

University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Academic Department Chairs' Self-Perceived Utilization of Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Theoretical Model

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



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This study examined the Bolman and Deal leadership orientation preferred by academic department chairs (ADCs) of Educational Leadership or Administration programs at member colleges and universities of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). A secondary purpose of the study was to examine how the preferred frame of the chairs varied according to the ADC's gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in their current chair position. Data were collected from 48 ADCs of 74 UCEA public and private member institutions using the Leadership Orientations Survey; a questionnaire that measures leadership behaviors, style, and the overall effectiveness of the respondent as a leader and as a manager. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This study found: (a) the Human Resource Frame is the preferred leadership orientation among ADCs; (b) the second preference is the Structural Frame, the Symbolic Frame was the third preferred orientation, and the least preferred frame was the Political Frame, and (c) there were no statistically significant differences in preferred frames based on personal and professional variables. An additional finding was that all ADCs in this study saw themselves equally balanced as a faculty member and administrator or they perceived themselves as more of an administrator than a faculty member.

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In colleges and universities, up to 80% of decisions are made by academic department chairs (ADCs) (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004); therefore, it is essential for them to have effective decision-making skills in order to successfully serve their institutions. Decision-makers, when faced with uncertainty, may often rely on familiar ways of making decisions, thereby locking themselves into flawed ways of making sense of their circumstances (Bolman & Deal, 2008); such a short-sighted perspective allows for an increase in the chances of missing alternative opportunities for solutions to complex problems within their organization. Limited information is available on leadership relating to the chair position. Bolman and Deal (2008) proposed that managers have an awareness of how they frame situations and how they view the workplace: as a factory, a jungle, a family, or a temple, because this perception can have an effect on how they make decisions. Much of the research reported in higher education on ADCs focused on the responsibilities and stressors of the position. Moreover, gender is a common variable used in leadership studies (Barbuto, Fratz, Matkin, & Marx, 2007); however, the study of the variables on age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in the current chair position have not been extensively researched. An examination of the effects of these variables on how ADCs make decisions needs to be included in scholarship on the chair position, as well as the discourse on practical training in decision-making for chairs. This study adds to the body of knowledge on how the views of those in university department chair positions impact their decision-making. For university preparation programs, this study may provide a basis for recommending leadership training to department chairs. This study provides a deeper understanding of the four frames developed by Bolman and Deal: Human Resources, Structural, Political, and Symbolic, and their application in university departments.

Research Questions

Quantitative research methodology was used to analyze each research question:

1. Which leadership frames established by Bolman and Deal are the most frequently used by academic department chairs (ADCs) of Educational Leadership and Educational Administration programs at University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) member institutions?
2. How does the utilization of Bolman and Deal's leadership frames by academic department chairs in Educational Leadership and Educational Administration programs at University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) member institutions vary by the ADCs' gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in their current chair position?

Method

All data were collected by administering the Leadership Orientations Survey (Self)[®] instrument to ADCs at UCEA member institutions. The data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistics of Independent Samples *t*-tests and Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs). The pooled variances version of Cohen's *d* was also used to examine the existence of any differences in mean scores and the practical implications in the variances.

Procedure

The Leadership Orientations Survey (Self)[®] version was electronically mailed to the population of 74 UCEA member ADCs. Each ADC received, by email, a letter detailing the purpose of the study, a request for participation, a description of the survey instrument, and a link to complete the survey using the online *Survey Monkey* program. The data were collected online and analyzed using SPSS software. Ethical standards were met in conducting the research and reporting the findings. No identifying information was collected.

Instrumentation

Only the *Self* version of the survey instrument was used to collect data from chairs about their own performance. This version of the instrument consists of three major sections to measure *Behaviors*, *Leadership Style*, and the *Overall Rating* of the ADCs effectiveness as a manager and as a leader. The instrument is designed to measure individuals' orientations toward leading through each of the four frames (structural, human resource, political and symbolic) originally developed in the late 1970s by Bolman and Deal. Additional personal and institutional demographic questions were included in the survey with the authors' permission. This instrument has been used in research studies related to leadership orientations in higher education, including: Chang, 2004; Crist, 1999; Eick, 2008; Gilson, 1994; Griffin, 2005; Guidry, 2007; Johanshahi, 1992; Kotti, 2008; Mathis, 1999; Matra, 2007; Meade, 1992; Pritchett, 2006; Probst, 2011); Sy pawka, 2008; Thomas, 2002; Thompson, 2000; Tobe, 1999; Toy, 2006; and Welch, 2008.

Data Analysis Scheme

In the preliminary analysis, descriptive statistics for the overall sample, including the frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation, were computed for each of the leadership frames: structural frame score, human resource frame score, political frame score, and symbolic frame score. The research methodology used to analyze Research Question 1 follows: Cohen's *d* was used to determine if any practically significant differences existed between mean scores of respondents.

Research Question 2 was answered using inferential statistics of Independent Samples *t*-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to answer if any statistically significant differences in preferences by gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in their current chair position existed. The differences in mean scores are significant at a .05 set Alpha level.

Results

Data collection from the *Leadership Orientations Survey (Self)*[®], designed by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal and electronically administered through Survey Monkey, began July 2013 and was completed by the end of August 2013. Of the 74 UCEA member institutions surveyed, 48 academic department chairs of educational leadership programs responded, resulting in a response rate of 65%. From the 48 responses, 3 (.06%) were excluded from the leadership orientations assessment because the respondents skipped the questions in Section Two, *Leadership Style*. The same three respondents, however, submitted demographic information and

were included in the descriptive analysis for the population. In total, 45 (61%) valid responses were used to determine leadership orientations of respondents, while 48 valid responses were used to depict the demographic characteristics of the population. Of the population, 25 men responded (52.1%), and 23 women responded (47.9%).

Regarding the question of age, of the 47 usable responses, all of the men and women ADCs were over 41 years of age, whereas the largest majority were 61 years of age or older.

Respondents were asked how they racially or ethnically self-identified, and the majority of respondents self-identified as White (83.0%). The remainder identified as Black or African American (8.50%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2.1%), and Hispanic or Latino (2.1%). For those respondents who chose *Other* for this item, one identified as “Black/White,” (2.1%), and the other as “Jewish” (2.1%).

The majority (76%) of respondents who answered the question on the number of years have been a faculty member in an Educational Administration or Leadership program reported at least 10 years. Of these, at least 35% have over 15 years of experience in this type of program.

Included in the survey was a question regarding the total number of years the ADCs had in administration in any organization. Of the ADCs who responded, most (57%) had under 15 years of total experience. Twenty respondents (43%) reported having over 15 years, whereas only 8 (17%) reported having 5 years or less of experience in any organization.

Regarding classifications of ADCs, more than half (68%) of the respondents are full professors, whereas 28% are at the associate professor level. Most (68%) of the respondents reported that they have been chairs in their current department at the respondent’s current institution for five years or less. Only 4% reported being in the chair position for over 15 years. Of the remaining 13 respondents, 8 have been in the chair position 6 to 10 years ($n = 8$; 17.0%), whereas 5 have been ADCs 10 to 15 years.

Of the respondents’ number of faculty supervised, 46% reported that they supervise 18 or more faculty, followed by 35% who reported that they directed departments where 12 or fewer faculty were supervised. Also reported, 19% of the ADCs supervised 13 to 18 faculty in their departments.

Additionally, overall, 79% of the ADCs reported that they were either equally balanced as a faculty member and administrator or they perceived themselves as more of an administrator than a faculty member. Only one indicated that he or she saw his or her current role as solely an administrator.

Section One of the instrument, *Behaviors*, provided an overall description of leadership behaviors as self-reported by the population only. The largest number (73%) of respondents to this section of the survey chose the ability to “Develop and implement clear, logical policies and procedures” as a practice they conduct *Often*. Also in *Behaviors*, in the Human Resource frame, 44% of respondents reported on both questions that they “Give personal recognition for work well done” and “Show high sensitivity and concern for others’ needs and feelings” *Always*. Only 1 participant (2%) reported being a highly participative manager *Occasionally*.

Included in *Behaviors*, the Symbolic frame indicated that the ability to “Generate loyalty and enthusiasm” scored the highest percentage (61%) of *Often* users. The second highest scores in this section were tied between “Communicate a strong and challenging sense of vision and mission” and “Serve as an influential model of organizational aspirations” with 57% of the respondents reporting *Often* exhibiting this behavior. Only one respondent (2%) reported to *Never* being “highly charismatic.” Incidentally, this is the only reported *Never* answer from any respondent in this section on *Behaviors* in regard to any of the four frames.

Estimating Practical Significance

Effect sizes range from 0.0 to 2.0; the closer the effect size is to 2.0, the larger the difference is in the scores. Overall, in each of the sections where a Cohen's *d* was used to further examine the level of significance in the reported differences in mean scores, a medium effect was indicated; however, there was a low standard deviation only slightly over one step from the mean in all areas. This dispersion showed that the individual scores of ADCs in each section of the study were closely grouped and indicated similar responses and rankings to the questions in the survey.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked how the frame preferences varied by the ADC's gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and years of experience in their current chair position.

The Independent *t*-test analysis was used to determine if a difference exists in the mean score of the two groups, men and women. There were no statistically significant differences in preferred frames based on the gender. There were also no statistically significant differences in preferred frames based on the racial or ethnic identification (White or non-White).

To test if there were any statistically significant differences in the mean scores of each frame by age groups, a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted by dividing the population into age groups. There were no statistical significant differences between the mean scores of the age groups in the study.

An Independent Samples *t*-test analysis was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the equality of variance of those who had been in their current position of academic department chair for five or fewer years, and those who have been in their current position as academic department chair for six or more years. There were no statistically significant differences in preferred frames based on the years in current position.

In addition, an Independent Samples *t*-test was used to compare scores between those ADCs who had up to 10 years of total administrative experience in any organization and those ADCs who had accumulated more than 10 years of total administrative experience in any organization. No statistically significant difference was found between the scores of the two groups.

Relating to participants' overall effectiveness as a manager, of the 45 responses, all participants rated themselves to be at least in the middle 20% of overall effectiveness as a manager when compared to other individuals they have known with comparable experience and responsibility. Of the 45 participants, 31 (69%) rated themselves in the top 20% of overall effectiveness as a manager.

The 45 participants were also asked to rate themselves on overall effectiveness as a leader when compared to other individuals they have known with comparable experience and responsibility. Regarding effectiveness as a leader, 37 (82%) rated themselves in the top 20%, whereas 8 (18%) participants rated themselves in the middle 20%. None of the participants responded that they were in the bottom 20%.

An Independent Samples *t*-test was used to compare the mean scores of males and females to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the gender groups. Both genders rated themselves higher in overall effectiveness as a leader than how they rated themselves on overall effectiveness as a manager.

Of the four variables, no statistically significant differences were found to signal variances in the utilization of the leadership frames by ADCs in (UCEA) member institutions personal or professional variables.

Additional Findings

An additional question in the survey asked ADCs to indicate the level he or she saw himself or herself as an administrator and/or a faculty member in their current role as department chair. All 48 respondents reported that they, at a minimum, saw themselves equally balanced as faculty and administrator or perceived themselves as more of an administrator than a faculty member. None of the respondents saw themselves solely as a faculty member, and only one respondent indicated that he or she perceived the chair position as solely an administrator position.

Discussion

The results of this study are in accordance with previous research conducted on leadership frames; the Human Resource frame tends to be the leadership orientation that most administrators perceive as their preferred frame and also as the leadership behaviors they exhibit the most (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Guidry, 2007; Kotti, 2008; Palestini, 1999; Probst, 2011, Sypawka, 2008; Welch, 2002). The research in this study and the literature for this research suggested that regardless of gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, or the number of years in the chair position, the respondents preferred the Human Resource Frame (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Guidry, 2007; Kotti, 2008; Palestini, 1999; Probst, 2011; Sypawka, 2008; Welch, 2002). As in previous studies, the second preference for participants in this study was the Structural Frame (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Probst, 2011). One possible cause for this phenomenon could be as researchers Bolman and Deal (1992) and Bensimone (1990) pointed out, that the less experienced an administrator is, the more likely he or she will revert to operating within the Human Resource and Structural Frame. The least preferred frame was the Political Frame, which is in accordance with the literature (Guidry, 2007; Kotti, 2008; Palestini, 1999; Probst, 2011; Welch (2002).

The composition of the responding ADCs was consistent with the data on age, race, and rank of studies on faculty and administrative positions in higher education. As the literature stated, in 2004, the findings of a national study showed that chairs were 96% White, 3% Asian, and only 1% Black (Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Wolverson 2004). In over 20 years, the only visible growth is in the increase of women in the chair position. The biggest disparity in the responding group, although in keeping with the literature, was in the racial component of the chairs – minorities were less than 8% of those who responded.

In this study, all of the respondents were at least 41 years of age and the number of men (52%) and women (48%) were closely split. Research suggested that many administrators in higher education are 40 years of age or older (Brower & Balch, 2005; Carroll & Wolverson, 2004; Mills, 2006). Carroll (1991) suggested that chairs are about 10% women.

The largest group of chairs in this study reported being new to the position, having only been in this role for five or fewer years at their current institution. They are new to the chair position, but 73% surveyed reported having a faculty career that spans 10 or more years. The next largest group reported that 24% of the chairs had 10 or fewer years experience as faculty in an education program. As the literature predicted, 71% of the chairs are full professors, and 29%

are at associate professor rank. None of the respondents reported being a lower rank. This is also in line with the literature which suggested that due to the nature of the chair position, for legal reasons, chairs are often at higher ranks and tenured in institutions (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004).

Walzer (1975) found that over 83% of chairs viewed themselves as faculty members and not as administrators; but, in this study only 19% viewed themselves as more of a faculty member than an administrator. The largest group of respondents (44%) considered themselves to be equally balanced as a faculty member and an administrator and the second largest group (35%) viewed themselves as more of an administrator than as a faculty member. Only one chair reported that he or she viewed the chair role as solely an administrator (2%). This result aligned with Carroll and Wolverton (2004), who stated that less than 5% of will define their role as exclusively.

Additionally, this research study also focused on demographic variables (gender, age, racial/ethnic identification, and the years of experience in the current chair position) and how they might relate to the preferred frame and leadership behaviors exhibited by academic department chairs. The results of this study showed that no statistically significant differences were found between the scores of the respondents by any of these variables. This finding is consistent with the research of Kotti (2008) and Guidry (2007). However, Palestini (1999) did find a difference in how men reported themselves as being more Structural more than the females. Both Palestini (1999) and Sypawka (2008) found that number of years in the administrative position showed no significance.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are that the surveyed individuals hold academic department chair positions at UCEA member institutions; therefore, findings of this study are not intended to be generalized to other categories of schools or administrators. As with self-rating instruments in general, but specifically as it relates to the use of the Leadership Orientations Survey (Self)[©] instrument in this study, Bolman stated, “the instrument’s reliability is high but the validity is not so high,” and “Self-ratings of leadership tend not to be highly valid, and the forced-choice nature of the instrument creates limitations as well” (leebolman.com, n.d.). Bolman and Deal (1992) stated that the validity of the instrument is a limitation because it depended on the respondents to rate themselves honestly and accurately. Bensimone (1989) stated that in studies on higher education Presidents that, self-ratings in the Human Resource Frame are often inflated by respondents. Another limitation was that ADCs often return to their full-time roles as faculty members making the identification of UCEA ADCs at the time of the study difficult.

Recommendations for Further Research

As indicated by the findings of this study, future research on leadership frames in higher education can benefit from these recommendations: (1) The research indicated that most academic department chairs often rely on the Human Resource and Structural frames; thus, a study of the attitudes and opinions of new chairs compared to chairs within retirement range could provide insight into attitudinal shifts, and (2) a qualitative study giving voice to administrators’ reasoning for how they manifest their preferred leadership frames could provide a better understanding of ADCs’ decision-making.

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