

Exploring Minnesota FFA Regional Officers' Attitudes and Motivating Factors to Lead

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Introduction and Need for Research

The National FFA has a mission of developing premier leadership in students (National FFA Organization, 2024). Leadership positions are one of many avenues for FFA members to develop and serve as leaders. Minnesota utilizes regional officers to assist in providing quality leadership experiences on a more local level, such as chapter visits (Anderson & Kim, 2009). While work has been done evaluating the impact of leadership education in the classroom (Morgan et al., 2013) and with FFA members on a local, state, or national level (Kagay et al., 2015; McKim et al., 2017; Ricketts et al., 2004; Rosch et al., 2015), little has been done to specifically investigate officer perceptions and experiences, especially for those holding positions between the local and state levels. With the increased diversity of member backgrounds and needs within the National FFA Organization, and the increased bandwidth for regional officers to individually reach more students throughout the year than state officers in many states, it is critical to understand the background and philosophies of these leaders who may pursue future roles within the organization or the agricultural industry. The purpose of this study was to examine leadership perceptions and FFA-related leadership activities, referred to as motivating factors, which contributed to regional officers' decision to serve as a 2024-2025 Minnesota regional officer. Objectives included: 1) to identify student perspectives and backgrounds relating to leadership and 2) to evaluate student perceptions related to their potential to influence as a regional officer.

Theoretical Framework

Keating et al. (2014) "Ready, Willing, and Able" to lead model serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Their framework identifies the three tenets which influence a student's leadership ability as being ready to lead (leadership self-efficacy), willing to lead (leadership motivation), and being able to lead (possession of leadership skill) (Keating et al., 2014). As such, an FFA member who is pursuing a leadership role above the chapter level will need to have some degree of self-confidence, some interest to lead, and some inherent ability to lead and serve as a role model for others. While the degree to which members possess and demonstrate these items may vary, regional officers are provided with additional training and resources throughout the year as a way to influence and maximize their leadership potential. Instrument questions were designed using the tenets of leadership as identified in Keating et al. (2014) model.

Methodology

As recommended by Creswell & Creswell (2018), an expert panel-reviewed questionnaire consisting of demographic, multiple choice, Likert-type scale, ranking, and short answer items was developed using Qualtrics and provided to all region officers attending the 2024 Minnesota Providing Officers with Essential Resources (POWER) conference. Region officers accessed the IRB-approved questionnaire via a QR code and provided consent to participate. Of the 60 regional officers across Minnesota, 56 attended POWER, and 55 completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 98.2%. After data collection, identifying information was isolated from the data, and analysis occurred using a spreadsheet (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Results and Findings

Objective 1 identified student backgrounds along with leadership perspectives and experiences. Of the 55 respondents, 83.6% ($n = 46$) were female, 16.4% ($n = 9$) were male, and they reported an average age of 16.65 years, and having been FFA members for 4.24 years. Only 29.1% ($n = 16$) reported being a region officer prior to 2024-2025, and 100% ($n = 55$) participated in at least

one state-level FFA activity, with 83.6% ($n = 46$) participating in a LDE above the chapter level, 90.9% ($n = 50$) reporting participation in at least one state-level CDE, and 100% ($n = 55$) attending state or national convention. Additionally, 100% ($n = 55$) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that FFA provides them with opportunities to develop their leadership abilities, and FFA helps build their leadership skills. To better understand their leadership philosophies, participants were provided five key competencies as identified by the National FFA officer selection process and asked to rank them in order of most (1) to least (5) important. Region officers identified character as the most important leadership quality (Table 1).

Table 1: *Region Officers' Perceived Rankings of Key Characteristics of Leadership (Obj. 1)*

Item	μ	Overall Rank
Character	2.06	1
Communication	2.35	2
Influence	2.80	3
Knowledge	4.20	5
Team Player	3.59	4

Objective 2 evaluated student perceptions related to their potential to create an impact as a regional FFA officer. Participants were asked a series of questions where they ranked perceptions on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Key data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Region Officers' Beliefs in Their Leadership Abilities (Obj. 2)*

Item	n	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	μ
I recognize a need for leadership in my region	54	0	0	3	27	24	4.02
I can make an impact within my region	53	0	0	0	14	39	4.74
Leadership is intimidating to me	54	10	25	17	2	0	2.20
I am a follower	54	6	12	30	6	0	2.67
I am a leader	54	0	0	8	28	18	4.19

Conclusions and Recommendations

When examining objective 1, it is evident all participants engaged in and saw value in FFA leadership experiences, as 100% ($n = 55$) agreed FFA builds their leadership skills. Participants indicated a variety of experiences they attributed to building their leadership capacity, such as CDEs, LDEs, local activities, leadership conferences, and assisting with fair crop or livestock exhibits. The National FFA Organization (2024) defines leadership as influence; interestingly, this was ranked as the third most important leadership trait. However, as discovered within objective 2, region officers recognize they can make an impact within their region, with 100% of respondents ($n = 53$) at least agreeing and 85.2% ($n = 46$) of respondents identifying as a leader. Keating et al.'s (2014) model supports that students are ready, willing, and able to lead. Further research using this instrument over the course of multiple years may reveal unique trends as additional programs or initiatives are developed. Likewise, additional data using region, district, or area officers from other states can be collected to better understand perceptions and motivating factors of leaders. Future research should link the various opportunities, experiences, or people which have directly influenced one's desire to serve above the chapter level through interviews or focus groups. This questionnaire can also be administered to state officers to better gauge geographical diversity relating to leadership beliefs and engagement at the state level.

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