

Assessment of the Leadership Ability of Young Urban Adults in North Dakota

Shane W. Lester and Vernon D. Luft

Today more than ever, society is faced with a number of challenges brought on by changes in population demographics, industry, the world economy, and culture. Society's future direction will be determined by the decisions individual members of our society make in response to these challenges. The success of their decisions will depend largely on the ability of leaders within our society to overcome the obstacles confronting them.

The leadership abilities possessed by members of our communities will be a factor contributing to the success of community development. How, then, do we define leadership? What makes a great leader? Leadership may be defined as the ability to influence others to perform beyond a level established by formal authority (Robbins, 1980).

A great deal of research has been conducted in an attempt to identify the traits that may be used in selecting potential leaders. Early research listed such characteristics as charisma, honesty, self-confidence, reliability, responsibility, and status (Robbins, 1980). Recently, leadership has been defined 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 accomplish both objectives (Goldhaber, 1986).

Luft (1986) completed research to determine the perceived leadership ability of young adults residing in rural areas of North Dakota. He found that young rural adults in North Dakota 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. When comparing the leadership ability of these young adults based on various demographic characteristics, the research showed that females, single persons, those with no children living at home, persons raised on a farm and now living in a town or city, persons 24 years of age and under, and those with 16 or more years of completed schooling had the highest perceived leadership ability. The strongest differences occurred between genders, age groups, and education groups.

The future of any society depends largely on the leadership of persons within that society. "The success of economic development hinges upon a personal, organizational, or

community attitude that is reinforced by leadership characteristics. In other words, leadership policies or practices can lead to economic development" (Vaughn, 1985, p. 6). A number of leadership improvement programs have been developed and implemented across the country.

For any educational program to be successful, it must meet the needs of its students. Students must exit a program with knowledge and skills that will be useful in their lives. Those who develop educational programs must be aware of the needs, strengths, and weaknesses of their potential participants. In the same way, well-planned leadership programs must provide participants with an opportunity to develop weaknesses and reinforce strengths. The knowledge gained from this study might be used by individuals or agencies in North Dakota responsible for developing leadership programs. The information might also promote creation of leadership programs that are more productive and that reach a greater number of individuals.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of this study was to determine perceived leadership abilities of young adults whose residences are in or near urban areas of North Dakota. This study complements a study completed by Luft (1986) that was designed to determine the leadership ability of young rural adults in North Dakota.

The specific objectives of this study included the following:

1. Identifying selected demographic characteristics of young adults residing in urban areas of North Dakota as age, gender, years of school completed, marital status, and size of family.
2. Determining the perceived leadership ability of young urban adults in North Dakota.
3. Comparing results of the perceived leadership ability of young urban adults using selected demographic characteristics as variables.

PROCEDURES

The population of the students consisted of young adults living in or near cities with a population of 2,500 or more. "Young adults" was defined as those persons between the ages of 18 and 40. From this population, a sample of 500 names was obtained from the Drivers License Division of the North Dakota Highway Department from a random sampling of persons possessing drivers licenses and meeting the

Lester was a graduate student in the Department of Agricultural Education at NDSU and is now agribusiness instructor at NDSU-Bottineau. Luft is a former professor, Department of Agricultural Education, and is now professor of vocational teacher education at the University of Nevada, Reno.

following criteria: birth dates between December 1, 1948, and December 1, 1970, and addresses in which the ZIP codes matched those of cities having populations of 2,500 or more.

For some unknown reason, the random sample obtained from the Drivers License Division included a higher than expected number of names in the older age groups as well as a much larger percentage of females than males.

Data was collected by use of a mail survey questionnaire similar to one previously developed by Luft (1986) for collecting data from young rural adults in North Dakota. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I was used to determine the demographic information needed for each respondent. Part II consisted of 69 statements related to leadership characteristics. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement using a Likert-type scale. The following choices were given: 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 names contained in the sample. The cover letter explained the study and encouraged participation. Approximately three weeks after the first mailing, nonrespondents were contacted again with a second questionnaire. Of the 500 questionnaires mailed, 65 were undeliverable due to addresses being no longer current. In addition, two of the respondents were no longer residents of North Dakota. This reduced the sample to 433. Persons in the sample returned 246 usable questionnaires for a response rate of 56.8 percent. As completed questionnaires were received, they were categorized as either early or late responses. An analysis of the responses in Part II revealed no significant differences between the mean scores of early and late respondents. If nonrespondents are more likely to respond as do late respondents, one can then conclude that the nonrespondent group was similar to the respondent group.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Respondents were asked to complete several questions seeking information about their demographic characteristics. Results of that information are shown in Table 1.

A total of 76.5 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 30 and 40. Only 8.5 percent were 24 years old or younger. Females represented a larger percentage of the sample (61 percent) than males (39 percent). About two-thirds (65 percent) of the respondents were married, 22.8 percent were single, and 12.2 percent were divorced or widowed. A total of 61.4 percent indicated they had children living at home. When asked the highest level of schooling completed, 24 percent reported completing 12 years or fewer; 44.7 percent reported completed 13 to 15 years; and 31.3 percent reported completing 16 or more years. Approximately 59 percent of the respondents reported being raised in a town or city, and 32 percent reported being raised on a farm. A total of 86.2 percent of the respondents indicated current residence as a town or city, whereas 11 percent indicated residence in the country but not on a farm.

LEADERSHIP ABILITY

The leadership ability of young adults residing in urban areas of North Dakota was determined by asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each of the leadership skill statements. To accomplish the second objec-

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Age		
24 and under	21	8.5
25 to 29	37	15.0
30 to 34	77	31.3
35 and over	111	45.2
	246	100.0
Gender		
Female	150	61.0
Male	96	39.0
	246	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	160	65.0
Single	56	22.8
Divorced or Widowed	30	12.2
	246	100.0
Children Living at Home		
No	95	38.6
Yes	151	61.4
	246	100.0
Highest Level of Schooling Completed		
12 years or fewer	59	24.0
13 to 15 years	110	44.7
16 or more years	77	31.3
	246	100.0
Where Raised		
On a farm	79	32.1
In the country, but not on a farm	21	8.5
In a town or city	146	59.4
	246	100.0
Current Residence		
On a farm	7	2.8
In the country, but not on a farm	27	11.0
In a town or city	212	86.2
	246	100.0

tive of the study, mean scores and standard deviations were calculated based upon the Likert-type scale mentioned previously. Results of these calculations are presented in Table 2.

Statements are arranged in Table 2 from highest to lowest mean score in each leadership category. Overall, the young urban adults in North Dakota felt their leadership ability was good. In the category **General Leadership**, leadership skills receiving the most desirable mean score ratings (higher on positively stated skills and lower on negatively stated skills) are as follows: I like to see conflicts resolved; I understand others have feelings, motives, goals of their own; Other people can depend on me to accomplish a task for them; I willingly listen to others; and I enjoy sharing information with others. Respondents agreed moderately to strongly with these statements.

The **Speaking Skills** category received the lowest mean scores as a group. Following are the statements that were rated highest in this category: I enjoy expressing my ideas on a given issue; and, I feel confident openly promoting issues I feel strongly about.

Table 2. Perceived Leadership Ability of Young Urban Adults.

Leadership Skills	N	Mean	S.D.
General Leadership			
1. I like to see conflicts resolved.	246	5.48	0.822
2. I understand others have feelings, motives, goals of their own.	246	5.46	0.703
3. Other people can depend on me to accomplish a task for them.	246	5.36	0.811
4. I willingly listen to others.	245	5.35	0.783
5. I enjoy sharing information with others.	246	5.29	0.804
6. People confide in me because they consider me trustworthy.	246	5.22	0.774
7. I persevere on a project until completed.	246	5.20	0.925
8. I consider myself to be intelligent.	245	5.17	0.816
9. I believe that my ideas are practical in nature.	244	5.13	0.814
10. I am a cordial person.	246	5.11	0.828
11. When someone comes to me with a problem, I try to put myself in their shoes so I can better understand the problem.	246	5.10	0.853
12. I enjoy success and strive for it.	245	5.09	0.901
13. I consider myself to be a flexible person.	246	5.03	0.921
14. I consider myself a valuable contributor to the human race.	245	4.99	0.989
15. I work at maintaining good interpersonal relationships.	244	4.99	0.958
16. I feel people respect and admire me for the person I am.	246	4.92	0.934
17. I can see both sides of an argument/question.	245	4.88	0.902
18. People look to me for advice.	246	4.87	0.924
19. I use tact in everyday life.	245	4.82	0.944
20. I can motivate people.	246	4.78	0.866
21. People seek guidance from me when they are having difficulty.	245	4.71	0.873
22. I am an effective decision maker.	245	4.64	0.942
23. Other people accept me as a leader.	246	4.61	1.011
24. I am self conscious about what I do.	244	4.40	1.481
25. I am original in my ideas/activities.	246	4.36	1.108
26. I encourage others to become involved in various projects.	246	4.30	1.105
27. I am unafraid to research questions for which I do not know the answer.	245	4.18	1.756
28. * I cannot tolerate frustration and delays.	246	3.91	1.356
29. I get involved in professional and community affairs.	245	3.68	1.554
30. Making mistakes tends to stimulate worry about making another mistake.	245	3.45	1.432
31. * Being tolerant of uncertainty is not an essential part of my life.	241	3.44	1.353
32. I am a dependent person.	245	3.27	1.827
33. * I consider myself to be a follower.	245	3.08	1.390
34. * I am a moody person.	246	3.05	1.415
35. * My emotions often get in the way of making a rational decision.	246	3.04	1.421
36. * I do not like initiating projects.	244	2.95	1.315
37. * Rarely do I take a chance on a new idea.	246	2.76	1.190
38. * I felt extra-curricular activities in high school were not a very important part of my life.	246	2.70	1.670
39. * I feel unconfident with my capabilities.	243	2.52	1.525
40. * I am unable to inspire people.	246	2.45	1.279
41. * I am often ignored.	246	2.44	1.210
42. * I find it difficult to consider another person's point of view.	245	2.10	1.228

Leadership Skills	N	Mean	S.D.
Speaking Skills			
43. I enjoy expressing my ideas on a given issue.	242	4.66	1.074
44. I feel confident openly promoting issues I feel strongly about.	242	4.56	1.221
45. I feel at ease in leading a group.	242	3.91	1.426
46. * I have trouble speaking before large groups.	242	3.85	1.589
47. * I hesitate to discuss a difficult situation.	242	3.30	1.353
Group Leadership			
48. Once I begin a project, I must see it through to completion.	242	5.06	1.023
49. I enjoy meeting new people.	242	5.06	1.021
50. Making friends and getting along with others is easy for me.	24	4.91	1.086
51. Other people accept my ideas.	242	4.62	0.812
52. I usually hold back from taking part in the discussion for a short time before I interact.	241	4.32	1.137
53. My ability to convey ideas and convince ideals in the social arena is good.	242	4.32	1.117
54. I am willing to take charge and lead a group.	242	4.20	1.368
55. I enjoy mingling with people in a large group.	242	4.05	1.474
56. Belonging to organizations is important to me.	242	3.57	1.542
57. People often seat me at the head of the table in a group discussion.	242	3.26	1.302
58. * I am intolerant of individuals who deviate from society norms.	239	3.18	1.360
59. * When working in a group, I spent more time talking than any other person in the group.	242	2.51	1.240
60. * I am not able to persuade others to respect my point of view.	242	2.48	1.075
61. * It is not easy for me to develop an interest in people.	242	2.19	1.334
Work-Related Leadership			
62. I like to maintain good interpersonal relations with my co-workers.	244	5.45	0.738
63. I feel I am proficient in my work.	244	5.43	0.785
64. I view myself as a professional.	244	5.03	1.300
65. I can work persistently for just cause, without giving up or backing off.	244	5.01	0.877
66. I am enthused about my work.	242	4.93	1.114
67. I consider myself to be an achiever in life.	244	4.82	1.076
68. Each year brings me closer to my occupational goal.	244	4.39	1.457
69. * I am inconsistent in my work habits.	243	1.92	1.203

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

Mean scores for the category **Group Leadership** tended to be higher than those for the **Speaking Skills** category. Statements in the **Group Leadership** category with the highest mean scores included the following: Once I begin a project, I must see it through to completion; I enjoy meeting new people; and, Making friends and getting along with others is easy for me.

Most urban adults living in North Dakota have a positive view of their **Work-Related Leadership**. Nearly all positively stated leadership skills had mean scores in the moderately

agree range. Statements that produced the highest mean scores included the following: I like to maintain good interpersonal relations with my co-workers; and, I feel I am proficient in my work.

COMPARISON OF LEADERSHIP ABILITY

The third objective in this study was to make comparisons among various demographic groups. Comparisons were made based on gender, marital status, whether or not child-

ren were living at home, whether or not respondents were raised on a farm, age, and years of school completed.

The perceived leadership ability of female respondents generally tended to be higher than that of male respondents. Female respondents appeared to have more desirable scores on 45 of the 69 leadership skill statements. Males perceived themselves to have higher leadership ability in the **Speaking Skills** category.

The marital status of respondents had only a small influence on perceived leadership ability. Whereas single respondents, in general, perceived their leadership ability to be slightly higher than married respondents, a significant difference occurred in only seven skill statements. Whether or not respondents had children living at home was another characteristic that had very little effect on perceived leadership ability. Although respondents with no children living at home had a more desirable score on a majority of the leadership skill statements, a significant difference was found on only two items.

The location where respondents were raised made no difference on their perceived leadership ability. When examining the mean scores, however, the scores of those raised on a farm were slightly higher than those who were not raised on a farm.

A comparison of respondents' age categories also revealed that their ages made little difference on their perceived leadership ability. Persons in the 24 and under age group appeared to have higher perceived leadership ability than those in the other age groups. Respondents in the 35 and over category perceived their leadership ability to be higher than persons in the 25 to 29 and 30 to 34 age groups.

The amount of school completed by respondents had a greater effect on their perceived leadership ability than any other characteristic studied. Those who had completed 16 or more years of school perceived their leadership ability to be higher than those persons having completed less school.

Respondents with 13 to 15 years of school completed perceived their leadership ability to be higher than those who had completed 12 years or fewer. It appears, then, that the more school a person has completed, the higher his or her perceived leadership ability.

SUMMARY

The results of this study indicated that young adults residing in urban areas of North Dakota gave themselves good marks for perceived leadership ability. The strongest leadership skills were in the category of **General Leadership** followed by **Work-Related Leadership**. **Speaking Skills** were perceived to be the weakest category as reported by respondents.

The largest difference in perceived leadership ability occurred among various levels of school completed (higher leadership among those with higher levels of school) and between genders (female were higher than males). These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Luft (1986).

This study revealed that young urban adults in North Dakota perceived their leadership ability to be the weakest in the categories of **Group Leadership** and **Speaking Skills**. Leadership programs should be conducted to provide opportunities for citizens to develop in these areas. If their ability to speak in front of large groups and their ability to direct the work of organizations is improved, young urban adults may feel that it is important to become involved in community and professional affairs.

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