

Leadership Ability of Young Rural Adults in North Dakota

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Most communities, rural or urban, are in need of effective leaders to aid in meeting their goals and needs. Effective community leaders are increasingly necessary in today's complex and rapidly changing society. A problem facing rural communities is that the pool of individuals who are able to provide effective leadership is considerably smaller in number than in urban areas.

Leadership has been defined as "the means by which one or more persons aid a group in setting and attaining desirable goals" (Kreitlow et al., 1965, p. 57). Wills (1974) defined a leader as a person who has the ability to get others to act in a certain and definite way. Contrary to popular opinion, leadership characteristics are not inherited; they are developed over a period of time.

Agriculture is North Dakota's largest industry. Therefore, it is important for the industry to have strong leadership. This leadership is likely to originate from individuals in rural areas of the state. Rural communities and agriculture, civic, service, social, fraternal, and church organizations are only as strong as their leadership. Gordon (1977) indicated that being a leader of a group doesn't necessarily make a person an effective leader. The leader still has to perform to gain acceptance and have an influence on the behavior of the group.

Citizens in rural communities tend to have fewer opportunities to develop leadership abilities than do residents of urban communities. How then do the persons placed in leadership positions function effectively? Do they possess skills necessary to lead effectively? Where have they acquired their leadership abilities? This study was an attempt to answer some of these questions.

The Cooperative Extension Service and/or College of Agriculture in the land grant universities of several states have been involved in conducting public affairs leadership development programs for rural leaders. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan, provided more than \$4 million in financial assistance for programs conducted in Pennsylvania, California, Michigan, and Montana (Howell et al., 1982). Although these programs were determined to be successful, there is no evidence indicating the programs were developed based upon research that first determined the leadership needs of the people in those respective states.

In 1976, the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs conducted a major investigation to determine the educational needs of rural women and girls in the United States. The investigation involved a series of four

consultations by the council in different locations around the country which gave rural women and girls a chance to speak out on their educational needs and concerns. Clarenbach (1977) reported the investigations suggested a need for expanded programs that developed processes for the identification of leadership and then helped with the translation of leadership experience and skills into political and public policy leadership.

Williams and Faulkner (1979) evaluated the impact on participants of the Kellogg Extension Education Project conducted in Montana. The Kellogg Extension Education Project was funded from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for the purpose of increasing leadership skills of present and future leaders in Montana. Activities of the program ranged in intensity from a one-week training program to a study travel program of roughly four weeks' duration per year for a period of three years. The results reported indicate that participation in the Kellogg Extension Education Program positively affected participants' perceptions of their leadership abilities. A total of 81.9 percent of all participants reported that the program had made a difference in their lives. The data also suggested that participation in the program had a measurable impact on participants' exercise of leadership in public affairs activities.

An understanding of the characteristics, leadership qualities and leadership development needs of young adults in rural North Dakota will be useful in determining the need for leadership development programs in the state. The information may subsequently prove to be useful in developing such programs. This data should be helpful in determining program content and method.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the perceived leadership abilities of young adults residing in rural areas of North Dakota.

Specific objectives of this study were: 1) To identify selected biographical characteristics of young adults residing in rural areas of North Dakota such as age, sex, level of education, marital status, and size of family; 2) determine the perceived leadership ability of young rural adults in North Dakota, and 3) compare results of the perceived leadership ability of young rural adults using selected biographical characteristics as variables.

PROCEDURES

The target population for this study was young adults residing in rural North Dakota. For the purpose of this study,

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the researcher determined that young adults were considered to be those persons between the ages of 18 and 40. Rural areas were considered to be cities with a population of fewer than 2,500 and those areas outside of towns and cities. According to the 1980 census, there were approximately 87,290 persons between the ages of 18 and 40 residing in rural North Dakota (Bureau of the Census, 1980). A sample size of 1,500 was desired for this study.

Because the record of licensed drivers represents the most complete list of persons between the ages of 18 and 40 in the state, permission was sought and granted by the Drivers License Division of the North Dakota Highway Department to obtain the sample from their list of licensed drivers. A systemic random sampling procedure was used to draw a sample of names whose birthdays fell between January 1, 1944, and January 1, 1966 and whose addresses contained a zip code matching those of rural areas.

Data for this study were collected by use of a mail survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher using related literature and previous research as a basis. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part 1 asked respondents to provide background information. Part 2 consisted of 70 statements reflecting leadership characteristics. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceived leadership by indicating their level of agreement most descriptive of their feeling toward the statement. Available responses were on a Likert-type scale as follows: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = moderately disagree; 3 = slightly disagree; 4 = slightly agree; 5 = moderately agree; and 6 = strongly agree. Only data obtained from Parts 1 and 2 will be addressed in this article.

The questionnaire along with a cover letter and self-addressed, stamped envelope was sent in October of 1984 to each of the 1,509 persons in the sample. Non-respondents were followed up with a second questionnaire package. Totally, 578 usable questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 38.3 percent response rate. As the questionnaires were returned, they were categorized as either early or late respondents. An analysis of the responses to Part 2 revealed no significant differences between the mean scores of early and late respondents. If non-respondents are most likely to respond as late respondents do, one can then conclude the non-respondent group was similar to respondents.

BIOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Respondents were asked to respond to questions seeking information regarding selected biographical characteristics. Table 1 reveals the results of that information.

A total of 75.3 percent of the respondents were in the age categories between 20 and 34 years of age. Only 6.2 percent were 18 and 19 year olds, while 2.4 percent were 40 years old or older. Females (52.2 percent) represented a larger percentage of the sample than males (47.8 percent). Almost two-thirds (62.3 percent) of the respondents were married, 34.2 percent had never been married, and 3.5 percent were divorced. When asked the number of children living with respondents, 43.7 percent reported none, 36.2 percent has one or two, 19.2 had three or four, and less than 1 percent had five or more. A total of 32.1 percent of the respondents reported that 12 years was the highest level of schooling completed. Only 3.5 percent had completed less than 12 years and 16.6 completed 16 years of schooling. A majority (54.1 percent) of the respondents were raised on a farm, 31.7 percent currently live on a farm, and 56.1 percent live in a town or city.

Table 1. Biographical Characteristics of Respondents.

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Age		
19 and under	36	6.2
20 - 24	150	26.0
25 - 29	152	26.3
30 - 34	133	23.0
35 - 39	93	16.1
40 and over	14	2.4
	<u>578</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Sex		
Female	301	52.2
Male	276	47.8
	<u>577</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Marital Status		
Married	359	62.3
Never Married	197	34.2
Divorced	20	3.5
Widowed	0	0.0
	<u>576</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Number of Children Living at Home		
None	252	43.7
One	93	16.1
Two	116	20.1
Three	79	13.7
Four	32	5.5
Five or more	5	0.9
	<u>577</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Highest Level of Schooling Completed		
Less than 8 years	0	0.0
8 years	4	0.7
9 years	4	0.7
10 years	8	1.4
11 years	4	0.7
12 years	185	32.1
13 years	105	18.2
14 years	97	16.8
15 years	28	4.9
16 years	96	16.6
17 years	18	3.1
18 or more years	28	4.9
	<u>577</u>	<u>100.1*</u>
Where Raised		
On a farm	312	54.1
In the country, but not on a farm	39	6.8
In a town or city	226	39.6
	<u>577</u>	<u>100.1*</u>
Current Residence		
On a farm	183	31.7
In the country, but not on a farm	71	12.3
In a town or city	324	56.1
	<u>578</u>	<u>100.1*</u>

*Totals do not equal 100 due to rounding procedures.

LEADERSHIP ABILITY

Objective two of this study sought to determine the perceived leadership ability of young rural adults in North Dakota. Respondents were asked to respond to statements indicating leadership skills according to their level of agreement with the statement. Table 2 reports the perceived leadership ability of all respondents. The data reported in-

cludes mean scores and standard deviations for each leadership skill statement. Mean scores were calculated using: strongly agree = 6; moderately agree = 5; slightly agree = 4; slightly disagree = 3; moderately disagree = 2; and strongly disagree = 1.

In general, young adults residing in rural areas of North Dakota perceive their leadership ability to be good. The

leadership skill statements in the category of **General Leadership** receiving the highest mean score ratings were: I understand that other people have feelings, motives, and goals of their own; I like to see conflicts resolved; I enjoy sharing information with others; Other people can depend on me to accomplish a task for them; and I willingly listen to others. The mean scores indicate the responses agreed moderately to strongly with the statements.

Table 2. Perceived Leadership Ability of Young Rural Adults.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS		N	Mean*	S.D.
General Leadership				
1.	I can motivate people.	574	4.60	0.945
2.**	I am able to inspire people.	575	2.43	1.267
3.	Other people accept me as a leader.	574	4.33	1.160
4.	People look to me for advice.	575	4.65	1.012
5.	I persevere on a project until it is completed.	573	5.09	0.985
6.	I consider myself a flexible person.	575	5.14	0.910
7.**	Rarely do I take a chance on a new idea.	575	2.51	1.294
8.	I am unafraid to research answers to questions which I don't know.	575	4.32	1.671
9.	People seek guidance from me when they are having a difficult time.	575	4.42	1.097
10.	I believe that my ideas are practical in nature.	575	5.07	0.822
11.	I willingly listen to others.	575	5.36	0.819
12.**	I find it difficult to consider another person's point of view.	573	2.04	1.254
13.**	I feel unconfident with my capabilities.	574	2.76	1.637
14.	I am the type of person involved with professional and community affairs.	574	3.64	1.640
15.	I am a dependent person.	574	3.62	1.817
16.	I am concerned about maintaining good interpersonal relationships.	575	5.19	0.915
17.	I consider myself to be a valuable contributor to the human race.	575	4.83	0.979
18.	I enjoy success and strive for it.	574	5.12	0.986
19.	I can see both sides of an argument in question.	575	4.99	0.931
20.	I am self-conscious about what I do.	575	4.65	1.365
21.	Making mistakes tends to stimulate worry about making another mistake.	574	3.78	1.555
22.	I am an effective decision-maker.	575	4.55	1.029
23.	I understand that other people have feelings, motives, and goals of their own.	575	5.58	0.696
24.	I enjoy sharing information with others.	575	5.37	0.777
25.	Other people can depend on me to accomplish a task for them.	574	5.37	0.772
26.	I consider myself to be intelligent.	575	5.07	0.860
27.**	I do not like to be the one to initiate projects.	573	3.24	1.481
28.	I am a person who is original in my ideas and activities.	574	4.39	1.088
29.	I have a good sense of humor.	573	5.17	0.797
30.	People will confide in me because they consider me to be trustworthy.	575	5.28	0.785
31.**	I cannot tolerate frustration and delays.	575	3.85	1.451
32.	I like to see conflicts resolved.	573	5.54	0.729
33.**	Being tolerant of uncertainty is not an essential part of my life.	559	3.36	1.432
34.**	I am a moody person.	575	3.11	1.522
35.	I encourage others to become involved in various projects.	573	4.34	1.279
36.	I use tact in everyday life.	574	4.70	1.004
37.	I am a cordial person.	570	4.96	0.944
38.**	I consider myself to be a follower.	574	3.28	1.503
39.**	I felt extra-curricular activities in high school were not a very important part of my life.	574	2.59	1.794
40.**	I am often ignored.	575	2.57	1.411
41.	I feel people respect and admire me for the person I am.	573	4.83	0.967
42.	When someone comes to me with a problem, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can better understand the problem.	575	5.09	0.910
43.**	My emotions often get in the way of making a rational decision.	575	3.13	1.501
Speaking Skills				
44.	I feel confident to openly promote issues I feel strongly about.	575	4.39	1.324
45.	I enjoy expressing my ideas on a given issue.	574	4.52	1.253
46.	I feel at ease in leading a group.	575	3.61	1.589
47.**	I have trouble speaking in front of large groups.	574	3.84	1.781
48.**	I am hesitant to discuss a difficult situation.	573	3.45	1.525

LEADERSHIP SKILLS		N	Mean*	S.D.
Group Leadership Skills				
49.**	When working in a group, I spend more time talking than any other person in the group.	575	2.51	1.374
50.	I am willing to take charge and lead a group.	575	3.82	1.538
51.**	I am not able to persuade others to respect my point of view.	574	2.67	1.185
52.	Other people accept my ideas.	573	4.51	0.872
53.	Making friends and getting along with other people is easy for me.	575	4.83	1.176
54.	My ability to convey ideas and convince ideals in the social arena is good.	575	4.06	1.218
55.	People often seat me at the head of the table in a group discussion.	567	2.98	1.383
56.	I usually hold back from taking part in the discussion for a short time before I interact.	574	4.41	1.306
57.	Belonging to organizations is important to me.	575	3.54	1.599
58.	Once I begin a project, I feel I must see it through to completion.	574	5.07	1.108
59.**	It is not easy for me to develop an interest in people.	575	2.31	1.414
60.	I enjoy mingling with people in a large group.	575	4.01	1.573
61.**	I am intolerant of individuals who deviate from society norms.	564	3.09	1.401
62.	I enjoy meeting new people.	575	5.01	1.062
Work-Related Leadership				
63.	I view myself as a professional.	564	4.41	1.590
64.	Each year brings me closer to my occupational goal.	563	4.25	1.539
65.**	I am inconsistent in my work habits.	563	2.54	1.590
66.	I consider myself to be an achiever in life.	564	4.71	1.141
67.	I am enthused about my work.	561	4.96	1.056
68.	I can work persistantly for just cause, without giving up or backing off.	563	4.97	0.947
69.	I like to maintain good interpersonal relations with my co-workers.	562	5.35	0.871
70.	I am proficient in my work.	561	5.28	0.782

*6 = Strongly agree
3 = Slightly disagree

5 = Moderately agree
2 = Moderately disagree

4 = Slightly agree
1 = Strongly disagree

**Negatively stated leadership skills. Lower mean scores are more desirable.

The leadership skill statements in the category of **Speaking Skills** tended to receive lower ratings than the other categories. Statements in this category receiving the highest ratings were: I enjoy expressing my ideas on a given issue; and I feel confident to openly promote issues I feel strongly about.

Leadership skill statements belonging to the category of **Group Leadership Skills** tended to have lower ratings than statements in the **General Leadership** and **Work Related Leadership** categories. The statements of: Once I begin a project, I feel I must see it through to completion; I enjoy meeting new people; Making friends and getting along with other people is easy for me; and Other people accept my ideas were the highest.

Work Related Leadership statements tended to be rated quite high. Those rated highest in this were: I like to maintain good interpersonal relations with my co-workers; I feel I am proficient in my work; I can work persistently for just cause, without giving up or backing off; and I am enthused about my work.

COMPARISON OF LEADERSHIP ABILITIES

The third objective of this study was to compare results of the perceived leadership ability of young rural adults using selected biographical characteristics as variables. Comparisons were made using sex, marital status, number of children living at home, location where raised, current residence, age, and amount of schooling completed.

The perceived leadership ability of female respondents in general tended to be higher than male respondents.

However, males perceived themselves to have higher leadership ability in the **Speaking Skills** and **Work Related Leadership** categories.

The respondents' marital status had only a slight influence on perceived leadership ability. Although single respondents perceived their leadership ability to be slightly higher than married respondents, a significant difference occurred in only a few skill statements. Whether or not respondents had children living at home was another characteristic that had little effect on perceived leadership abilities. Those with no children living at home tended to perceive their leadership ability to be higher than those with children living at home. There appears to be a relationship between this and the finding that single respondents perceived their leadership ability to be higher than married respondents.

The location where respondents were raised made very little difference on their perceived leadership ability. Respondents raised on a farm had slightly higher perceived leadership ability than those who were not raised on a farm. Respondents who were not living on a farm perceived their leadership ability to be higher than those who live on a farm.

A comparison of respondents' age categories revealed that their ages made little difference on their perceived leadership ability. Persons in the 24 and under category perceived their leadership ability to be higher than other age groups on 40 percent of the skill statements. However, a significant difference was found on only nine items. Persons in the 35 and over category perceived their leadership ability to be higher than person in the 25-29 and 30-34 age brackets. This may be explained by the fact that more

leadership development opportunities have been available in recent years than 15-20 years ago.

The amount of school completed by respondents made more difference on their perceived leadership ability than any other characteristic studied. The more school completed, the higher the perceived leadership ability. Young rural adults who had completed 16 years of school or more perceived their leadership ability to be higher than those with less schooling. Those who had completed 13-15 years rated their level of leadership higher than those completing 12 years or less. This raises the question: Do persons with higher levels of leadership ability pursue higher levels of education, or do high levels of education contribute to leadership development in that more activities and opportunities are more readily available to those continuing their education?

SUMMARY

The biographical data obtained corresponded closely with the 1980 census data. About three-fourths of the respondents were between the ages of 20 and 36; slightly over one-half were female; and approximately two-thirds were married. Slightly more than one-half the respondents were raised on a farm, whereas the majority currently resides in a town or city. Almost all respondents completed at least a high school education; two-thirds completed some education beyond high school, and about one-fourth completed a college degree.

Young adults residing in rural North Dakota tended to perceive their leadership abilities to be quite good. Leadership skills in the categories of **General Leadership** and **Work Related Leadership** were perceived to be better than those in the **Group Leadership Skills** and **Speaking Skills**. The **Speaking Skills** category was perceived to be their weakest area of leadership. This would indicate that young people need to be provided more opportunities through activities and their educational experiences to develop their speaking skills.

The greatest difference in perceived leadership ability occurred between sexes (females were higher) and among various levels of school completed (higher leadership among those with higher levels of school completed). A profile of an individual with the highest level of leadership would be: female, single, no children living at home, raised on a farm, not currently living on a farm, 24 years old or less, and has completed 16 or more years of school.

The findings of this study may serve as a basis for developing leadership programs in the state. The leadership skills statements which the young adults perceived themselves to be lowest in should be given the greatest amount of attention in a leadership development program.

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will not have a significant effect on the test factor level in the samples collected with the three tools.

This study indicates that the Pipe and Can will provide samples of a lot of grain that are as representative as those obtained with the Pelican when the sampling instruments are used properly, cutting the full stream and not overflowing before exiting the grain stream.

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