

Comparison of the Leadership Ability Between Young Rural and Urban Adults in North Dakota

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The state of North Dakota as well as other agricultural states relies heavily on the success of the rural economy. Leadership development, human resource development, economic development, and community development are all terms given to programs in communities of various sizes that attempt to improve upon the leadership of its citizens. That leadership is important in providing a positive direction for the maintenance and growth of communities.

Goldhaber (1986) defined leadership as the coordinating of group action and the movement of groups toward the completion of a task. In order for people to be effective leaders, they must be able to accomplish both. Robins (1980) defined leadership as the ability to influence others to perform beyond a level established by formal authority.

How well do young adults in North Dakota perceive their ability to lead? How do the perceived leadership abilities of young rural adults compare with those of young urban adults in the state? Research was conducted to answer these questions.

In determining the perceived leadership ability of young adults residing in rural areas of North Dakota, Luft (1986) found that these people perceived themselves as having good leadership ability. Leadership skills in the *General Leadership* and *Work-Related Leadership* categories were perceived to be higher than those skills in the *Speaking Skills* and the *Group Leadership* categories.

Lester (1986) studied the perceived leadership ability of young urban adults in North Dakota. His study revealed that urban adults also perceived their leadership skills to be quite good. They too were found to have the strongest leadership skills in the categories of *General Leadership* followed by *Work-Related Leadership*. *Speaking Skills* was perceived to be their weakest category of skills.

Lester's study (1989) also compared the leadership abilities of the young urban adults with those of the rural adults as reported in Luft's study (1986). The purpose of this article is to report the results of the comparisons that were made.

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PROCEDURES

The target populations were young adults residing in rural North Dakota and young adults residing in or near urban areas of the state. Rural areas were considered to be cities with a population of fewer than 2,500 and those areas outside of towns and cities. Urban adults were living in or near cities with a population of 2,500 or more. Young adults were considered to be persons between the ages of 18 and 40. From these populations a random sample was drawn by the Drivers License Division of the North Dakota Highway Department.

Data for each study were collected by use of a mail survey questionnaire. The instrument from which comparisons could be made consisted to two parts. Part I was used to determine the background characteristics of the respondents. Part II consisted of 69 statements related to leadership characteristics. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement by using 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.

The questionnaires, along with cover letters and postage paid return envelopes, were mailed to the people in each of the sample group. A total of 1,509 were in the rural sample. A total of 578 usable questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 38.3 percent response rate. The final urban sample consisted of 433 individuals. Persons in that sample returned 246 usable questionnaires for a response rate of 56.8 percent.

RESULTS OF COMPARISONS

The t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the perceived leadership ability of young rural adults with the perceived leadership ability of young urban adults. In general, the perceived leadership ability of urban respondents was higher than rural respondents. Young urban adults in North Dakota had a more desirable (higher on positive stated items and lower on negative items) mean score for 44 of the 69 leadership skill statements. Young urban adults had more desirable mean scores in the categories of *Speaking Skills*, *Group Leadership*, and *Work-Related Leadership*. In the category of *General Leadership*, however, young rural adults had more desirable mean scores than young urban adults on 22 of the 42 statements.

Table 1 reveals that a statistically significant difference occurred for 12 of the leadership skill statements in the *General Leadership* category. Positive statements for which young rural adults had a significantly more desirable mean

Table 1. Comparison of perceived urban and rural leadership ability — general leadership.

Leadership Skills	Urban		Rural		t	p
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.		
1. I like to see conflicts resolved.	5.48	.82	5.54	.73	-1.03	.30
2. I understand others have feelings, motives, goals of their own.	5.46	.70	5.58	.70	-2.30	.02*
3. Other people can depend on me to accomplish a task for them.	5.37	.81	5.37	.77	-.06	.95
4. I willingly listen to others.	5.35	.78	5.36	.82	-.24	.81
5. I enjoy sharing information with others.	5.29	.80	5.37	.78	-1.37	.17
6. People confide in me because they consider me trustworthy.	5.22	.77	5.28	.78	-.92	.36
7. I persevere on a project until completed.	5.20	.93	5.09	.98	1.60	.11
8. I consider myself to be intelligent.	5.17	.82	5.07	.86	1.52	.13
9. I believe that my ideas are practical in nature.	5.13	.81	5.07	.82	.83	.40
10. I am a cordial person.	5.11	.83	4.96	.94	2.25	.02*
11. When someone comes to me with a problem, I try to put myself in their shoes to better understand the problem.	5.10	.85	5.09	.91	.16	.87
12. I enjoy success and strive for it.	5.09	.90	5.14	.91	-1.61	.11
13. I consider myself a valuable flexible person.	4.99	.92	5.14	.91	-1.61	.11
14. I consider myself a valuable contributor to the human race.	4.99	.99	4.83	.98	2.12	.03*
15. I work at maintaining good interpersonal relationships.	4.99	.96	5.19	.91	-2.92	.00*
16. I feel people respect and admire me for the person I am.	4.92	.93	4.83	.97	1.26	.21
17. I can see both sides of an argument/question.	4.88	.90	4.99	.93	-1.54	.12
18. People look to me for advice.	4.87	.92	4.65	1.01	2.93	.00*
19. I use tact in everyday life.	4.82	.94	4.70	1.00	1.72	.09
20. I can motivate people.	4.78	.87	4.60	.94	2.16	.01*
21. People seek guidance from me when they are having difficulty.	4.71	.87	4.42	1.10	4.02	.00*
22. I am an effective decision maker.	4.64	.94	4.55	1.03	1.19	.23
23. Other people accept me as a leader.	4.61	1.01	4.33	1.16	3.46	.00*
24. I am self conscious about what I do.	4.41	1.48	4.65	1.36	-2.27	.02*
25. I am original in my ideas and activities.	4.37	1.11	4.39	1.09	-.25	.80
26. I encourage others to become involved in various projects.	4.30	1.11	4.34	1.28	-.53	.59
27. I am unafraid to research questions for which I do not know the answer.	4.18	1.76	4.32	1.67	-1.08	.28
28. I cannot tolerate frustration and delays.**	3.91	1.36	3.83	1.45	.49	.63
29. I get involved in professional and community affairs.	3.68	1.55	3.64	1.64	.32	.75
30. Making mistakes tends to stimulate worry about making another mistake.	3.45	1.43	3.78	1.56	-2.78	.01*
31. Being tolerant of uncertainty is not an essential part of my life.**	3.44	1.35	3.36	1.43	.79	.43
32. I'm a dependent person.	3.27	1.83	3.62	1.82	-2.55	.01*
33. I consider myself to be a follower.**	3.08	1.39	3.28	1.50	-1.82	.07
34. I am a moody person.**	3.05	1.41	3.11	1.52	-.47	.64
35. My emotions often get in the way of making a rational decision.**	3.04	1.42	3.13	1.50	-.83	.40
36. I do not like initiating projects.**	2.95	1.32	3.24	1.48	-2.77	.01*
37. Rarely do I take a chance on a new idea.**	2.76	1.19	2.51	1.29	2.58	.01*
38. I felt extra-curricular activities in high school were not a very important part of my life.**	2.70	1.69	2.59	1.79	.80	.43
39. I feel unconfident with my capabilities.**	2.52	1.52	2.76	1.64	-1.93	.06
40. I am unable to inspire people.**	2.45	1.28	2.43	1.27	.20	.84
41. I am often ignored.**	2.44	1.21	2.57	1.41	-1.26	.21
42. I find it difficult to consider another person's point of view.**	2.10	1.23	2.04	1.25	.63	.53

** Negatively stated leadership skills; lower mean scores are more desirable.

* Significantly when $p < .05$.

score were: I understand others have feelings, motives, goals of their own; I work at maintaining good interpersonal relationships; I am self conscious about what I do; making mistakes tends to stimulate worry about making another mistake; and I am a dependent person. The negative statement Rarely do I take a chance on a new idea had a significantly more desirable score for rural respondents. Young urban adults had significantly more desirable scores for the following statements in the *General Leadership* category: I am a cordial person; I consider myself a valuable contributor to the human race; People look to me for advice; I can motivate people; People seek guidance from me when they are having difficulty; Other people accept me as a leader; and I do not like initiating projects.

Urban young adults had a more desirable mean score on three of the five *Speaking Skills* statements as shown in Table 2. However, only one statement resulted in a significant difference. That was: I feel at ease in leading a group.

Table 3 contains the results when making the comparisons in the *Group Leadership* category. While young urban adults had a more desirable mean score for 11 of the 14 statements, a significant difference occurred for only four. Those were: My ability to convey ideas and convince ideals in the social arena is good; I am willing to take charge and lead a group; People often seat me at the head of the table in a group discussion; and I am not able to persuade others to respect my point of view.

The urban young adults had more desirable mean scores on seven of the eight leadership skill statements in the *Work-Related Leadership* category as reported in Table 4. A statistically significant difference occurred for only three statements, however. Those statements were: I feel I am proficient in my work; I view myself as a professional; and I am inconsistent in my work habits.

SUMMARY

The results of these studies reveal that young urban adults perceive their abilities as speakers, as group leaders, and as leaders on the job to be higher than do young rural adults. Young rural adults, on the other hand, have more desirable levels of personal skills. They are more understanding, work harder at maintaining good personal relationships, are more dependent, and are more likely to take a chance on a new idea. Young urban adults are more cordial, are considered to be more valuable contributors to the human race, are sought more for advice and guidance in difficult situations, are better able to sell their views, and are more likely to take charge and lead a group discussion.

Although the overall perceived leadership ability of young urban adults is higher than that for young rural adults, many of the strengths and weaknesses within the groups are the same. Given this information, leadership programs may be developed that meet the needs of both populations rather than merely those of one or the other.

REFERENCES

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Table 2. Comparison of perceived urban and rural leadership ability — speaking skills.

Leadership Skills	Urban		Rural		t	p
	X	S.D.	X	S.D.		
1. I enjoy expressing my ideas on a given issue.	4.66	1.07	4.52	1.25	1.48	.14
2. I feel confident openly promoting issues I feel strong about.	4.57	1.22	4.39	1.32	1.76	.08
3. I feel at ease in leading a group.	3.92	1.43	3.60	1.59	2.67	.01*
4. I have trouble speaking before large groups.**	3.85	1.59	3.84	1.78	.11	.92
5. I hesitate to discuss a difficult situation.	3.30	1.35	3.44	1.52	-1.33	.18

** Negatively stated leadership skills; lower mean scores are more desirable.

* Significant when $p < .05$.

Table 3. Comparison of perceived urban and rural leadership ability — group leadership.

Leadership Skills	Urban		Rural		t	p
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.		
1. Once I begin a project, I must see it through to completion.	5.06	1.02	5.07	1.11	-.13	.89
2. I enjoy meeting new people.	5.06	1.02	5.01	1.06	.55	.59
3. Making friends and getting along with others is easy for me.	4.91	1.09	4.83	1.18	.90	.37
4. Other people accept my ideas.	4.62	.81	4.51	.87	1.77	.08
5. I usually hold back from taking part in the discussion for a short time before I interact.	4.32	1.14	4.41	1.31	-1.00	.32
6. My ability to convey ideas and convince ideals in the social arena is good.	4.32	1.12	4.06	1.22	2.81	.01*
7. I am willing to take charge and lead a group.	4.20	1.37	3.82	1.54	3.52	.00*
8. I enjoy mingling with people in a large group.	4.05	1.47	4.01	1.57	.30	.76
9. Belonging to organizations is important to me.	3.57	1.54	3.54	1.60	.23	.82
10. People often seat me at the head of the table in a group discussion.	3.26	1.30	2.98	1.38	2.66	.01*
11. I'm tolerant of individuals who deviate from society norms.**	3.18	1.36	3.08	1.40	.91	.36
12. When working in a group, I spend more time talking than any other person in the group.**	2.51	1.24	2.51	1.37	-.03	.98
13. I am not able to persuade others to respect my point of view.**	2.48	1.07	2.67	1.19	-2.14	.03*
14. It is not easy for me to develop an interest in people.**	2.19	1.33	2.30	1.41	-1.04	.30

** Negatively stated leadership skills; lower mean scores are more desirable.

* Significant when $p < .05$.

Table 4. Comparison of perceived urban and rural leadership ability — work-related leadership.

Leadership Skills	Urban		Rural		t	p
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.		
1. I like to maintain good interpersonal relations with my co-workers.	5.45	.74	5.35	.87	1.68	.09
2. I feel I am proficient in my work.	5.43	.79	5.28	.78	2.57	.01*
3. I view myself as a professional.	.503	1.30	4.41	1.59	5.81	.00*
4. I can work persistently for just cause, without giving up or backing off.	5.01	.88	4.97	.95	.57	.57
5. I am enthused about my work.	4.93	1.11	4.96	1.06	-.03	.76
6. I consider myself to be an achiever in life.	4.82	1.08	4.71	1.14	1.29	.20
7. Each year brings me closer to my occupational goal.	4.39	1.46	4.25	1.54	1.23	.22
8. I am inconsistent in my work habits.**	1.92	1.20	2.54	1.59	-6.07	.00*

** Negatively stated leadership skills; lower mean scores are more desirable.

* Significant when $p < .05$.