

The Perceived Leadership Behaviors and Practices of Selected Scholars

Krysti L. Kelley, Oklahoma State University
Joelle Futrell, Oklahoma State University
Marshall A. Baker, Oklahoma State University

456 Agricultural Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-8251
bakerma@okstate.edu

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Introduction/ Need for Research

In 1996, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI, 1996) stressed the importance of leadership development on college retention and success. Furthermore, students who were identified as leaders and honed leadership skills during their college years outperformed their peers academically and in securing a job after graduation (HERI, 1996). Carter and Spontanski (1989) found that students who received formal leadership training exhibited more desirable employability skills. The McKnight Scholars Leadership Program at Oklahoma State University seeks to identify, equip and empower students to be leaders on campus and in their home communities (McKnight Scholars, 2016). Scholars are trained through leadership development coursework and experiences. In the past, this has been done through the Student Leadership Challenge curriculum. The Student Leadership Challenge outlines five practices of exemplary leadership: model the way, inspire the shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2014). The Student Leadership Practices Inventory 360 (SLPI) provides students with 360-degree feedback in all five of these practices from themselves as well as mentor observations and allows for introspection of their current behaviors and actions (Posner, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to analyze scholars' 360 feedback for their use of the five practices of exemplary leadership and compare their feedback to the national college student SLPI averages. The following research questions were used to address the purpose of the study:

RQ1. What are the scholars' perceived frequencies of their use of the five practices of exemplary leadership?

RQ2. What are the observers' perceptions of the scholars use of the five practices of exemplary leadership?

RQ3. How do the McKnight Scholars compare to the national average for use of the five practices of exemplary leadership?

RQ4. What are the differences between scholar perceptions and mentor perceptions of frequency of use for the five practices of exemplary leadership?

Theoretical Framework

The social change model of leadership (SCM) served as the theoretical framework for this study (HERI, 1996). This framework describes leadership as a "purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive change" (HERI, 1996, p. 9). SCM outlines the relationship between individual, group and community values (HERI, 1996). The McKnight Scholars Leadership Program works to develop all three components of this model and used the Student Leadership Challenge curriculum to focus on the development and understanding of individual values. SCM associates three critical elements with individual values: collaboration, congruence and commitment (HERI, 1996). This framework states that the outcome should be recognition of behaviors and change over time (HERI, 1996).

Methodology

This census study included the McKnight Scholars enrolled in the McKnight leadership course taught in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 ($n=50$). The Student Leadership Practices Inventory 360 was used to measure perceived use frequency for 30 behaviors; six behaviors in each of the five practices of exemplary leadership. At the beginning of the course, students rated their perceived frequency on a likert type scale ranging from 1 (rarely) to 5 (very frequently). Scholars asked observers such as peers, mentors, superiors, etc. to also rate their frequency for the five behaviors. The five leadership practices on the Student Leadership Practices Inventory 360 have

Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities for leaders (self) between .814-.900 and for observers between .855-.921 (Posner, n.d.).

Results/ Findings

As seen in Table 1, McKnight Scholars identified their use frequencies for three of the five practice at above the national average: Model the Way ($M=22.92$, $SD= 3.02$, $\Delta= 0.8$), Inspire a Shared Vision ($M=21.34$, $SD= 3.54$, $\Delta= 0.16$) and Encourage the Heart ($M=24.06$, $SD=3.69$, $\Delta= 1.35$). McKnight Scholars' observers rated scholars above the national average in all five of the practices. In response to research question four, the differences between the students' self-perception and that of the mean observer score were as follows: (a) -2.96 – Model the Way, (b) -3.79 – Inspire a Shared Vision, (c) -3.20 – Challenge the Process, (d) -1.96 – Enable Others to Act, and (e) -1.55 – Encourage the Heart.

Table 1

McKnight Self and Observed Practice Frequencies Compared to the National Average

	Self					Observer				
	McKnight		National		Δ	McKnight		National		Δ
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Model the Way	22.92	3.02	22.12	3.30	0.8	25.88	1.46	24.05	3.92	1.83
Inspire a Shared Vision	21.34	3.54	21.18	4.03	0.16	25.13	1.83	23.97	4.24	1.16
Challenge the Process	20.76	3.76	21.51	3.71	-0.75	23.96	1.92	23.69	4.19	0.27
Enable Others to Act	23.84	2.82	24.00	3.07	-0.16	25.76	1.83	25.30	3.66	0.46
Encourage the Heart	24.06	3.69	22.71	4.05	1.35	25.61	1.97	24.22	4.41	1.39

Conclusions

For each of the five practice frequencies, the McKnight self and observed scores are higher than the national average in all but two combinations, Self—Challenge the Process and Self—Enable Others to Act. Noting the change in means between the students' self-perception and national averages, the largest difference is in the practices of Encourage the Heart and Model the Way. This pattern repeats when comparing the mean observer scores to the national averages, except at a larger magnitude. Overall, the mean observer scores are higher than mean self-perception scores for each of the five practices.

Implications/ Recommendations/ Impact on Profession

As the McKnight self-perception and observer scores are higher than the national average, perhaps the individual values outlined in the SCM are positively developed through the SLC. However, as 360 evaluations were completed early in the college career of the scholars, self-perceptions and observer scores could have been influenced by participation at the high school level. Thus, further evaluations must be completed to determine if individual values develop as a result from curriculum or change of environment. Further 360 evaluations should include observers from the scholars' collegiate experiences and should be compared against previous observer scores. This study presents further implications for the profession as students who understand and are trained on their leadership skills are apt to experience higher rates of college engagement and retention, as well as employability (Carter and Spontanski, 1989; HERI, 1996). Additionally, multiple perspective evaluation could be utilized in other areas of the profession to offer a multi-faceted picture of student teacher and communicator performance.

References

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