leadership skills include industry knowledge as a separate skill area. Kotter (1988) identified industry and organizational knowledge as one of six domains for effective senior leaders. Kotter

viewed an expansive knowledge of the industry and the organization as essential to creating the broad outlook needed by leaders to produce an organizational vision and strategies to accomplish that vision.

In a study in which they designed a leadership competency instrument for healthcare administration, Robbins, Bradley, and Spicer (2001) identified four leadership skill domains. Their assessment instrument contained 52 items that were classified as technical skills, industry knowledge, analytic and conceptual reasoning, or interpersonal and emotional intelligence. They identified industry knowledge as a domain of skills due to the complex nature of the healthcare industry.

More recently, communication skills have been identified as a separate leadership skill domain. In their study in which they interviewed administrative heads of agriculture in order to build a leadership competency model for Extension, Moore and Rudd (2004) identified six leadership skill areas as important for senior Extension leaders: Human Skills, Conceptual Skills, Technical Skills, Communication Skills, Emotional Intelligence Skills, and Industry Knowledge Skills. While communication skills had not previously been identified as a separate leadership skill area, competencies within the skill area have been recommended for inclusion in leadership and professional development programs. This is true even within the Extension system. Holder (1990) recommended the inclusion of communication and listening skills in Extension leadership training programs for Extension faculty.

Competency Models

According to Stone (1997), "competency modeling is a highly participatory process" (Why Competencies? section, ¶ 3) and "Extension educators play a large role in identifying and assessing their level of skill" (Why Competencies? section, ¶ 3). Stone discussed a five-stage systems approach to competency development including: (1) identifying areas of opportunity, (2) targeting potential audiences, (3) collecting competency data and associated behaviors, (4) building competency models, and (5)

communicating the new language of competencies.

Each of the stages in the systems approach to competency modeling may consist of a number of steps. According to the work of McClelland (as cited in Dalton, 1997), building a competency model involves five steps: (1) specifying the job or position being analyzed, (2) specifying expected business challenges, (3) conducting critical incident interviews, (4) conducting a content analysis of the critical incidents to identify the underlying competencies, and (5) validating the model.

The systems approach to competency development (Stone, 1997) served as the theoretical framework for this study. The review of literature related to leadership skills provided a starting point for the development of a competency model for Extension. Moore & Rudd (2004) developed such a model, completing steps one through four of the building competency models stage. Because the six leadership skill areas and 80 specific leadership competencies in the model were derived from interviews with administrative heads of agriculture, and not by the leaders themselves, this study focused on the fifth step, validating the model with current Extension leaders. Validating the instrument would offer great insight for those involved in the training and development of current Extension leaders, as well as those involved in the hiring of future Extension leaders. According to Stone (1997), "establishing a competency-based human resources system has the potential to promote continuous learning and create an infrastructure for moving the organization forward" (Summary section, ¶ 1).

Purpose and Objectives

This study was part of a larger study conducted to identify and describe the leadership styles and skills of Extension leaders as well as to explain the influence of demographics on their leadership styles and skills. The specific objectives of the present quantitative study were to:

1. Determine the importance of leadership skills areas as perceived by current Extension leaders.

2. Determine the self-perceived proficiency level of current Extension leaders in each of the leadership skills areas.
3. Assess the differences between perceived importance and perceived proficiency in each leadership skill area.

Research Methods and Procedures

Population and Sample

For the purposes of this study, current Extension leaders were defined as the individuals that are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the CES within their state. Typically, these individuals are the Extension directors and administrators at 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions. However, due to overlaps in the CSREES Directors and Administrators Directory (April, 2002) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) list of Administrative Heads of Agriculture, each individual in the CSREES Directory was contacted via e-mail about the nature and purposes of this study and asked to identify the individual in their state most responsible for the day-to-day operation of Extension. Based on the responses to these e-mails, a list of 80 current Leaders was compiled and served as the population frame for this study.

A total of 49 responses were received for a response rate of 61.25%. Two responses did not contain usable data and were removed from the database leaving 47 respondents for data analysis.

Instrumentation

One instrument was used to collect data in this study. The instrument was developed by the researchers based on the findings of Moore and Rudd (2004) and consisted of 80 specific leadership competencies grouped into six leadership skill areas: Human Skills, Conceptual Skills, Technical Skills, Communication Skills, Emotional Intelligence Skills, and Industry Knowledge Skills. Leadership skill areas and leadership skills were derived from content analysis of long interviews conducted with a purposive sample of administrative heads of

agriculture at 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions and the 80 specific competencies were based on the specific comments of the interview participants and the literature base (Moore & Rudd). The competencies were clustered into one of the six leadership skill areas based on the review of literature. However, the competencies may not be mutually exclusive. Moore and Rudd suggested interrelationships between the leadership competencies within and between skill areas.

This instrument was designed to assess how important current Extension leaders believe each competency is to their overall success and the self-perceived proficiency level of the leaders in each specific leadership competency. To assess the perceived importance of each leadership skill area, participants responded to each competency included in that skill area on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not Important) to 5 (Very Important). Raw scores were calculated for the perceived importance of each of the six skill areas by summing the responses within each area. Raw scores were then converted to a 100-point scale by dividing the sum of the responses by the total possible response score for each skill area. Scores were converted to a 100-point scale for ease of interpretation and allowed all skill areas, regardless of the number of items within the skill area, to be represented on the same scale. Scores on this 100-point scale served as the scale score for importance in each of the six areas. Raw scores were also calculated for perceived importance of all 80 competencies by summing all of the importance responses. These raw scores were also converted to a 100-point scale by dividing the sum of responses by the maximum possible score, 400, which served as the total score for importance.

To measure participants' self-perceived proficiency in each skill area, participants responded to the same competencies included in each skill area on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (None) to 5 (Very Proficient). Raw scores were calculated for proficiency in each of the six skill areas and total proficiency score using the same procedure used to calculate raw scores for importance.

The instrument was evaluated by a panel of experts for content and face validity prior to data collection. The nation-wide panel consisted of university faculty members familiar with leadership and/or Extension. The instrument was also pilot-tested to establish reliability. The pilot study group consisted of 29 associate and assistant deans and directors of Extension not included in the study. Fifteen of the 29 individuals invited to participate in the pilot study completed the instrument for a response rate of 51.7%. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for importance and proficiency within each skill category. Cronbach's alpha is appropriate for estimating internal-consistency reliability within a scale in Likert format (Isaac & Michael, 1995). In terms of how important pilot study participants perceived the competencies within each skill area to be, Cronbach's alpha for each skill area were: $\alpha=.91$ for Human Skills, $\alpha=.92$ for Conceptual Skills, $\alpha=.74$ for Technical Skills, $\alpha=.91$ for Communication Skills, $\alpha=.86$ for Emotional Intelligence Skills, and $\alpha=.92$ for Industry Knowledge Skills. In terms of how proficient pilot study participants perceived they were in each skill area, Cronbach's alpha for each skill area were: $\alpha=.93$ for Human Skills, $\alpha=.94$ for Conceptual Skills, $\alpha=.80$ for Technical Skills, $\alpha=.91$ for Communication Skills, $\alpha=.91$ for Emotional Intelligence Skills, and $\alpha=.88$ for Industry Knowledge Skills. No leadership competencies could have been removed so as to cause an increase in Cronbach's alpha for both perceived importance and self-perceived level of proficiency.

Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument was administered to current Extension leaders following the Tailored Design Method of Dillman (2000). This method included a system of up to five compatible contacts with each individual selected for participation in the study. First, a brief prenotice letter was sent informing participants that they would soon be receiving directions for completing the instrument and encouraging their participation in the study. Within one week,

packets containing directions for participating in the study, an informed consent form, and the instrument were mailed to participants. A thank you postcard was sent one week later thanking those who had already completed the instrument and returned it, while at the same time encouraging those who had not to please complete and return the instrument. Approximately three weeks after sending the thank you post card a fourth contact was made with individuals who have not returned the completed instrument. Replacement instrument packets were mailed to these individuals. Finally, a fifth contact was made by telephone approximately one week after the replacement questionnaires were mailed as a final attempt to encourage a response.

Data were analyzed using the SPSS[®] statistical package for Windows[™]. Missing values were replaced with the item mean during analysis in cases where participants did not respond to a particular item (George & Mallery, 2001). However, there were five cases in which the missing data accounted for more than 15 percent of the scale and therefore missing values were left as missing and that participant's responses were not included in the analysis of that particular scale or in the analysis of the total score for the instrument (George & Mallery). Measures of central tendency were used to describe current Extension leaders in terms how important they perceived each leadership skill area to be and how proficient they perceived themselves to be in each of the leadership skill areas. Paired samples t-tests were used to assess the significance of differences between perceived importance and perceived proficiency in each of the six leadership skill areas and total score.

To address nonresponse error, early and late responders were compared for statistical differences (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996; Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001; Miller & Smith, 1983). Late responders were defined as the later 50% of the respondents (Lindner et al.). There was no statistical difference between early responders and late responders.

Results

The first objective was to determine the importance of each leadership skill area as perceived by current Extension leaders. The mean scores for each skill area are presented in Table 1. All scores were above 75 for the possible range of 20 to 100. The highest mean score was for the importance of Emotional Intelligence Skills ($M=93.14$, $SD=6.14$), followed by Conceptual Skills ($M=92.27$, $SD=5.28$), Human Skills ($M=92.04$, $SD=5.62$), Industry Knowledge Skills ($M=91.04$, $SD=7.52$), Communication Skills ($M=89.06$, $SD=7.86$), and Technical Skills ($M=79.53$, $SD=11.13$), respectively. The Technical Skills area was the only skill area that had a mean score for perceived importance below 80. Scores for

the importance of Emotional Intelligence Skills ranged from a low of 77.14 to a high of 100, the highest possible score. For the importance of Conceptual Skills, scores ranged from a low of 82.27 to a high of 100. Scores for the importance of Human Skills ranged from a low of 80.00 to a high of 100. For the importance of Industry Knowledge Skills, scores ranged from a low score of 73.85 to a high score of 100. For the importance of Communications Skills, scores ranged from a low of 65.71 to a high of 100. Scores for the importance of Technical Skills ranged from a low of 56.00 to a high of 100. Total Importance Scores were calculated for the all 80 competencies and ranged from a low of 76.00 to a high of 99.75.

Table 1
Mean Scores for Extension Leaders' Perceived Importance of the Leadership Skill Areas

Leadership Skill Area	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Emotional Intelligence Skills (Importance)	46	93.14	6.14
Conceptual Skills (Importance)	47	92.27	5.28
Human Skills (Importance)	47	92.04	5.63
Industry Knowledge Skills (Importance)	46	91.04	7.52
Communication Skills (Importance)	46	89.06	7.86
Technical Skills (Importance)	46	79.52	11.13
Total Importance Score	44	90.18	5.72

Note. If more than 15% of the data for a particular scale was missing, that respondent's data were not included in the analysis for that scale or for the Total Importance Score.

Objective 2 was to determine the self-perceived proficiency level of current Extension leaders in each leadership skill area. Mean scores for each of the leadership skill areas and total proficiency are reported in Table 2. All scores were above 70 for the possible range of 20 to 100. The highest mean score was for proficiency in Emotional Intelligence Skills ($M=85.46$, $SD=8.10$), followed by Industry Knowledge Skills ($M=84.31$, $SD=10.80$), Human Skills ($M=84.28$, $SD=8.31$), Conceptual Skills ($M=82.49$, $SD=9.42$), Communication Skills ($M=81.51$, $SD=9.95$), and Technical Skills ($M=71.50$, $SD=12.20$), respectively. The Technical Skills area was the only skill area

that had a mean score for perceived importance below 80. Scores for the self-perceived proficiency of respondents in Emotional Intelligence Skills ranged from a low of 68.57 to a high of 100, the highest possible score on a possible scale of 20 to 100. For the self-perceived proficiency level in Industry Knowledge Skills, scores ranged from a low of 50.77 to a high of 100. Scores for self-perceived proficiency in Human Skills ranged from a low of 66.67 to a high of 97.33. For the self-perceived proficiency level in Conceptual Skills, scores ranged from a low of 58.57 to a high of 98.57. For the self-perceived proficiency level in Communication Skills, scores ranged from a

low score of 58.57 to a high score of 100. Scores for self-perceived proficiency in Technical Skills ranged from a low of 46.00

to a high of 98.00. Total Proficiency Scores ranged from a low of 64.00 to a high of 96.50.

Table 2
Mean Scores for Extension Leaders' Self-perceived Proficiency in the Leadership Skill Areas

Leadership Skill Area	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Emotional Intelligence Skills (Proficiency)	47	85.46	8.10
Industry Knowledge Skills (Proficiency)	47	84.31	10.80
Human Skills (Proficiency)	47	84.28	8.31
Conceptual Skills (Proficiency)	47	82.49	9.42
Communication Skills (Proficiency)	47	81.51	9.95
Technical Skills (Proficiency)	46	71.50	12.20
Total Proficiency Score	46	82.11	8.12

Note. If more than 15% of the data for a particular scale was missing, that respondent's data were not included in the analysis for that scale or for the Total Proficiency Score.

The third objective was to assess the relationship between perceived importance and perceived proficiency in each of the leadership skill areas. Table 3 shows the difference between mean scores for the importance of each skill area and the self-perceived proficiency level of respondents in each skill area. Mean scores were higher for perceived importance than for self-perceived level of proficiency in all six skill areas. The difference between perceived importance and self-perceived proficiency was greatest for

Conceptual Skills (Mean Difference=9.78), followed by Technical Skills (Mean Difference=8.02), Human Skills (Mean Difference=7.76), Emotional Intelligence Skills (Mean Difference=7.68), Communication Skills (Mean Difference=7.55), and Industry Knowledge Skills (Mean Difference=6.73). Paired samples t-tests showed statistically significant differences between the mean for importance and the mean for proficiency in each of the six leadership skill areas and the total score.

Table 3
Difference Between Extension Leaders' Perceived Importance and Self-perceived Proficiency in Each Leadership Skill Area

Leadership Skill Area	Mean (Importance)	Mean (Proficiency)	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>
Conceptual Skills	92.27	82.49	9.78	7.82*
Technical Skills	79.52	71.50	8.02	4.32*
Human Skills	92.04	84.28	7.76	9.09*
Emotional Intelligence Skills	93.14	85.46	7.68	8.37*
Communication Skills	89.06	81.51	7.55	7.03*
Industry Knowledge Skills	91.04	84.31	6.73	5.66*
Total Score	90.18	82.11	8.07	9.81*

**p* < .05.

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Current Extension leaders rated five of the six leadership skill areas (Human Skills, Conceptual Skills, Communication Skills, Emotional Intelligence Skills, and Industry Knowledge Skills) between important and very important. Technical skills were rated between somewhat important and important. Participants perceived Emotional Intelligence Skills to be the most important of the six leadership skills areas. In such difficult budget times, demands on faculty time continue to increase. The Emotional Intelligence Skills area included competencies such as time management and balancing personal and professional lives.

Although not unexpected due to Goleman's (1998) assertion that emotional intelligence skills are more important than other leadership skill areas, it is interesting to find Emotional Intelligence Skills rated most important. Many of the specific competencies within this skill area are the same skill areas and competencies often left out of leadership training and development. It is not so rare to find leadership development in competencies such as conflict resolution and negotiation, but many competencies within this skill area, such as demonstrating personal integrity, a high level of motivation, and high levels of energy and enthusiasm are rarely included in leadership courses, workshops, or seminars. For example, it may not be hard to find development activities that emphasize strategies to motivate followers, but strategies for motivating oneself as the leader are rarely included in leadership training and development programs for Extension leaders. Perhaps the fact these competencies are so rarely taught contributes to the perceived importance of them by Extension leaders. Based on the findings of this present study, it is recommended that leadership training and development programs offered to current and future Extension leaders emphasize the development of Emotional Intelligence Skills in an effort to provide leaders with the skills they perceive to be most important.

Participants perceived Technical Skills to be the least important of the six leadership

skill areas. This finding is consistent with the literature (Hicks & Gullett, 1975) that reported the amount of technical skills required by leaders decreased the higher in the organizational hierarchy leaders were. Since the leaders in this study were in the most senior leadership positions within the organization, it is to be expected that the amount of technical skills they require would be less than that of other skill areas and therefore perceived as less important. Although the Technical Skills area was rated as least important, overall, the competencies were still rated between somewhat important and important, and in reality, were rated closer to the important end of that scale. In essence, this finding supports the finding of Moore and Rudd (2004) who found technical skills to be the area of the most disagreement. In other words, some of the current Extension leaders perceived technical skills competencies to be closer to very important while others perceived them to be closer to somewhat important.

Moore and Rudd (2004) reported that the perceived importance of technical skills, especially those related to computer literacy, appeared to be a function of the size of the institution. In their study, participants from larger institutions with more resources, such as a communications department within the college, placed less importance on technical skills than did participants from smaller institutions. In this study, no data were collected on the size of the institution of participants and the availability of technical support. Additional research is needed in this area to determine if perceived importance is actually a function of such factors or simply that many professionals are becoming more technically literate.

Participants ranked themselves between above average and very proficient in terms of their proficiency in Human Skills, Conceptual Skills, Communication Skills, Emotional Intelligence Skills, and Industry Knowledge Skills. Participants ranked themselves between average and above average in proficiency in technical skills. Participants perceived themselves to be most proficient in Emotional Intelligence Skills and least proficient in the Technical Skills area.

After finding that participants ranked Emotional Intelligence skills as most important and Technical Skills to be the least important, it was not unexpected to find that they perceived themselves to be most proficient and least proficient in the same skill areas, respectively. It is to be expected that participants in a study involving self-reported data are not likely to perceive themselves to be poor in a skill area they believe is very important. It may be possible that the reason Technical Skills are rated as least important is because participants see them as an area of weakness. It is also quite possible that because Technical Skills are seen as least important, participants have chosen to develop their skills in areas they consider to be more important and not sought opportunities to develop their technical skills.

Previous research has offered conflicting findings related to whether leaders tend to rate themselves higher on self-reported leadership measures than do people who are familiar with their styles and abilities. Holder (1990) reported that Extension faculty members rated their middle managers lower on leadership practices and skills than the managers rated themselves. In contrast, Cobb (1989) reported no significant differences in the leadership effectiveness ratings of the County Extension Directors (CEDs) who rated themselves and the county Extension agents who rated their CEDs. A study by Rudd (2000) offered conflicting findings based on gender. In his study, male CEDs ranked themselves higher on all five leadership practices measured by the LPI (challenge the process, enable others to act, inspire a shared vision, encourage the heart, and model the way) than did their observers, whereas female CEDs ranked themselves lower in four of the five leadership areas than did their observers. It is recommended that future research involving superiors and subordinates of the participants in this study be conducted to determine if participants have an inaccurate perception about their own level of proficiency in each competency, or if they,

in fact, actually view their abilities as they are perceived by others.

The largest gap between perceived importance and self-perceived proficiency occurred in the area of Conceptual Skills. As noted earlier, some authors support the notion that conceptual skills are most important at the higher levels of administration within an organization (Hicks & Gullet, 1975; Katz 1955) while Goleman (1998) reported emotional intelligence skills to be of more importance than other skills. It must be noted, however, that Goleman's notion of emotional intelligence explaining 90% of the difference in the effectiveness of senior leaders deals with leadership effectiveness, a construct not assessed in this study. Findings of this study support Goleman's assertion in that participants rated Emotional Intelligence Skills as most important and Conceptual Skills second in importance. However, participants were not as confident in their proficiency within the Conceptual Skills area as they were in other skills areas, including emotional intelligence, creating the largest mean difference between perceived importance and perceived proficiency. Such a gap clearly indicates an area for professional development. Extension leaders are faced with the ongoing challenge of continuing to move the organization forward with limited and dwindling resources. Given such a challenge, effective leaders must be able to support organizational change and think strategically. It is recommended that competencies in this area, such as strategic thinking and creating a long-term vision, be included in leadership development programs for Extension leaders in an effort to better equip leaders with the kinds of conceptual skills they need to move Extension forward.

The smallest gap between perceived importance and perceived proficiency occurred in the Industry Knowledge Skills area. This finding is not surprising given the high number of Extension leaders promoted from within the organization. Less emphasis should be placed on providing professional development in this area as compared to the other areas included in the present study.

However, in instances in which new Extension leaders are hired from outside the organization, additional emphasis in Industry Knowledge Skills would be warranted.

Findings of this study suggest that the individuals who hire Extension leaders are looking for leadership skills that are also important to individuals in the positions for which they are hiring. Therefore, leadership training and development programs for Extension leaders should focus on developing competence within each of the six leadership skill areas. However, this study only addressed the perceived leadership styles and self-perceived proficiency in leadership skill areas of current leaders. Future research should be conducted to determine the perceptions of both leaders and those around them with respect to the effectiveness of leadership.

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