# Perceived Differences of Leadership Behaviors of Deans of Education:
# A Selected Study

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## Abstract

The study design investigated the leadership behavior of deans of education that addresses an important aspect of leadership – leadership is created when there is alignment between the organizational leadership behaviors needed by the institution and the leadership behaviors provided by the organizational leader. A survey of a selected group of deans of education from 35 institutions addressed the questions: what do deans self-identify as their prominent leadership behavior and to what extent do deans use multiple leadership behaviors. The research of Bolman and Deal (1984) provided the frames for analysis: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. The study response rate was 50%. The findings of the study indicated that the majority of respondents perceived their primary leadership behavior as most closely matching the human resource frame. Results also indicated that a majority of respondents did not perceive that they

exhibited multiple leadership behavior frames simultaneously in their leadership behaviors.

## Introduction

Leadership behavior is a phenomenon that has long been recognized but not easily defined. According to Wolverton, Gmelch, Montez, and Nies (2001), leadership is the essential element that holds an organization together while moving it forward. In a university, chief executive officers have the major responsibility for providing leadership, while deans are accountable for the day-to-day administration of academic programs within the individual schools or colleges (Austin, Ahern, & English, 1997). Leadership behavior in higher education involves working effectively with many different stakeholders in complex situations, and deans face the leadership challenge of preserving a mission of teaching, research, and service without creating a rigid and inflexible environment (Wolverton et al., 2001). As deans are tasked with the day-to-day administration of academic programs (Austin et al., 1997), and a multi-faceted application of leadership behaviors seems required for effective leadership, determining the selected dean's perceptions of their leadership behaviors seems warranted. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of leadership from the perspective of the perceptions of the selected dean's exhibited leadership behaviors, which could produce important new information relative to the leadership behaviors of education deans and provide data that supports leadership development courses for these administrators (Wolverton, et al., 2001).

## Background

In higher education, there exists a paradox on the subject of academic leadership: "only the faculty has the knowledge and wisdom to make judgments regarding the content and conduct of the academic program and only the persons whose energies are directed full time to control of the academic organization can administer those judgments effectively" (Gould, 1964, p. 1). Gould indicates that recognizing this paradox is essential to understanding the leadership opportunities of the academic dean and in recognizing the challenges of this mid-level administrator. The focus of this academic leadership lies "between those perceived by the public as leaders [presidents] and those upon whose work the reputation of the organization rests [faculty], in which academic deans fill this role" (Wolverton, et al., 2001, p. 1) in universities today.

Traditionally, colleges promoted their most senior faculty members to the deanship. By the mid-1940s, these deans were responsible for supervising the

curricula, faculty, and budgets, with less time for direct interaction with students (McGrath, 1947). Before 1950, these were older, well-established white males (Gould, 1964). According to Wolverton et al. (2001), these deans did not see themselves as leaders but as "catalysts of faculty opinion and decision making" (p. 6). In addition, Wolverton, et al. pointed out that they had no inclination to shape opinion or set directions and would abandon ideas that did not conform to faculty sentiment. The end of student-based issues for academic deans came with the creation of the dean of students' position in the 1960s (Dibden, 1968), and as universities grew in size and complexity, the deanship became decidedly more managerial in nature.

Academic deans were expected to be fiscal experts, fundraisers, politicians, and diplomats (Dibden, 1968; Gould, 1964; Tucker & Bryan, 1991) and began to take on the business-oriented functions of "seeking new student markets, finding opportunities to combine academic interests with business or industrial interests, monitoring external grant opportunities, searching for developments outside their units, and representing their units to off campus agencies and alumni" (Wolverton, et al., 2001, p. 17). In reality, these deans began to market [develop] their colleges (Creswell & England, 1994).

In today's academy, two systemic phenomena exist: the use of power and authority and the dual-ranking system that governs the source of power (Wolverton, et al., 2001). When exercising power and authority, deans work within the rules and regulations of university bureaucracies to accomplish their routine administrative tasks, but they lack the control normally associated with the employer/employee relationship because of the autonomy that faculty assert in the pursuit of academic freedom. As a result, deans strive to maintain a balance between meeting the expectations of the presidency and those of the faculty (Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999). In this complex environment, deans face leadership challenges that the early deans did not have to face, and as a result, their leadership is critical.

Leadership in higher education includes the interaction of many different stakeholders as they create vision and establish meaning, trust and respect in their professional life (Clark & Clark, 1992). Through such interactions, deans create meaning that determines their leadership behavior. Tucker and Bryan (1991) described the leadership behaviors of deans as doves who act as peacemakers, dragons who drive away forces that threaten the college, and diplomats who guide, inspire and encourage members of the academic community. The impression of a dean as a quiet, academic leader has given way to an image of the

dean as an executive – politically perceptive and economically confident (Wolverton, et al., 1999).

# Literature Review

A review of the related literature reveals a great deal of research on university deans, not until recently has there been a significant body of the literature on the leadership behaviors of deans or the perceptions of their leadership behaviors. Most of the scholarly works addressing university deans have addressed the organization and governance of higher education, not the administrators who lead and support colleges (Gmelch, Wolverton, Wolverton, & Sarros, 1999). Coladarci (1980) stated "that the literature addressing this honorable estate could be read comfortably between a late breakfast and an early lunch–and that the dearth in volume was not compensated for by substance" (p. 125). Although it has been 27 years since Coladarci wrote this statement, little has been contributed to the literature concerning the leadership behaviors of deans.

The literature on the leadership behaviors of academic deanship are highlighted by two publications in the 1960s (Dibden, 1968; Gould, 1964) and two in the 1980s (Griffiths & McCarty, 1980; Morris, 1981). Gould's (1964) study attempted to identify the substantive leadership role of the academic dean, while Dibden's (1968) anthology focused on the dean's development, duties, dilemmas, and decisions. Griffith and McCarty's (1980) work provided an overview of leadership responsibilities and factors for deans while Morris' (1981) book was intended to be a technical report of educational administration but an individual perspective on "an unlit corner of academic life written from inside the compound" (p. x). This was an innovative approach that gave the reader a first-person experience of the leadership challenges of deans written from a third-person point of view.

From these works, Tucker and Bryan (1991) continued in describing a dean's role in terms of a dove, a dragon, and a diplomat, and their book is a handbook on how to become each one. According to Tucker and Bryan, these are roles that academic deans assumed at various times and sometimes needed to fulfill simultaneously in their leadership responsibilities. Cantu (1997) and Mooney (1988) wrote about their investigations of leadership styles, characteristics, and challenges involving deans. Mooney described the leadership challenges felt by academic deans from the perspective of deans who shared their "thoughts about faculty relations and other issues, swapping ideas and strategies in a forum that at times resembled a support group" (p. A15). Cantu (1997) investigated the

differences in leadership frames of deans based on Bolman and Deal's (1990) Leadership Orientation Instrument.

# Organizational Theory of Bolman and Deal

The concept of leadership offered by Bolman and Deal (1984) presented a uniquely useful organizational theory in which to examine the study's questions. The authors advocated looking at leadership through four perspectives that they call "frames" which are identified as (a) the structural frame (emphasizes specialized roles and formal relationships); (b) the human resource frame (considers the needs of the individuals); (c) the political frame (focuses on bargaining, negotiating, coercion, and compromise); and, (d) the symbolic frame (views organizations as cultures with rituals and ceremonies).

Figure 1
Conceptual framework for Bolman and Deal's leadership frames

|  | **Structural Frame** | **Human Resource Frame** | **Political Frame** | **Symbolic Frame** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Metaphor for Organization** | Factory | Family | Jungle | Carnival, temple, theatre |
| **Central Concepts** | Rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, environment | Needs, skills, Relationships | Power, conflict competition, organizational politics | Culture, meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes |
| **Image of Leadership** | Social Architecture | Empowerment | Advocacy | Inspiration |
| **Basic Leadership Challenges** | Attune structure to task, technology, environment | Align organizational and human needs | Develop agenda and power base | Create faith, beauty, meaning |

A combination of analysis, intuition, and artistry is involved when leaders choose a frame or understand others' perspectives, and this process builds on a lifetime of skill, knowledge, intuition, and wisdom (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Research

suggests that leaders who integrate elements of the four frames are likely to have more flexible responses to different administrative tasks because they perceive the multiple realities of an organization and are able to interpret circumstances in a variety of ways (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). Bolman and Deal (2003) advocated reframing or looking at events from each of the four frames in order to have a better picture of what is happening in the organization and to make the best decisions possible.

Leaders, such as deans, who can think and act using more than one frame, may be able to fulfill the multiple, and often conflicting, expectations of their leadership positions more skillfully than deans who cannot differentiate among situational requirements (Bensimon, et al., 1989). Much of the current research suggests that the effectiveness of leadership can be connected to cognitive complexity as well as to the theory that complex leaders may have the flexibility to comprehend situations through the manipulation of different and competing scenarios (Bensimon, et al.). Since greater cognitive complexity is demanded in a turbulent organizational world, leaders need to identify with multiple frames and know how to use them in day-to-day activities (Bolman & Deal, 1991). The ability to use more than one frame increases "an individual's ability to make clear judgments and to act effectively" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 519). This theory suggests that the meaning of leadership can be interpreted differently and can lead to different expectations of leadership as well as to the development of innovation thinking among leaders. Leaders who can simultaneously attend to the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic needs of the organization are seen as effective, while those who focus their attention on a single aspect of an organization's functioning are seen as ineffective (Bensimon et al., 1989). Having an analytical understanding and ability to utilize multiple frame of leadership behavior is becoming more important as college environments become more complex.

Bolman and Deal's (1984) theory is grounded in a conceptual framework model. As Figure 1 indicates, the conceptual framework model advocates looking at organizations from four different perspectives or frames. Windows, maps, tools, lenses, orientations and perspectives are often used as metaphors for these frames because they suggest multiple functions (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Use of the four leadership behavior frames identifies effective leaders as analysts and architects (structural frame), catalysts and servants (human resource frame), advocates and negotiators (political frame), and prophets and poets (symbolic frame) (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Each of the four leadership behavior frames is useful individually, but collectively, they make it possible to reframe or view the same situation from

multiple perspectives (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Research suggests that leaders who integrate elements of the four leadership behavior frames are likely to have more flexible responses to different administrative tasks (Bensimon et al., 1989). A leader will likely be more successful "with an artful appreciation of the four lenses and how to use them [in order] to understand and influence what's really going on" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 40).

## Methodology

The participants for the study were selected deans from colleges and schools of education within a national consortium of 35 public colleges and universities that have a major commitment to the preparation of educational professionals. Names of institutions and respondents cannot be disclosed as the researchers assured confidentiality to all respondents. The researcher's institution, though a member of the national consortium, was excluded from the study.

In order to measure the four leadership behavior frames, the Leadership Orientation Instrument (LOI) developed by Bolman and Deal (1990) was selected for use in this study. The instrument measures self-perception of leadership orientations and exhibited behaviors. Bolman and Deal (1991) assert that "internal reliability is very high: Cronbach's (1951) alpha for the frame measures ranges between .91 and .93" (p. 518). The validity of self-ratings is generally low when using only the self-section of the instrument (Bolman, 2004).

The LOI contains 32 items with five-point response scales. The use of a five-point Likert allows respondents to indicate the degree to which each leadership statement is true (1 - never, 2 - occasionally, 3 - sometimes, 4 - often, 5 -always). Each frame is sequenced in a pattern of four (structural, human resource, political and symbolic) leadership behavior frames and the scores for the eight items in each frame were divided by eight in order to yield a score that indicates a primary leadership behavior. The primary leadership behavior is determined by identifying the highest mean among the four leadership behavior frames. Additional statistical analysis included calculating means, standard deviations and correlations between the four leadership education frames.

The study was initiated with a letter from the dean of the college of education (study non-participant) and was emailed to the 34 deans in the selected group. The electronic letter introduced the researcher, explained the importance of the research, indicated that the researcher would be contacting the deans shortly, and requested their participation. Five days after this letter was sent, and continuing

weekly for a total of four weeks, an email explaining how the data would be used and providing the URL link to the survey was sent to the deans.

# Results of the Study

Thirty five institutions of the national consortium were originally selected to participate in the study. The researcher's own institution was removed as a participant; two other institutions were excluded from the study because no responses were received. In addition, two institutions were excluded because the dean was replaced with an interim dean during the data collection phase. This brought the total number of eligible participating institutions to 30. Of these 30, 15 deans completed the survey and submitted a survey resulting in a response rate of 50%.

Descriptive statistics were used to organize and summarize the data (see Table 1). These data were reported in frequency distributions with means and standard deviations. To determine how many frames each dean uses, a count of all means above 4.0 were calculated. A mean of 4.0 or above represents use of the frame as "often" or "always." Use of a particular frame is considered consistent with a mean score of 4.0 or greater. This scoring scale is consistent with other studies (Durocher, 1996; Harlow, 1994; Peasley, 1992; Strickland, 1992) that utilized Bolman and Deal's (1990) LOI.

The data indicates the deans perceived the human resource leadership behavior frame orientation as the most frequently exhibited for the selected group. The results shown that human resource frame had a combined mean score of 4.26, followed by the structural (3.97), political (3.80), and symbolic (3.70) leadership behavior frames. In the human resource leadership behavior frame, the combined mean was between four and five indicating that deans perceived themselves as "often" to "always" exhibiting characteristics of this frame. The mean scores for the structural, political, and symbolic frames averaged in the three-to-four range that indicated the deans perceived themselves as "sometimes" to "often" exhibiting characteristics of these frames. Furthermore, results indicate that the deans do not perceive themselves as exhibiting leadership behaviors from multiple leadership frames.

Table 1
Results by leadership behavior frames for deans by institutions

| | Leadership Behavior Frames | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Respondents** | **Structural** | **Human Resource** | **Political** | **Symbolic** |
| 1 | 3.86 | 3.43 | 3.38 | 3.25 |
| 2 | 4.24 | 5.00 | 4.63 | 4.13 |
| 3 | 3.57 | 4.29 | 4.38 | 3.75 |
| 4 | 4.00 | 3.86 | 3.88 | 3.75 |
| 5 | 3.57 | 4.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 |
| 6 | 3.57 | 4.00 | 3.88 | 4.13 |
| 7 | 4.57 | 3.86 | 3.75 | 3.25 |
| 8 | 3.43 | 4.00 | 4.13 | 4.25 |
| 9 | 3.71 | 4.29 | 3.75 | 3.63 |
| 10 | 3.86 | 3.71 | 4.13 | 4.25 |
| 11 | 4.29 | 4.71 | 4.62 | 4.88 |
| 12 | 4.57 | 4.14 | 3.63 | 3.88 |
| 13 | 4.00 | 4.43 | 3.63 | 3.63 |
| 14 | 4.00 | 3.86 | 3.00 | 2.62 |
| 15 | 4.86 | 5.00 | 4.63 | 3.17 |
| **Mean** | **4.01** | **4.17** | **3.89** | **3.70** |
| **Stand. Dev.** | **0.425** | **0.455** | **0.535** | **0.583** |

| Correlations | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Structural** | **Human Resource** | **Political** | **Symbolic** |
| **Structural** | 1.000 | 0.443 | 0.287 | -0.109 |
| **Human Resource** | 0.443 | 1.000 | 0.677 | 0.274 |
| **Political** | 0.287 | 0.677 | 1.000 | 0.671 |
| **Symbolic** | -0.109 | 0.274 | 0.671 | 1.000 |

The study results indicated that the deans in institutions 5, 13, and 15 perceived this exact pattern of leadership behavior frame rankings: human resource, structural, political and symbolic. The political leadership behavior frame follows the human resource leadership behavior frame for deans in institutions 2 and 9.

The majority of deans (institutions 1, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, and 14) perceived that they exhibit characteristics of the human resource leadership behavior frame second in the pattern. Deans in institutions 4 and 8 perceived that they exhibited characteristics of the human resource leadership behavior frame third in the pattern, while the dean in institution 10 perceived characteristics of the human

resource leadership behavior frame the least. These results show that individuals perceived that they use the human resource leadership behavior frame less consistently than the study.

## Discussion

Analysis of the four leadership behavior frames revealed that the primary leadership orientation for the deans is the human resource leadership behavior frame followed by the structural, political and symbolic leadership behavior frames. Since it has been substantiated by research that deans work closely with many different stakeholders (Tucker & Bryan, 1991; Wolverton, et al., 2001), it is not surprising that they will utilize the human resource leadership behavior frame most often. The mean score of the deans indicated that they perceived themselves as "often" to "always" exhibiting characteristics of the human resource leadership behavior frame.

Obviously, the human resource leadership behavior frame is not the only component in leadership behavior. The mean scores of the structural, political and symbolic frames leadership behavior indicated that deans perceived themselves as "sometimes" to "often" exhibiting characteristics of these leadership behavior frames, with the structural leadership behavior frame being perceived a close second to human resource leadership behavior frame. This pattern correlates with findings in other studies (Burks, 1992; Cantu, 1997). The results in Burks' (1992) study indicated that the structural and human resource leadership behavior frames were used more frequently than the political and symbolic leadership behavior frames. Cantu's (1997) study indicated that academic deans predominately used the human resource leadership behavior frame followed by the structural, political, and symbolic leadership behavior frames.

One of the most important aspects of Bolman and Deal's (1984; 2003) theory on leadership is that the use of more than one leadership behavior frame increases the individual's ability to make clear judgments and to act effectively (Bolman & Deal, 1991). The use of multiple leadership behavior frames is determined by a count of all means above 4.0, and this mean indicates that the frame is used "often" or "always." The structural and the human resource leadership behavior frames had a mean greater than 4.0, the findings in this study show that collectively, deans did exhibit characteristics of multiple leadership behavior frame perspectives in their leadership behavior. This is in agreement to the findings of other studies involving higher education administrators (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Burks, 1992; Cantu, 1997; Gilson, 1994).

It is noted that further analysis of the individual institutions revealed several deans who do exhibit characteristics of multiple frame perspectives in their leadership behaviors. For example, deans in institutions 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13 and 15 have means of 4.0 or higher in at least two of the leadership behavior frames, and deans in institutions 2 and 11 exhibit characteristics of all the leadership behavior frames. These results show that individual deans perceived that they exhibit characteristic of multiple leadership behavior frame perspectives more frequently than this study indicated.

While limited in scope, the study results indicate deans of education colleges or schools could benefit from more intense analytical leadership development programs that enhanced their understanding of the concepts of leadership behavior frames of Bolman and Deal (1984) and the use of multiple leadership frames. Further study is needed to determine any wider implications.

In examining the correlation analysis of the collected data, the human relation leadership behavior frame had a correlation relationship (+ 0.677) with the political leadership behavior frame and the political leadership behavior frame had a (+ 0.671) relationship to the symbolic frame. As the political leadership behavior frame had a relationship with two of the other three leadership behavior frames, concentrating on the educational development and use of the political leadership behavior frame could have a multiplier effect in the dean's ability to effectively use the individual frames or use multiple frames.

## Conclusion

Leadership in higher education is critical and multidimensional. In this study, leaders have been described as analytical (structural), sensitive (human resource), pragmatic (political), and charismatic (symbolic). Leadership behavior is defined differently based on individual perceptions. Deans must be aware of their own leadership development in order to build colleges conducive to collegiality and productivity (Wolverton, et al., 2001). The privilege of leading a college necessitates that deans identify with the concept of multiple leadership perspectives.

In addition, the effective use of the political frame may be a key factor in the dean's ability to use multiple frames in order to address institutional leadership needs, thus expanding or improving leadership effectiveness for the institution. The development of leadership education and development programs that address these issues could increase the deans' knowledge of leadership behaviors and their personal capabilities as leaders in higher education by providing

opportunities for deans to think more intensely and analytically about leadership. This knowledge and experience has the potential to empower deans to work more effectively with different stakeholders in the complex situations they face as academic leaders in their schools or colleges of today and tomorrow.

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