

## **A Look at What Influences the Leadership of Agricultural and Extension Education Department Heads**

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### **Abstract**

Through the study of leadership, the concept of leadership effectiveness and its importance has emerged. Effective leadership contributes to successful organizations (Amagoh, 2009; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). According to Gordon & Yukl (2004), because of constantly changing environments, it is important to continue research in the leadership and leadership effectiveness fields, especially when it comes to leadership in academia. Using Seiler and Pfister's (2009) Dynamic Five-Factor Model of Leadership as the theoretical frame, a qualitative study of leadership effectiveness influencers of Agricultural and Extension Education department heads was completed. The research looked at both internal and external influential factors.

### **Introduction/Contextual Frame**

Thoughts of leadership have transformed since formal theories of leadership were first developed in the 1950s (Conger, 1999). People's desire for leadership that reflects an organization's work in a unique manner has led to increased studies of leadership at different levels of power (Fiedler, 1981; Burns, 1978). Leadership has also been studied to understand the influential process that happens when a person engages other people to accomplish tasks including goal attainment (Vardiman, Houghston, & Jinkerson, 2006; Yukl, 2006; Amagoh, 2009; Spendlove, 2007).

Through the study of leadership, the concept of leadership effectiveness and its importance has emerged. Effective leadership contributes to successful organizations (Amagoh, 2009; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Conger (1999) said “today, strong leadership is often viewed as one of the most important keys to organizational growth, change, and renewal” (p. 1). Because of an organization’s constantly changing context and social needs over time, leaders must be prepared to change and adapt, or move on (Leithwood et al., 1999; Weinberger, 2009). Effective leadership is needed at all levels of business organizations as well as academic institutions, specifically academic departments (Yamasaki, 1999). The leader of an academic department is the department head and is considered a challenging position because of the roles they hold and the responsibilities they have (Olson, 2008; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Stanly & Algert, 2007). According to Gordon & Yukl (2004), because of a constantly changing environment, it is important to continue research in the leadership and leadership effectiveness fields, especially when it comes to leadership in academia.

This study focused on leadership in “stand alone” agricultural and extension education departments at 1862 land grant universities. In order to put the study in context, three areas must be considered: the university setting today, agricultural and extension education in the field of higher education, and department heads and university personnel.

Many higher educational institutions have tightened enrollments and increased tuition (Weerts & Ronca, 2006). Although enrollment requirements have tightened, more and more of the population have attempted to enroll in higher education (Heller, 2009). Gumpert and Snyderman (2002) said universities have “paradoxical imperatives faced by the U.S. higher education system to adapt to the changing needs of society while remaining a stable social institution” (p. 383). Most agricultural and extension education programs are in a land grant university. Thus, land grant universities must be studied to understand the context in which these department heads operate. Department heads play a very important role in the success of universities since they are held accountable for a wide range of responsibilities (Collinson & Collinson, 2009). Their roles have become more challenging due to obstacles like budget cuts, competition and accountability pressures (Majeski, 2004).

### **Theoretical Framework/Literature Review**

The guiding framework for this study was Seiler and Pfister’s (2009) Dynamic Five-Factor Model of Leadership. While many leadership theories look at how a leader influences others, Seiler and Pfister’s framework explains how leaders are influenced. According to Seiler and Pfister, “leadership behavior (LB) is influenced by the leader’s individual competencies (IC), the environment (E) he or she is working in, and the immediate situation (S) he or she is confronted with” (p. 43). The environmental factors are made up of “the group of people (G) leaders are working together with, the organization (O) they are working in, and the general context (C) they are located in” (p. 43).

Within the framework Seiler and Pfister (2009) define the competencies in the following ways: Individual competencies include professional (ex. job knowledge), strategic (ex. decision making skills), personal (ex. self-motivation), social (ex. empathy, communication), and intercultural (ex. foreign language knowledge). Group factors include structural (ex. group composition,

norms) and dynamic (ex. relationships). Organization factors are made up of four components: strategy (ex. company goals), structure (ex. infrastructure), processes (ex. processes of the organization), and culture & climate (ex. feedback culture). Context factors include static (ex. history) and dynamic (ex. political, economical) components. Finally, situation factors include clarity (ex. information availability), familiarity (ex. novelty of the situation), and pressure (ex. time pressure).

Past research has also studied the importance of effective leaders in a leadership role. Wangler (2009) used the Competing Values Managerial Leadership Instrument and the L-BL Individual Achieving Styles Inventory to “determine focal managers’ behavioral complexity” (p. 46). The research focused on effective managers with the premise that behaviorally complex managers were more effective. The researcher used internet-based questionnaires to gather data collected from 322 participants, 233 of which were actual focal managers. The rest were peers, bosses and subordinates. Wangler found that “connective leadership, behavioral complexity and managerial effectiveness were correlated” (p. 98). The researcher also found “a focal manager’s subordinates, peers, and bosses [to] associate different achieving styles with managerial effectiveness” (p. 100). Based on the findings, six of the nine achieving styles of the Connective Leader as well as all four of the competing values functions were associated with effectiveness (all but intrinsic direct, social instrumental, and entrusting instrumental styles).

Williams, Blackwell, and Bailey (2010) conducted a study “to explore how department heads in Colleges of Agriculture at Land-Grant universities perceive, conceptualize, and have experienced leadership development” (p. 82). The basic qualitative research study had a population of 10 current and past department heads from across the U.S. in land grant institutions specifically in colleges of agriculture. The three methods used for the study were interviews, observations and document analysis. The researcher found that of the 10 department heads surveyed, six of them had no prior leadership training or development before entering the role of department head. Seven of the department heads said they “believed that being a faculty member was their leadership preparation before becoming department head” (p. 84). Leadership training through two forms – national programs and on campus training - was also found as being important to department head roles in this study. As for the campus training, all 10 department heads “mentioned activities at their home institution that were geared towards the training of department heads” (p. 85). Leadership education was another category that explained how the department heads had all “learned leadership from different areas in their professional career” (p. 86). Observation of other department heads, leadership books and “learning by doing” (p. 87) were ways in which department heads established their leadership knowledge base. Williams, Blackwell, and Bailey said “all 10 of the participants in this study said they felt like they learned how to be a good academic leader by doing the job” (p. 87).

### **Purpose and Guiding Questions**

Using Seiler and Pfister’s (2009) Dynamic Five-Factor Model of Leadership as the theoretical frame, a qualitative study of leadership effectiveness influencers of Agricultural and Extension Education (AEE) department heads was completed. In order to guide the research, two questions were established:

1. What external factors influence what roles and responsibilities department heads undertake?
2. What internal factors influence the roles and responsibilities of department heads?

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted under the constructivist, or interpretive, philosophy. Because the purpose of this study was to understand and describe, constructivism was the most appropriate epistemology to guide the research. This epistemology outlines that symbolic interaction and experiences of a person are important (Merriam, 2009).

This basic qualitative research study was designed in three steps: document analysis, semi-structured interviews and comparison of the information gleaned from the two. Berg (2004) describes document analysis as an unobtrusive way to collect information. The documents used for document analysis in this study were job descriptions of department heads. Semi-structured interviews followed the job description document analysis (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the researcher completed a comparison of the information gleaned from each in order to review and compare the data collected (Merriam, 2009).

The population for the study was agricultural and extension education department heads from 1862 land-grant universities in “stand-alone” departments. A purposive sampling technique was utilized in this study (Berg, 2004). Only individuals in the “stand-alone” departments were considered to be part of the study, leading to a total of 18 possible department heads. 13 individuals were interviewed and included both male and female participants.

When beginning data collection, the researcher contacted the department heads and requested job descriptions for the initial document analysis. Job descriptions were coded JD with a corresponding number. Department heads were then contacted for semi-structured interviews and had the option of conducting the interviews via Skype, Google Hangouts or phone. Once a time and place were agreed upon, department heads were informed of their rights as participants prior to the interviews taking place (Merriam, 2009). Department heads signed an IRB approved consent form before their interview. Each interview was coded, recorded and transcribed. Codes for the interviews included DH (Department Head) and a corresponding number.

Data was analyzed using constant comparative method. First, researchers must conduct “a general review off all information” (Creswell, 1998, p. 140). Second, Creswell stated that researchers should reduce data and start to build codes/categories” (p. 140). Finally, Creswell said the final step in analysis is to compare and relate categories to develop logical frameworks. As part of the constant comparative method, content analysis was completed. Content analysis has three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Because the researcher was a graduate student at [STATE] State University, she witnessed daily interaction between a department head and faculty members and students. The researcher’s knowledge and experiences gained as a graduate student of the department influenced the reasoning and analysis of this study. Trustworthiness of this study was established using tenants of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

## Results

### Introduction to Department Heads

Who are AEE Department Heads from 1862 land-grant universities? Land grant universities with “stand-alone” AEE departments represent 32% of all 1862 land grant universities (United States Department of Agriculture, n.d.). In this study, both department heads (appointed by administrators) and department chairs (elected) were represented as well as both female and male department heads. Combined, the department heads interviewed have a total of 310 years of professional experience in Agricultural and/or Extension Education or an average of almost 24 years. A department head in AEE oversees an average of 20 faculty, staff, and employees. Their departments include an average of 200 undergraduates and 37 master’s/PhD students. Department heads from 1862 land grant universities with “stand-alone” AEE departments, came from a wide range of backgrounds. Some department heads were former high school agriculture teachers, while others were involved in extension. Some were seasoned administrators while others considered this their first administrative position. All department heads interviewed had previous experience as faculty members and were all tenured either at the associate or full level. Everyone in the study population participated in professional organizations.

**Research Question One:** *What external factors influence what roles and responsibilities department heads undertake?*

External factors of influence were everything but the department head themselves. These factors can be from the department environment, college setting, university or outside sources. Three major areas of external influence included stakeholders/clientele, the departmental environment, and required attributes.

### Stakeholders/Clientele

Stakeholders/clientele are groups of people that have invested in the department, are benefiteres of the department or are considered a major contributor to what the department does. Many job descriptions required department heads to work with stakeholder groups/clientele (JD3, 5, 6, 9, 12, 14). Some groups were considered outside of the university such as alumni, agencies and professional groups. According to Job Description 12, it is important for department heads to maintain “effective relations and communication with stakeholders, industry groups, professional organizations, and the public.” A department head also “develops and maintains liaisons with alumni groups, advisory boards and stakeholder groups as appropriate” (JD3). They also “encourage linkages with external groups to strengthen ties with stakeholders, state, regional, national and international organizations, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, alumni and the citizens of [the state]” (JD14). Within the university, but external to the department, department heads report to deans, associate vice presidents (JD3), or associate deans (JD5).

Department heads viewed their connection with stakeholders/clientele to be important to their job and their departments. Department Head 6 said, “I think that what they [faculty] are looking

at is they want to have positive relationships with their stakeholders/constituents, which includes not just their undergraduates and graduates.” Department heads listed a more detailed list than their job descriptions provided. People and organizations such as Farm Bureau (DH5, 9, 16), Ag in the Classroom (DH5, 8, 12), extension agents/4-H (DH7, 12, 16), FFA (DH8, 9, 12), and Ag teachers (DH2, 3, 7, 12, 15) were described as being stakeholders or clientele to department heads. Department Head 6 pointed out that Ag teachers are not the only external group that AEE department heads should be focused on, even if most department heads currently do so: “If you came to me and asked who are your stakeholders in agricultural and extension education? I would say, well it ain’t those Ag teachers.” In considering stakeholder groups, department heads realize that “constituent groups evolve with [the] program and [the] program should evolve to meet the evolving needs in society” (DH3).

Inside the department or university, department heads are also influenced by people around them. Advisors, administrators, deans, supervisors, and advisory/leadership councils are examples of groups that department heads said they work with within the department or college (DH7, 8, 12, 15, 16, 18). Department Head 7 gave the example of a departmental advisory council:

We have a department advisory council that’s been in effect for about 12 years. That includes 16 external members and so, our faculty also participate in that and we use that council to not only share reports of what we are doing, but also invite feedback on ideas we are considering.

Department Head 16 referred to an external influencer as being their leadership team: “I do have what I call a departmental leadership team. It’s really a brainstorming unit.”

Students also influence what a department head does (DH3, 8, 12, 15). Department Head 3 explained two levels of influence. The “first level would be students we have in our programs or students we will have in our program – future students. [The] second level would be the faculty and staff that we work with” (DH3). “Without students, we wouldn’t have a program, whether it’s the undergraduates, the graduates. Without students, higher education does not exist,” pointed out Department Head 15. “Students definitely influence my priorities. If a student comes in and I’ve got things going on, that priority is going to move to the bottom and I am going to work with that student” (DH8).

### **Departmental Environment**

The environment of a department is both influenced by department heads and influences a department head. A department head’s environment represents the culture of a department. The environment comprises how a department works together and what creates the unit as a whole. Space, people and community are all components of a departmental environment. Many department heads are required to build a department focused upon creating successful people (JD6, 7, 9, 12, 14). Job Descriptions 12 and 14 both said a department head needs to “maintain a productive environment for research, teaching, extension, public service and international programs and, within available time, participate in these activities,” thus demonstrating that a departmental environment both influences and is influenced by department heads.

According to department heads, a departmental environment is inclusive, focused on improvement and collaborative (DH3, 5, 14, 18). Department heads try to create environments that are “friends, family-type” (DH5), positive (DH7) and respectful (DH8). “The culture in our department is such that I would say it’s evolving” mentioned Department Head 2.

According to Department Head 14 there are five important areas to a department:

1. Community – we want to create a community where people at all levels...are valued,
2. Being authentic – which means providing a trusting and open atmosphere that says ‘I’m not going to say one thing and mean another,’
3. Excellence – in that everything we do, we strive to do very well, not half-hearted,
4. Culture of service – I try strongly to model that,
5. Being globally minded – that really is as much about being international as it is valuing people regardless of where they are from and recognizing that there are different ways of looking at things (DH14).

Faculty also influence how an environment develops in a department. “You can’t have a culture if the faculty don’t own up to it. So, whatever the cultural norms are, the culture remains if there’s ownership to it,” stated Department Head 2. The faculty of a department “take ownership in what they are doing [and] have a really good working relationship” (DH9).

### **University/Professional Required Attributes**

In order to achieve department head status, there are a few requirements that universities expected as well as some qualities that department heads themselves deemed important to the position. Almost all job descriptions required that a department head have a degree in the field of or a related field to Agricultural and Extension Education (JD2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 16). Two job descriptions required previous experience as either an agriculture teacher, in an extension field or previous administrative experience (JD8, 12). Other intangible requirements included that Department Heads are required to have a “commitment to student learning and success” (JD8) as well as be “a proven leader with excellent decision-making, motivation, relationship building and oral and written communication skills” (JD9). There should also be “knowledge of the history, philosophy, objectives, and methods of land grant university mission work” (JD3).

### **Research Question Two:** *What internal factors influence the roles and responsibilities of department heads?*

Department heads have the final say in their decisions and ultimately choose what course of action they take. The biggest areas of influence for a department head are those that have been internalized. Internal influences are the experiences, situations, and personal items that have created the persona of who Department Heads are and what they do. Internal factors cannot come from the university nor can they come from other people. The internal factors that are prevalent among many department heads are values, strengths, weaknesses, personality, beliefs, past experiences in context and the leadership library they have built up (DH2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18).

## Strengths

Strengths are positive characteristics or skills that department heads perceive themselves as having that influence why and how they do their jobs. Strengths of department heads varied among the population. All department heads had at least one strength that they found beneficial in their job as department head (DH2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18). Many department heads saw their strength as having the ability to “see the big picture” (DH3, 5, 6, 8, 10) when completing their responsibilities: “I think the thinking big, seeing the big picture is important to the department to keep the department positioned in that organizational structure” (DH3). Department Head 6 said, “I can zoom up or zoom down as some people would talk in organizational leadership.”

Two department heads saw being analytical and logical as strengths (DH6, 16). “I think I am allowed to cut through a lot of the cloudiness of department administration by having an analytical view or expecting decisions to be based in data” said Department Head 6. Department Head 16 similarly said having an analytical side is a strength “because I do try to make conclusions based on facts and figures and not on rash decisions.” Another two department heads believed having “emotional intelligence skills” (DH6, 9) as important.

Numerous department heads described being a good listener as a strength (DH2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10). “I really listen to people,” said Department Head 5. Department Head 2 said it is important to listen because “sometimes, people just need to be listened to. And that’s all they want – just to be listened to.” One department head mentioned what they “try to do every day, in any situation, [was] be a good listener, to let people know they have been heard” (DH9).

Two department heads expressed the notion that being a learner is important to the job of department head (DH2, 18). “I try to be a lifelong learner” said Department Head 18. One other department head said “I love what I do and I enjoy it and I’m willing to work hard at it” (DH7).

Other strengths included working “well with a lot of different people” (DH12) and being patient (DH2). Yet another department head compared their strength to being on a sports team. When playing basketball, Department Head 10 said, “I’ve been told ‘When you are on the court, everyone on your team becomes better.’ I find that a huge compliment. That’s what I end up doing as a department head.”

## Weaknesses

The opposite of strengths are weaknesses. Weaknesses are personal characteristics that department heads see as a challenge to what they do. All department heads cope with weaknesses in their job that they must overcome to run the department (DH2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18). Department Head 6 described weaknesses as “character assets...any of them in excess [they] become defects,” and followed with this example: “People say ‘Well, you are too analytical and you are not emotional enough. You seem detached.’ ...That’s because that character asset has become in excess and now it’s become a liability or a defect” (DH6).

Procrastination was a weakness to which a few department heads related (DH2, 6, 8). Department Head 2 said, “I can’t afford to procrastinate. That’s what gets me in that quadrant one” (alluding to Stephen Covey’s Time Management Quadrants). “Sometimes I procrastinate,” said Department Head 2, “How I wish I could fix that.” Department Head 6 explained their procrastination as purposeful procrastination: “I’ve got some procrastination to myself, but I also call that being reflective or contemplative.” Department Head 8 realized the need to not procrastinate in their position as department head because it makes the job even harder:

The procrastination and the [not] delegating responsibility certainly make it [the position] more difficult. That’s not setting a good example for faculty...I think it’s important to teach them to delegate responsibility too.

Organization was another weakness with which some department heads grappled (DH2, 3, 15). Department Head 3 said, “I really wish I was more organized than I am.” Department Head 15 wished to be more organized or “one of those people who was able to color code things.” In order to make up for lack of organizational skills, Department Head 15 finds “people who I know can accomplish those kinds of things who can compensate.”

Another weakness some department heads had was not being able to say no when asked to do things (DH8, 9, 12, 18). Department Head 12 said, “I cannot say no. I take on way too much. It’s good to be needed and I want the department to be needed and I’d like people to look at us to be that problem solver, but because I can’t say no, I get way too much work than I can handle.” Over committing and delegation challenges also fell into this category (DH8, 18). Department Head 18 claimed to over-commit from time to time: “A friend sent me a quote the other day that said ‘half of the problems in life come from saying yes too quickly and not saying no enough’ (DH18). “I’m not very good at delegating” said Department Head 8.

## **Personality**

Many department heads claimed that personality influences what they do and the choices they make (DH2, 3, 8, 10, 14, 16). Personality guided the roles which department heads portrayed – “I could see how if we had a different personality group [of faculty], my role would be a bit more autocratic. My role with this group is to be more of a facilitator” (DH3). One department head said “My personality is I don’t want to be surrounded by YES men and women and not people that think the same way” (DH10). According to Department Head 10,

if you are going to do something like Myers-Briggs, Strengths Quest, True Colors, any of those analysis, that you don’t just find out who you are. You find out how you can work with people that are different than you...All those kinds of experiences help put things into perspective when you are being asked to lead a department as diverse as our department here. We have very different operational styles, personalities.

Personality also influences how department heads handle situations. Department Head 14 claimed to be an introvert having a personality type “very prone to wanting to handle those things and solve those things and answer those emails or those pop-in problems that just show up

that are not on anybody's schedule. So, the challenge [becomes] to learn how to be more of a leader and less bogged down in the day-to-day managing." Another department head said his personality style is based on True Colors and he is "green" (DH16). "I'm green. I'm not gold. I have almost no gold at all. If you saw my office you would understand that I'm not a really structured person. So, I have to have people around me that do [have organizational traits]" (DH16).

### **Beliefs**

Beliefs are ideals that department heads uphold in their lives that contribute to what they do. Beliefs, in this case, are based on a religion, Higher Power, or morals. Four department heads mentioned beliefs as an influencer in their lives (DH5, 6, 9, 14). Department Head 14 made sure to mention

You should know that I am a Christian and I take very seriously what the Bible has to say. As a result of that, that is my worldview. I take very seriously what the words of Christ mean. Everything I do, everything I am, I have to look in the mirror and respect what's in the Bible and ask –am I living those out?

Department Head 6 said their beliefs were to be reflected in the way they served their faculty and students. "If you think about it like this... Christ got down on His knees and washed [the disciples'] feet. If you think about that in your philosophy from your Sunday School days, that's the type of department heads we need" (DH6). Department Head 5 joked "When I was in 4-H, one of my favorite sayings was, 'I see the 4-H program leader as the opposite of being a preacher.' A preacher's goal in life is to comfort the afflicted. I saw my goals as to afflict the comforted."

When discussing priority setting, Department Head 9 mentioned "part of it goes back to my beliefs, to my accommodation in which I use every day to direct myself in life. It's really important to me to have a strong connection with my faculty, staff, students, and other colleagues here." Beliefs when priority setting was also important to Department Head 14:

I [got married] for a reason and we had children intentionally for a reason. It was not so that I could widow my [spouse] and orphan my children on the altar of a career or of having a job. I say that in, I work very diligently to own my calendar, to be very intentional about what my day looks like so that I can have time in the evenings and weekends to be able to enjoy them and to be able to focus on the things that are truly important in life.

### **Values**

Values are personal principles or standards of behavior that department heads deem important. They influence how a department heads think because they look for them not only in themselves but other people. Values such as being caring (DH2), honest/trustworthy (DH8, 9, 12), having integrity (DH7, 8, 9) and being loyal to the department (DH6) were some examples of what

department heads valued. “Integrity is huge for me,” said Department Head 9, “very, very important.” Department Head 6 explained that they believe “commitment and loyalty to an organization” are important; “meaning, if [STATE] State University is paying you and you are working here, you are loyal.” Department Head 15 said they valued “openness, honesty, trust, collaboration, [and] programmatic thinking.”

Department Head 12 reported valued being firm, fair, and consistent:

The notion of being firm means that you are deeply rooted, well at least rooted enough that the wind’s not going to blow your decision...this idea of being fair is this whole notion of if I do one thing for somebody, I need to be fair and do it for everyone else because no one likes favorites...consistency is key. The day that you contradict something you said the day before, loses all trust (DH12).

Some values that department heads shared stemmed from past experiences. Department Head 7 said their values stemmed from “growing up on a farm” while Department Head 18, said “practice drives [values] and then they drive practice.” Department Head 2 mentioned that their values came from teaching – “Students have a way of teaching you. That’s not to say I didn’t learn these particular [values] from a teacher educator, because I did, but students just reinforced it. Students have a way of training you and teaching you. As do faculty and staff.” Another department head said that by “being a teacher you are always looking at and trying to instill values on your students. Instilling values in teaching leadership at the high school level...has really helped shape and form me” (DH8).

### **Past Experiences in Context**

I think the experience I’ve had to draw upon now I think a lot of it is real world experience that I’ve gained, but I’d say that experience I’ve gained has been tempered by the education I’ve received (DH5).

Department heads are internally influenced based on experiences before they came into the position of department head. Experiences both in the field and in academia contribute to how a department head does the job (DH2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18). Department Head 18 stated, “I wouldn’t be here without that academic experience, but I think academic experience really does fold into your life experience.”

Past experiences in the field included teaching high school or working in extension. Teaching high school later influences how department chairs operate because they “are managing an entire program such as students, facilities, budget, working with parents, things like that” (DH8). Being a high school teacher gives department heads context in order to better understand their students – “[teaching high school] provides some important context to ground you to what’s going on so you don’t forget the kinds of students you get into your university program and their kinds of goals and aspirations” (DH3). Teaching high school was also found to be important to Department Head 14:

Teaching high school in a comprehensive agricultural sciences program, essentially a teacher is a CEO of an enterprise in the sense that those are community-based programs. It's much, much more than simply being a classroom teacher, it's really in charge of student activities, organized events, especially competition through FFA, travel opportunities and those things. But, as well as managing budgets and facilities.

Academic experiences such as being a student, being a faculty member or taking part in some other administrative role were also ways that past experiences influenced department heads (DH2, 6, 7, 9, 14, 15); "In terms of really truly preparing me for being an academic leader and understanding academics and understanding education and being able to help lead a higher education program; I would have to say that my academic career has been instrumental in that" (DH15). Department Head 9 said working at the university level has been beneficial as a department head because

I've had the chance to witness and be a part of different departments and identify what has worked well and what needs to be done in departments with tight budgets, small faculty numbers. Just a number of experiences faculty face. It's very beneficial to get a perspective from different institutions.

Department Head 6 also said that past experiences helped them become the department head they are today:

I probably learned the most as I was an undergraduate at [STATE] State and then a student teacher, then an active ag teacher, then a [POSITION]. That was the solid foundation upon which I was able to build a career as a teacher educator.

Academic experiences also influenced Department Head 7 because "My academic faculty experiences have been more helpful than my high school teaching. There's so much about the context of a university that if you are going to be a department chair, you have to understand that. You have to experience that as a faculty member. You have to know what a faculty member deals with" (DH7).

Department Head 10 said experience as a parent influences his role as department head;

Essentially, being a parent you have strategies to work with your children and young people. I'm not saying faculty are like that, but many of the positive reinforcement strategies you would use as a parent are definitely applicable in the classroom and in meetings and in working with faculty (DH10).

### **Leadership Library**

I really got serious about becoming a student of leadership. Reading, thinking, reflecting, talking. When I go to conferences, I gravitate to the leadership topics as opposed to my

own disciplinary base...I'm looking at my bookshelf and I currently have probably 70 leadership books over there (DH7).

Leadership books have been used by some department heads to help develop their leadership abilities. These books vary in context but are focused on making people better leaders. Many of the department heads in the population either own or have read a number of books on leadership (DH2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 18). Stephen Covey's book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* was mentioned many times, specifically when relating to his time management model (DH2, 6, 10, 14, 18).

Three books influenced Department Head's leadership philosophy. They are "aside from the Bible, they are John Maxwell's *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*... Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*...Jim Collins' *Good to Great*." (DH14). Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Extraordinary Leadership* was a book Department Head 7 read. "I've read lots of things and I really think, everything I've read, you can find in those five practices" (DH7). Other leadership books included William James's *The Variety of Religious Experiences* (DH6), *A Sense of Urgency* by John Kotter (DH16) and Glasser's *Choice Theory* (DH6). *Strengths Quest* and *Strength Finders* were other forms of leadership development that some department heads utilized (DH9, 10, 15).

### **Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions**

Discussion, implications and conclusions were broken down by research questions.

#### **Research Question One**

The results of this research question lead the researcher to conclude that stakeholders heavily impact both the roles and responsibilities of department heads. The way that department heads interact with external stakeholder/clientele groups reflects back on the department. This notion of reflection is similar to Wangler's (2009) study that found the needs of the constituents of an organization are reflected back to the organization and influence responsibilities of managers. The researcher concluded that the connection between stakeholders and department heads is circular: stakeholders influence the department head, the department head influences the department, the department influences society, society then influences stakeholders. The idea of a circular connection is important for department heads to understand because it implies the actions of the department heads affect more than just the department and its stakeholders.

Department heads serve a variety of clientele both within the university and outside the university that influence what they do. It can be concluded that department heads are continually communicating and interacting with their stakeholder groups in order to better the department and meet the demands of external clientele. Due to demands of changing organizations, the people the department heads work with outside the department will also be changing. Implications include department heads must be able to reach new people as well as support those groups that are already involved with the department. By reaching new groups or organizations of people, the department broadens its stakeholders and opens itself up to more opportunities.

## Research Question Two

This study found that personality influenced leadership effectiveness, in this case with department heads. Other influencers that were found were hard work, lengthy experience, knowledge, honesty, openness, broad thinking, and engaging with people. These values as well as the others that were found in this study can be used to form a deeper understanding of department heads from an internal influencer perspective.

The findings of this research question were consistent with the findings of Williams, Blackwell, and Bailey (2010) that found past experiences of department heads, as well as the use of leadership books in understanding leadership, were influencers of department chairs. Williams, Blackwell, and Bailey found that some department heads “believed that being a faculty member was their leadership preparation before becoming department head” (p. 84). Both this study and Williams, Blackwell, and Bailey also found observation of other department heads and leadership books were methods of preparation for department heads. This study differed from that of Williams, Blackwell, and Bailey when it came to leadership training programs. Williams, Blackwell, and Bailey found leadership training occurred in two forms – national programs and on campus trainings – unlike this study, which found neither national programs nor on campus trainings were described as leadership influencers.

It can be concluded that some of the internal influencers were learned (such as beliefs) while others were less controlled (past experiences). It is implied that influencers that were less controlled helped shape some of the influencers that were learned. For example, a department head may have experienced a dishonest child while teaching in high school. Because of that experience, they now value honesty.

The researcher concludes that internal factors influence department heads the most. Because the department heads are influenced by internal sources, they influence their department and the people in it, in different ways. The way they influence would change depending on the nature of their own influencers. It can thus be concluded that the way a department head reacts to a situation is based on their own experiences and history. It is implied that not only do internal influencers influence what a department head does or how they act, but it also influences their effectiveness as a leader.

## Recommendations

### Further Research Suggestions

1. Since a variety of factors, including internal and external factors, influence department heads, it is suggested to interview department heads over a period of time to establish if there is consistency in their leadership effectiveness.
2. Interviewing department heads at land-grant universities that do not have “stand-alone” departments of Agricultural and Extension Education. A comparison could then be conducted to find similarities and differences in leadership, roles, and responsibilities of the department heads in AEE as a whole.
3. Similarly, department heads at private universities could be studied and compared to land-grant university department heads, both in AEE and non-AEE departments.

4. Department heads in land-grant universities can also be compared to department heads at other public universities to create a picture of public institution leadership.

### **Suggestions for Practice**

1. Department heads should take part in some type of leadership development. Examples of this could be attending leadership seminars, taking personality tests, and becoming an active leadership book reader. Not only should the department heads do it, but they should encourage faculty to do so as well. This needs to be done so that people in the department can understand how to effectively work together and communicate, including with the department head.
2. Department heads should continually be doing research for ways to improve their leadership in the department. Reading leadership books and observing other leaders are two ways that department heads can improve their effectiveness as a leader. Another way that department heads could improve their leadership is through working with other department heads. By working with peers, department heads will be able to attain new ideas and an understanding of what works well and what doesn't work well in a department.
3. In order for department heads to have an understanding of their background and prepare themselves for future situations, a self evaluation is suggested for AEE department heads. The self evaluation would have department heads reflect on past events/situations they have experienced and provide information that could be helpful if the situation arose in the future. By completing a self evaluation, department heads not only learn from their experiences, but develop as a leader.

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