

## **The Effects of the Academy on Behavioral/Skill Change in Organizational Leaders**

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The focus of this paper is a study conducted by Randal Wilson as part of his doctoral program at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. The study, carried out under the supervision of Dr. Alan Seagren, began in 2004 and was completed in 2006. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of leadership training on behavioral and skill change in community college division chairs and other organizational leaders. In particular, the study explored the effects of participation in the Academy for Leadership and Development offered by the Chair Academy. Findings of the literature review, methodology and data analysis, conclusions drawn from the data and recommendations are discussed in this paper.

The Academy was developed and implemented by the Chair Academy. The Chair Academy's mission at the time of the study was "to design and promote leading-edge training programs to advance organizational leadership in an era of change" (Chair Academy, 2004). What the Academy provided was a year-long leadership training program that included the following components: a one-week introductory leadership training session, a year-long practicum experience and a second week long leadership training session at the end of the practicum.

The first week of training exposed the participant to the Academy, its philosophies and its training curriculum. This was accomplished through structured as well as unstructured leadership development activities. The activities included lectures, large group discussions, small group break out sessions, case studies, informal

discussions and social interaction with fellow participants. The curriculum focused on eight topics and was presented by Academy program facilitators. The topics included: complex role of the organizational leader, developing your IPDP, behavioral work styles, effective leadership models, building effective work teams, strategic and scenario planning, managing individual/team conflict, and enhancing learning through leadership.

During the practicum participants were “expected to engage in reflective practice, an ongoing mindfulness of the objectives of the IPDP, and one’s progress toward meeting those objectives through application of the concepts learned” (Filan et al., 2000a, p. 10-3). The participant stayed in contact with the Academy through the use of an Academy mentor and through a list serve managed by the Academy. The list serve also facilitated communication between participants. During the practicum, the participant was to engage in reflective journaling and write a mid-term and final reflection reports that dealt with progress toward achieving the goals laid out in the IPDP.

The second week of training allowed the participant to reconnect with fellow participants, to be recharged and also to reflect on the past year. Topics covered during the first week were reviewed and six new areas of concentration were introduced. The new areas included: dimensions of leadership, leading change, appreciating diversity, leader as manager, hiring for excellence and leading part-time staff.

In order to assess the change that occurred in the participants’ leadership behaviors and skills, the Academy administered the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the Leadership Skill Perception Survey (LSPS). These assessments were administered multiple times so that change over time could be measured. The Academy administered both the MLQ and the LSPS via the Internet to participants prior to the first week of training (pre), during the practicum just prior to the second week of training (interim), then six months after completion of the Academy (post). The participant’s supervisor also completed the MLQ and LSPS assessments with regard to the participant.

The population for the study consisted of community college chairs and other organizational leaders that began participation in the Academy between January 2003 and December 2004. As part of the study, participant data were correlated with the supervisor data for both the MLQ and the LSPS. This was done to establish whether or not participant and supervisor data were consistent. The study also collected data from participants using the Modified Leadership Self-rating Survey (mLSS); a survey instrument developed by the researcher. These data were used to determine participant perception of their Academy experience and were compared with other data that were collected by the Academy via the MLQ and LSPS.

### **Literature Review**

As was stated in the mission of the Academy, one of its goals was to “advance organizational leadership.” This facilitated the development of leaders who could go back to their respective institutions and become change agents. This mission was in complete agreement with the need for leaders in the community college movement.

The division chair has been referred to as one of the most important leaders in the community college (Hecht et al., 1999; Seagren et al., 1993; Tucker, 1992). The need for highly trained and skilled chairs was obvious. However, according to Tucker and others, the chair often came to the position with little to no formal leadership training. More times than not, faculty members became the chair simply because it was their turn. The

chair was often a well meaning individual who lacked the necessary skills to adequately do the job.

The importance of the position and the typical lack of formal training highlighted the need for leadership training for chairs, potential chairs and other organizational leaders. The Chair Academy was designed to help participants acquire and improve their leadership behaviors. Determining whether or not change in leadership behavior and skill occurred due to participation in this training opportunity was what made this study relevant and important. Data collected from a select group of chairs and other organizational leaders provided evidence of the results of participation in the Academy.

Still (1995) stated, "In community colleges, departments or divisions are the building blocks of the academic structure. These instructional units traditionally are headed by a chairperson" (p. 17). Filan (1999) supported this with his statement, "Substantive operational and instructional issues within community colleges are taken care of at the department level. Therefore, department chairs are crucial to the success of the institution" (p. 48).

The role of the division chair has been referred to as both difficult and complex (Filan, 1999; Hecht et al., 1999; Seagren et al., 1993; Tucker, 1992). Much of this can be attributed to the paradoxical nature of the position (Hecht et al., 1999; Seagren et al., 1993; Tucker, 1992). The literature reported that chairs often found themselves caught between the interests of faculty and administration. Many times those interests were at odds with each other. On one hand it was the job of the chair to meet the administrative and mission related needs of the institution. On the other hand, the chair was supposed to represent the department or division to the administration. Gmelch (2004) related this predicament to the role of Janus, a Roman god with two faces looking in two directions at the same time.

This situation also referred to as the "swivel effect," placed chairs in a position where they could be stuck between the faculty, the administration, and the institution as a whole. Gmelch (2004) went on to say chairs had to learn to balance their roles. The key was to do it "without appearing dizzy, schizophrenic, or "two-faced" (p. 75). The chair needed to have the ability to facilitate the faculty's needs while at the same time be ready to act as an authoritarian when administration demanded.

The literature pointed out that the chair position was pivotal. Tucker referred to it as a fulcrum. Seagren et al. (1993) furthered this analogy and suggested that the fulcrum had no clear pivot point (p. 11). Due to the ambiguity of the position, lack of preparation going into the position and limited authority to make decision, chairs had no clear idea of what they were to do and how they were to do it. This was compounded by all the roles and responsibilities the chair was expected to take on.

With that said, who became a chair? According to Seagren et al. (1994), the majority of community college chairs were between 45-54 years, Caucasian, and male. Over 60% had a Masters degree or higher and were in the position somewhere between 6 and 10 years. Hecht et al. (1999) identified 4 distinguishing characteristics that most department chairs shared: they were drawn from faculty ranks, they lacked preparation for what was a major change in professional roles, they enjoyed, at best, limited financial rewards and they served for a relatively short period of time.

Regardless of who or what the chair was prior to taking the job, the expectations for leadership were there when they took the job. The chair was supposed to act like a

chair and exhibit the appropriate leadership behaviors. The Academy placed a great deal of emphasis on Full-range Leadership. Specifically, it sought to help the participant become more transformational while becoming less transactional and laissez-faire.

As was mentioned, most chairs came from the faculty ranks with little leadership experience or formal training. Could this deficit be overcome? Could leadership skills be taught? Some researchers have argued that people are born with leadership skills (Seagren et al., 1993). Others felt leadership skills could be taught. Kouzes and Posner (2003) supported this by stating, "We firmly believe that leadership is an identifiable set of skills and practices that are available to each of us, not just a few charismatic men and women" (p. 1). This study was guided by the idea that leadership could be developed through training programs.

If leadership skills can be taught, what were the skills that need to be learned? Hecht (2004) suggested that the ability to work with groups, the art of decision making, and management of people and resources are particularly useful (p. 41). Tucker (1992) added that the effective leader should have, good interpersonal skills, the ability to identify problems and resolve them, the ability to adapt leadership styles, the ability to set department goals, and the ability to search for, discover, and maximize the power available to them (p. 40). Thomas and Schuh (2004) included vision, conflict management, and being a change agent to the list (pp. 12-13). Kouzes and Posner (2003) stated that people would willingly follow a leader if that person was believed to be honest, forward-looking, competent and inspiring (p. 11).

Many chairs relied on self-education, prior experience, on-the-job training, observation of role models and mentoring to acquire leadership skills (Hecht, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999; Raines & Alberg, 2003; Seagren et al., 1993; Smith & Stewart, 1999; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Tucker, 1992). Of the training methods listed, education and training seemed to be the least used. The literature suggested this could be due to lack of interest on the part of the administration, lack of easily accessible training programs, or lack of interest on the part of the new chair.

Training programs did exist on both the local and national level. The Academy was an example. Gmelch (2004) suggested the effective programs recognized the following:

- Cohort groups of chairs in leadership development were essential
- Chairs thrived when they had mentors and support networks for guidance and reflection
- Chair development needed to entail continuous learning opportunities
- Department chair leadership development required a supportive culture
- Professional development programs for chairs had to be built around a single well-defined model of leadership development (pp. 82-83)

Regardless of the training method employed by the chair, it was important they understand their role in the process. Gmelch (2004) stated:

Nevertheless, in order for chairs to find their balance and become productive scholars and leaders, they must understand the nature of their job, the skills needed to provide them with balance, and the ability to reflect on and adjust what really matters in their personal and professional lives. (p. 83)

## **Methodology and Data Analysis**

The researcher attempted to determine whether participants in the Chair Academy perceived any change in their leadership behaviors and skills. To aid in this attempt, the following grand tour question was formulated: *What changes in a division chair's leadership behaviors and skills occurred as a result of participating in the Chair Academy?* The following research questions were used to provide additional focus to the grand tour question and were used as a guide for the mLSS survey questions.

1. What level of understanding of leadership behaviors and skills existed prior to participation in the Chair Academy?
2. What specific leadership behaviors or skills changed as a result of participation in the Chair Academy?
3. What specific leadership behaviors or skills were acquired as a result of participation in the Chair Academy?
4. What specific leadership behaviors or skills (changed or acquired as a result of participation in the Chair Academy) were or were not utilized by the participant in the job?
5. What specific leadership behaviors or skills (changed or acquired as a result of participation in the Chair Academy) were important to the job of the participant?
6. What factors other than participation in the Academy have led to change in leadership behavior and skill?
7. Were the results of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) data for participants in agreement with Academy completer's perception of behavioral change?
8. Was there agreement between participant and supervisor data on the MLQ and LSPS assessments?
9. In terms of participant perception of leadership behavior and skill change, what level of importance did participants place on the following components of the Chair Academy: Local Mentor, Academy Mentor, Development and use of the IPDP, Academy List serve, Journaling (reflective practice), Midterm Reflection report, and Final Reflection report?

This study was undertaken to answer the grand tour question and its accompanying research questions and was a non-experimental descriptive quantitative study. The study was conducted in two stages. Stage 1 used descriptive statistics to analyze data collected by the Academy from participants using the MLQ and the LSPS. A Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient was also calculated using participant and supervisor MLQ and LSPS data. Stage 2 used the mLSS. The mLSS contained both quantitative and qualitative questions. The quantitative questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative questions were analyzed using an explanatory descriptive method. This involved coding and grouping the data into common themes.

## **Summary of Findings and Conclusions**

An analysis of the data generally indicated that participants of the Chair Academy did perceive change in their leadership behaviors and skills. In this section, a summary of findings is presented and conclusions are drawn from the results of the data analysis.

According to the demographic data collected on the MLQ, the LSPS and the mLSS a majority of respondents were female, over 40 years of age, white/Caucasian, had been with their institutions less than 10 years, had attained at least a Masters degree and were at or above the director position. These data were generally in agreement with the study conducted by Seagren et al. (1994). The main exception was the fact that Seagren's study found a majority of chairs was male as opposed to female. This difference could be explained by the fact that more women have begun to move into leadership roles. The fact that this study included more than just department chairs could have also contributed to the difference.

Regardless of the differences between the studies, a majority of chairs and other organizational leaders entered the Academy with the following traits: they were in their forties, they were fairly well established in their careers and they had been with their institution(s) for a significant amount of time.

On the mLSS, respondents were given the opportunity to provide information to the study that was general in nature. When asked about the importance of leadership training, a large percentage of respondents indicated it was "Important" or "Very Important." Various reasons were given as to why leadership training was important. These ranged from the limited amount of training new leaders have to the professional development opportunities leadership training provides. This level of response indicated participants entered the Academy with an appreciation of the need for leadership training.

The mLSS also asked respondents if they had received a promotion since participation in the Academy and whether or not participation in the Academy contributed in any way to their promotion. Those who had received a promotion since participating were in the minority (23%). However, of those who had received promotions, a majority (72%) indicated participation had contributed to receiving the promotion. These data indicate that participation in the Academy can lead to promotion for a small percentage of participants.

When asked if they would recommend attending the Academy to a colleague, 100% of the respondents indicated they would recommend attending. Respondent explanations for why they would recommend the Academy to a colleague fell into the following four major themes: networking, curriculum, self development and facilitators. These data show those who participated in the Academy held it and its leadership program in high regard.

Research question 1 asked, "What level of understanding of leadership behaviors and skills existed prior to participation in the Chair Academy?" This question was answered with data from the pre LSPS and question 4 of the mLSS. Participants came to the Academy with varying levels of understanding in the areas of leadership behavior and skill. Therefore, the researcher anticipated a wide range of data for this research question. The researcher assumed that if a person used a particular skill or behavior on a regular basis, they were more likely to understand that skill or behavior. Data collected from the pre LSPS and the mLSS indicated prior to participation in the Academy, a large percentage of respondents had at least a moderate use (LSPS) or understanding (mLSS) of all the leadership skills and behaviors covered by the Academy.

Even though many respondents had at least a moderate level of understanding for each of the topics, there were some topics that had a noteworthy (>10.0%) percentage of respondents who indicated they had a low level of understanding prior to participation.

These included: Leading Part-Time Staff, Behavioral Work Styles, Effective Leadership Models, Building Effective Work Teams, Strategic and Scenario Planning, Managing Individual/Team Conflict, Enhancing Learning through Leadership, Dimensions of Leadership and Leading Change.

The data used for this part of the study supported the statement that participants entered the Academy with varying levels of understanding of the topics covered. Some indicated a relatively high level of understanding for some areas and others indicated a relatively low understanding.

Research question 2 asked, “What specific leadership behaviors or skills changed as a result of participation in the Chair Academy?” Data from the pre and interim LSPS and question 4 of the mLSS were used to address this research question. Pre and interim LSPS data were compared and found to show a majority of respondents had a positive change for all the behaviors. That is, the difference between their pre and interim scores moved in a positive or desired direction. Put another way, their scores improved. There were respondents who showed negative or no change. The last two categories combined had approximately one-half as many percentage points as positive change. This was true for all the behaviors. While it was unlikely anyone lost skill or ability due to participation, it was likely that some failed to gain in a particular area. This could be due to any number of causes. However the reason or cause for this was beyond the scope of this study.

The data from the LSPS were supported by data from question 4 of the mLSS. These data showed that a large percentage of respondents felt they had either a “Moderately High” or “High” level of gain in understanding for each of the 13 topics covered by the Academy during weeks one and two. Less than 10% of the respondents indicated a “Low” or “None” for gain in understanding for all 13 of topics.

Since the data indicated a large percentage of respondents had experienced positive change in all the areas covered by the Academy; and since most respondents indicated they had a “Moderately High” to “High” level of gain in understanding for each of the 13 topics, it can be said that many participants experienced change in all the areas covered by the Academy.

Research question 3 asked, “What specific leadership behaviors or skills were acquired as a result of participation in the Chair Academy?” Data from questions 3 and 6 of the mLSS were used to answer this question. For the purposes of this study, five behaviors/skills covered by the Academy had been determined directly implementable in the work place. These behaviors/skills included: Team Building, Strategic and Scenario Planning, Managing Individual/Team Conflict, Recognition of Different Learning Styles (Disc) and Leading Change. With a simple yes or no answer, a majority of respondents indicated that each of these behaviors/skills was acquired due to participation in the Academy. This was interesting given the fact earlier data suggested most respondents had at least a moderate understanding of each behavior/skill prior to participation.

Participation in the Academy could have conceivably led to the acquisition of behaviors/skills that were not directly covered by the curriculum. Respondents were given the opportunity to list additional behaviors/skills they had acquired due to participation in the Academy. Those listed a large percentage of the time included: Networking, Awareness of differences, Effective communication, Self-reflection, Time management and Mentoring. Other behaviors/skills mentioned were ethical behavior,

fostering community, change agent, collaboration, use of humor, patience, succession planning, delegation, confidence and goal setting.

The data associated with this part of the study indicate participation in the Academy facilitated the acquisition of behaviors and skills. Furthermore, some of the behaviors/skills acquired were not necessarily part of the Academy curriculum.

Research question 4 asked, “What specific leadership behaviors or skills (changed or acquired as a result of participation in the Chair Academy) were or were not utilized in the job?” Data from question 5 of the mLSS were used on this question.

The data showed that a large percentage of respondents used all 13 of the topics at least moderately in their job. Some of the topics were more heavily used than others. Three of the topics had their highest percentage in the “Moderate” category, six had their highest percentage in the “Moderately High” category and 4 had their highest percentage in the “High” category. Only two categories had notable (>10.0%) percentages in the “Low” category. These data indicate a varying degree of use in the job of the behaviors/skills taught by the Academy.

Research question 5 asked, “What specific leadership behaviors or skills (changed or acquired as a result of participation in the Chair Academy) were important to the job of the participant?” Again, data from question 5 of the mLSS were used to answer this question. These data showed that more than one half of the respondents rated all 13 of the topics covered by the Academy as having a “Moderately High” or “High” importance to their job. All of the topics had a small percentage in the “Low” or “None” category. These data indicate a large percentage of those who participated in the Academy felt the materials covered in weeks one and two had at least a “Moderately High” importance to their job.

Research question 6 asked, “What factors other than participation in the Academy have led to change in leadership behavior and skill?” Data from question 13 of the mLSS were used on this question. Without a doubt, events and experiences shape the lives of leaders. Therefore, respondents were given the opportunity to discuss events and experiences other than participation in the Academy that might have led to change in their leadership behaviors and skills.

The most commonly cited reason for change in leadership behaviors and skills other than participation in the Academy dealt with change in the workplace. These changes generally involved the respondent or their relationship with one of their colleagues or supervisors. The changes ranged from a new position or responsibility to the death of someone in the workplace. Other change themes included experience gained on the job, observation in the workplace, educational opportunities and networking. These data showed that events and experiences other than participation in the Academy lead to change in leadership behaviors and skills for some of the participants.

Research question 7 asked, “Were the results of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) data for participants in agreement with Academy completer’s perception of behavioral change? Data from the pre and interim MLQ were used as well as data from the mLSS.

As has been mentioned, the MLQ measured full-range leadership characteristics. One of the goals of the Academy was to foster transformational leadership. By comparing the pre and interim MLQ scores, a determination could be made as to whether or not growth had occurred. If it had, the transformational scores should have increased,

transactional scores should have decreased and laissez-faire scores should have decreased. When the data from the pre MLQ were compared to the data from the interim MLQ, they showed that a large percentage of the participants did score higher for the transformational behavior. Also, the transactional and laissez-faire behaviors showed a decrease.

Another indicator for transformational growth was for the transformational behavior to have the highest percentage followed by transactional and then laissez-faire. The data for both the pre and interim MLQ followed this pattern.

Respondents on the mLSS were asked to rate their perception of the make up of their leadership behaviors. When the data were analyzed, they were found to follow the same patterns as the data from the pre and interim MLQ. Therefore, it can be said that the results of the MLQ assessment were in agreement with participant perception of the changes that had occurred in their leadership behaviors.

Research question 8 asked, "Was there agreement between participant and supervisor data on the MLQ and LSPS assessments?" MLQ and LSPS data were used for this question. Using an equality test and a system of comparisons of difference, the MLQ data showed participant and supervisor data moved in the same direction for both transformational and transactional leadership a majority of the time. Laissez-faire leadership, on the other hand, had a majority of comparisons that were unequal.

The desired direction of movement for the three leadership styles was positive for transformational, negative for transactional and negative for laissez-faire. The data showed this was generally the case for transformational leadership; both participants and supervisors showed a positive change (+/+) a majority of the time. However, the data did not support this for transactional and laissez-faire. Participants and supervisors both moved in the negative direction (-/-) only 37.37% of the time for transactional and only 22.22% of the time for laissez-faire.

The same tests that were run on the MLQ data were used on the LSPS data. The results of the test showed that participant and supervisor data were in agreement for four of seven leadership behaviors/skills for a large percentage of the respondents. The other three behavior/skills were not in agreement. All seven of the areas had their highest percentage of participant/supervisor pairs move in the desired direction.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was ran on both the MLQ and LSPS data sets and showed that the MLQ had a fairly high level of predictability between participant and supervisor data. On the other hand, the LSPS had a fairly low level of predictability.

Results for this part of the study were not conclusive. The MLQ had agreement for two of the three behaviors and the LSPS had agreement for four of the seven leadership behaviors/skills. While there was more agreement than disagreement, there was not enough agreement to give a definitive answer to the research question. However, it can be said that the MLQ had greater predictability than the LSPS. This could be attributed to changes made to the LSPS between academies. The low predictability for the LSPS could have also been caused by a high number of no responses or outlier data points.

Research question 9 asked, "In terms of participant perception of leadership behavior and skill change, what level of importance did participants place on the following components of the Chair Academy: Local Mentor, Academy Mentor,

Development and use of the IPDP, Academy List serve, Journaling (reflective practice), Midterm Reflection report, and Final Reflection report?” Data from question 7 of the mLSS were used to answer this question.

Of the seven Academy components studied in this question, Local Mentor was the only one with the highest percentage of responses in the “Very Important” category. Four of the seven were considered “Important” by a high percentage of respondents. These included Development and use of the IPDP, Journaling (reflective practice), Midterm Reflection report, and Final Reflection report. The other two components, Academy Mentor and Academy List serve had the highest percentage of responses in the “Moderately Important” rating category. These data indicated that the additional components used by the Academy had varying levels of importance.

### **Summary of Conclusions**

The following is a summary of conclusions:

1. A large percentage of chairs and other organizational leaders entered the Academy with the following traits: they were in their forties, they were fairly well established in their careers and they had been with their institution(s) for a significant amount of time.
2. Participants entered the Academy with an appreciation of the need for leadership training.
3. Participation in the Academy led to promotion for a small percentage of participants.
4. Participants held the Academy and its leadership program in high regard.
5. Participants entered the Academy with varying levels of understanding of the topics covered. Some indicated a relatively high level of understanding for some areas and others indicated a relatively low understanding.
6. The Academy experience facilitated growth in the areas covered for most of the participants.
7. Participation in the Academy facilitated the acquisition of behaviors and skills. Some of the behaviors/skills acquired were not necessarily part of the Academy curriculum.
8. Participants indicated a varying degree of use in the job of the behaviors/skills taught by the Academy.
9. A large percentage of participants felt the materials covered in weeks one and two were important to their job.
10. Events and experiences other than participation in the Academy lead to change in leadership behaviors and skills for some of the participants.
11. Results of the MLQ assessment were in agreement with participant perception of the changes that had occurred in their leadership behaviors.
12. The study could not definitively conclude that there was agreement between participant and supervisor data on the MLQ and LSPS assessments. The study did show that there was a fairly high degree of predictability between participant and supervisor data on the MLQ and a fairly low degree of predictability between participant and supervisor data on the LSPS.
13. The additional components used by the Academy had varying levels of importance with regard to the participant’s Academy experience. These levels

ranged from “Moderate” to “High.” With that said, the importance of all components was at or above the “Moderate” level.

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