

Assessing Leadership Styles and Organizational Culture Within Kentucky Parks and Recreation Departments

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between park and recreation directors' leadership styles and organizational cultures existing within organizations. Researchers have reported that leaders of organizations should make maintenance of culture a high priority (Schein, 2004; O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989). Leaders affect organizational culture by creating shared visions, correcting inappropriate behaviors, opening lines of communication, and integrating and educating new employees (Burns, 1978; Ruggieri & Abbate, 2013). For this study, relationships were assessed between park and recreation directors' leadership styles and the organizational culture behaviors of professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and self-efficacy based upon the perceptions of park and recreation department employees. The data collection instruments used in this study included The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X (Avolio & Bass, 2004) and The Culture Triage Survey (Phillips & Wagner, 2003). Participating departments were identified based upon information obtained from the Kentucky Recreation and Park Services Study (2007-09). A bi-modal method of data collection was used to administer the survey to participants. One hundred thirty-four of 479 surveys were returned for a response rate of 28 percent. The organizational culture variables were found to be significantly related to the transformational leadership behaviors (individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and attributed idealized influences). The organizational culture variables were also significantly related to the transactional leadership behaviors or contingent reward and active management by exception as well as the passive-avoidant leadership behaviors of *lassiez faire* and passive management by exception. Implications of this study include suggestions that leaders of park and recreation agencies should make concerted efforts to manage the culture that exists in their departments. Also, an attempt to adopt more transformational styles of leadership can serve to benefit the employees, culture, and department as a whole.

Key Words: Collegiality, efficacy, leadership, organizational culture, park and recreation, collaboration, and relationship

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Introduction

Research on leadership has been an attractive topic for researchers over the past several decades (Taylor, 1915; Maslow, 1943; McGregor, 1960; Bennis, 1967; Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Lowe & Gardner, 2000; Yukl, 2006). These studies reveal the importance of organizational leadership and serve to link aspects of employee satisfaction, productivity, and commitment in contemporary organizations. Research on organizational culture has also become an important avenue for understanding organizational behavior and how this affects the growth and development of staff (Schein, 1990; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Greenberg, 2001; Wagner & Copas, 2002).

Research on these topics in the field of park and recreation administration could help park directors and administrators to more effectively manage their organizations. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between park and recreation directors' leadership styles and the organizational culture of departments. As parks and recreation departments become more diverse and serve a more diverse population, it has become necessary for leaders of these organizations to become skilled in the management of the cultures that exist in their organization and understand how this culture is affected by the leadership they provide (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992).

Leadership-related research has been a popular topic in recent decades. Burns (1978) introduced the concept of transformational leadership while examining U.S. political leaders. He found that a transformational leader causes followers to develop personally and seek personal growth and awareness. These leaders change an individual's value system by identifying the existence of common goals between the organization and employee. These leaders also actively engage with followers by getting them to work in a collaborative manner and encourage employees to identify organizational goals and visions beyond just the employees' self-

interest (Ruggieri & Abbate, 2013).

The operational mode of a transformational leader can cause followers to seek rewards within themselves and can facilitate the followers' personal growth and self-awareness. Transformational leadership seeks out and promotes the motives, goals, and needs of employees while assisting employees in achieving those needs or goals. This leadership also uses the employees' goals to advance the organizations goals and improve effectiveness of the organization (Burns, 1978).

Transactional leadership is more traditional in that leaders approach employees with the intent of exchanging one thing for another (i.e., work for pay/promotion). Bass and Avolio (1994) stated that transactional leadership crossed the line into effective leadership if there was active management by exception and if the leader constructed an environment of worker satisfaction and higher productivity. Instead of attempting to transform followers, transactional leaders seek to exchange something the employee wants or desires for a higher level of work performance.

Laissez-faire leadership refers to a leader that does nothing regardless of what the employees are doing (Bass, 1985). This "hands-off" approach lends little or no support to the employees and remains in the background allowing employees to prescribe their own work methods. Laissez faire leadership describes passive leaders who are reluctant to influence subordinates or give direction. These leaders also refrain from group decision making to a large extent and generally abdicate their leadership roles to others. As a result, employees are provided with considerable freedom of action and self-direction that can maximize the employees' power and minimize the power of the leader (Deluga, 1990).

Another area of importance when considering employee satisfaction and effectiveness is the culture that exists in the workplace or organizational culture. Culture has become

an important aspect in the study of organizational behavior as well as the effect leaders have upon the culture that exists in organizations. Organizational culture plays an important factor in determining how well individuals fit into the organizational context.

Schein (1985) defines culture as:

A pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered, or redeveloped by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 1985, p. 9).

Organizational culture is a system of shared meanings where employees have a common way of viewing events and objects (Shiva & Suar, 2012). Wagner (2006) described "school" culture as shared experiences both in and out of school (traditions and celebrations), a sense of community, and of family and team. Healthy organizations typically display and encourage open and honest communication among employees, show an abundance of humor and trust, and have leaders who provide tangible support to employees. Wagner also stated, "people in any healthy organization must have agreement on how to do things and what is worth doing" (p. 41). Wagner found that three "culture behaviors" provide insight into the overall culture of the schools. These were professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and efficacy/self-determination.

Phillips and Wagner (2003) suggested "professional collaboration is the degree to which staff members work together to resolve professional issues, and to encourage and inspire each other" (p. 5). Professional collaboration is dependent upon communication lines remaining open, inclusive behavior being adopted, and convergent communication strategies being encouraged by leaders.

Phillips and Wagner (2003) described

affiliative collegiality as "relationships between all members of the school or [work] community demonstrating harmony, respect, mutual support, and enjoyment of each other's company" (p. 5). According to Schein (1990), organizations are constantly concerned with the degree of "fit" employees have with the company. Severe consequences could result when new employees fail to understand or learn the culture of the organization into which they have been hired. As organizations and communities become more diverse, it becomes increasingly important for leaders to manage employee fit and collegiality.

Sometimes the culture and value system of organizations clash with culture and values of the individuals employed to work for the organization. Phillips and Wagner (2003) described self-efficacy as "staff members working to improve their skills as true professionals, and not because they see themselves as helpless members of a large, uncaring bureaucracy. They are acting from their own choices with a sense of responsibility for the community" (p.7). Culture and value differences between the organization and the employee can also have a tremendous effect upon the efficacy of employees. Commitment to the organization, job satisfaction, and work performance often decrease when employees perceive a difference between the organization and themselves in regard to culture and values (Sheridan, 1992). The culture and success of employees are often influenced by the values of the leaders of the organization. Successful leaders are considered to possess strong or inspiring values. (Graber & Kilpatrick, 2008).

Researchers have found that leaders of organizations should make maintenance of organizational cultures a high priority (Greenburg, 2001; Schein, 1985; Wagner, et.al., 2002). The cultures that exist in organizations affects employees by excluding/including individuals based upon perceived differences, making use of divergent/convergent communication, and

use/avoidance of collaborative efforts to solve problems (Greenburg, 2001; Smissen, et.al. 2005; Wagner, 2006). Successful leaders can have a positive effect on the culture by creating shared visions, correcting inappropriate behaviors, keeping lines of communication open, and integrating/educating new employees into the culture (O'Reilly, et.al. 1989; Smissen, et.al., 2005; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

Organizational culture is a collective phenomenon resulting from the interaction of employees and the sharing of beliefs that tie individuals in an organization together over time (Giberson, et.al. 2009). Frederick (1995) stated that leaders of organizations are the managers of organizational culture. This culture generally exists as a direct result of the values management holds and how that is projected onto employees. He described toxic cultures as places where negativity dominates conversation, interactions, and planning. Strong, positive cultures, on the other hand, were described as places where staff shares a sense of purpose and interpret the meaning of organization events (Schein, 2004).

Wallace and Weese (1995) found that organizations led by high transformational leaders were more likely to engage in culture building activity of attaining goals than were low transformational leaders which highlights the importance of organizational harmony. Results also indicated that organizations led by high transformational leaders were more likely to have strong organizational cultures and as a result positively influence organizational effectiveness. Transforming leadership results in mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders. It may also convert leaders into moral agents (Spinelli, 2006). Effective leaders display self-sacrificial behavior fostering group cohesiveness, team identification, and efficacy in goal attainment. These leaders are viewed by followers as charismatic, effective, and legitimate (Ruggieri & Abbate, 2013).

Parks and recreation directors should

pay very close attention to the leadership they provide to the organizations they are responsible for leading. Utilizing transformational, transactional, and laissez faire leadership can have a tremendous impact upon the culture that exists within the parks and recreation departments. This culture, in turn, can affect employee collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy in a positive or a negative way. It is imperative that parks and recreation leaders not leave the cultures of their organizations to just happen. This culture needs to be managed and developed to promote collaboration and collegiality among employees as well as a health self-worth for each employee. Leaving cultural development to just happen is irresponsible and could be detrimental to the department.

Methods

This study examined relationships between directors' leadership styles and three variables of Organizational Culture Health (professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and efficacy). Participating recreation departments were identified based upon the Kentucky Recreation and Park Services Study (2007-09). For the purpose of this study, the researchers contacted only departments that reported having at least 20 full-time employees on staff. Eight departments were identified as meeting this criteria. Two parks and recreation departments agreed to participate in the study. Surveys were mailed/emailed to 479 potential respondents, of which 134 surveys were returned (28%).

Table 1 illustrates the Bi-Modal Method utilized in conducting the data collection for this research (Frazee, et al., 2003; Schaefer & Dillman, 1998). The Bi-Modal Method refers to using two methods of contacting potential respondents (email and mail). E-mail pre-notification letters were sent to full-time employees with e-mail addresses followed by an electronic survey link. Non-respondents and employees without an identified e-mail address were mailed paper

Table 1*Bi-Modal Research Method*

| Contact | Day | Method | Mode |
|---------|-----|--|--------------|
| 1 | 1 | Request for volunteer agencies sent to Directors | E-mail/Mail |
| 2 | 7 | Pre-notification letter sent | E-mail |
| 3 | 10 | Survey packet sent to all e-mail addresses | E-mail/Web |
| 4 | 13 | Thank-you/reminder sent to non-respondents | E-mail |
| 5 | 17 | Survey packet sent to non-respondents | Mail |
| 6 | 21 | Thank-you/reminder sent to non-respondents | E-mail/ Mail |
| | 31 | Data collection ended | |

copies of the survey and follow-up reminders.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X (MLQ5X) was used to determine the leadership styles of park and recreation directors. The instrument measures the degree to which leaders exhibit transformational and transactional leadership and the degree to which their followers are satisfied with a leader and the leader's effectiveness. The six-factors of the MLQ 5X are charisma/inspirational, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, active management-by-exception, and passive avoidant. The version used in this study consisted of 45 questions measuring transformational leadership, transactional leadership, non-transactional leadership styles (passive, avoidant), and outcomes of leadership (effectiveness). The revised MLQ 5X has strong reliability and validity and has been used extensively in research and commercial applications worldwide (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

The Culture Triage Survey (CTS) was originally developed by Phillips (1996). The survey assesses the health of park and recreation departments' organizational culture. The CTS version used in this study was adapted from the School Culture Triage Survey with permission and assistance from one of the survey's creators. Phillips and Wagner (2002) and Wagner and Masden-Copas (2002) refined the CTS after extensive reviews of literature and feedback

from doctoral-level research students, school improvement researchers, and practicing administrators. According to Phillips, "the School Culture Triage Survey has been used extensively as a pre-assessment tool to determine the health of school culture prior to the administration of a full-scale culture assessment with stakeholders" (p. 128). The instrument identifies three significant elements of culture: (a) professional collaboration, (b) affiliative collegiality, and (c) efficacy/ self-determination (Melton-Shutt, 2004). An example of the modification of the original survey follows:

Original Question: Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies.

Modified Question: Staff discuss park and recreation strategies and programming issues.

Both instruments use a 5 point Likert-type scale for purposes of scoring. The original CTS was created for measuring school culture. Modifications of the questions were similar to the example where the researchers took the language away from schools and moved it towards parks and recreation.

Data analyses were conducted using a Pearson Correlation to determine the relationship between leadership styles and organizational culture variables of professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and efficacy. The researchers hoped to answer the following three research questions:

1. What is the relationship between the per-

- ceived leadership style of the supervisor and the professional collaboration of employees of public park and recreation departments?
2. What is the relationship between the perceived leadership style of the supervisor and the affiliative collegiality of employees of public park and recreation departments?
 3. What is the relationship between the perceived leadership style of the supervisor and the self-efficacy of the employees of public park and recreation departments?

Results

The total number of participants was $N = 134$. The largest portion of participants were "36-45 years of age" (34%) while the lowest number of participants were "25 and Under" and "66 and Older" (3% and 1%, respectively). Nearly twice as many males (66%) as females (34%) responded to the survey. The majority of respondents reported being employed at least "6-10 years" (31%).

Research Question 1-Professional Collaboration

Professional collaboration was positively correlated to the transformational leadership variables of individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation at the .01 significance level. (See Table 2). These results support research by Hater and Bass (1988) who found that leaders displaying transformational leadership qualities added to the prediction of effectiveness and satisfaction of employees.

Professional collaboration showed a statistically significant positive correlation with the transactional leadership variables of contingent reward and active management-by-exception. Avolio and Bass (2004) define active management-by-exception as a leadership quality that closely monitors the organization for deviances, mistakes, and errors and then takes corrective action as quickly as possible.

The passive-avoidant leadership variables of laissez-faire and passive management-by-exception showed a statistically significant posi-

tive correlation with professional collaboration. Peterson and Deal (1998) stated it is the responsibility of leaders to identify, shape, and maintain a strong, positive workplace culture that promotes organizational advancement. In order to achieve these, leaders must communicate organizational and expectations to their employees.

Research Question 2-Affiliative Collegiality

A statistically significant relationship existed between affiliative collegiality and the transformational leadership variables of individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation (See Table 2). Chirichello (1999) found school principals who displayed transformational leadership characteristics embraced teachers and their input in order to create a more harmonious work place and encourage collegial activity among teachers.

Affiliative collegiality and the transactional leadership variables of contingent reward and active management-by-exception were positively related. Research by Bass et al. (2003) reported that contingent reward was significantly related to the performance of employees as a unit but not with the cohesion of groups.

Affiliative collegiality indicated a statistically significant positive relationship with the passive-avoidant leadership variables of laissez-faire and passive management-by-exception. Savery (1994) found that when employees viewed leaders as consultative, they viewed management's concern over the welfare of employees in a more positive manner.

Research Question 3-Efficacy

Efficacy produced a statistically significant positive relationship with the transformational leadership variables of individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation (See Table 2). Toshi, et.al. (2000) suggest employees' perception of organizational "fit" can have a tremendous impact upon job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Efficacy and the transactional leadership

Table 2

| <i>Correlational Analysis of Leadership Variables and Organizational Culture Behaviors</i> | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| | Transactional | | | Transformational | | | Passive-Avoidant | | |
| | <u>Cont</u> <u>Rwrd</u> | Act MBE | <u>Indv</u> Cons | Intel | <u>Stim</u> | <u>Inspr</u> <u>Motv</u> | Ideal <u>Influ</u> (A) | Laisse- Faire | Pass MBE |
| Professional Collaboration | .45** | .50** | .56** | .51** | .37** | -.17* | .30** | .51** | |
| <u>Affiliative</u> Collegiality | .53** | .51** | .57** | .56** | .36** | -.09 | .42** | .61** | |
| Efficacy | .46** | .48** | .47** | .52** | .33** | -.17* | .28** | .51** | |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

variables of contingent reward and active management-by-exception were significant positively related. Sheridan (1992) found that organizations have a higher rate of turnover when leaders focus upon work related tasks rather than interpersonal relationships. Efficacy also had a positive relationship with the passive-avoidant leadership variables of laissez-faire and passive management-by-exception. Jordan and Mertesdorf (1994) found that employees had lower levels of satisfaction and viewed the leader as ineffective when parks and recreation leaders share power.

Discussion

This study was one of the first to examine the leadership styles and organizational cultures of parks and recreation directors as measured by park and recreation department employees. Study results suggest employees of park and recreation departments viewed directors' leadership styles significantly differently from the results reported in previous research of large business firms, military organizations, or other large institutions. Jordan and Mertesdorf (1994) found that park and recreation employees viewed supervisors as effective leaders re-

gardless of the style of leadership displayed. The current study found employees were just as likely to participate in culture building activities regardless of the leadership styles displayed by the park and recreation director.

In this study, all three culture variables showed a statistically significant relationship to the transformational leadership variables of individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. Avolio and Bass (2004) defined transformational leadership as a "process of influencing in which leaders change their associates' awareness of what is important, and move them to see themselves and the opportunities and challenges of their environment in a new way" (p. 96). Park and recreation directors displaying transformational leadership behaviors in this study were likely to have employees participating in organizational culture activities of collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy.

Weese (1994) defined individual consideration as leaders' ability to focus upon the individual rather than the group and the personal development of individuals on a case-by-case basis. Ayoko, et.al. (1989) stated that leaders in organizations hold the responsibility to help fa-

cilitate positive interpersonal control and reduce work place conflicts. Employees in this study reflected that they were more likely to participate in collaborative efforts with co-workers when they felt the director treated them as individuals.

Park and recreation department employees also reported more positive feelings of efficacy when they were treated as individuals. This reinforces the findings reported by Sheridan (1992) who found employees were more likely to remain employed at an organization when the leader was focused more on interpersonal relationships rather than work task values. Leaders of park and recreation departments need to keep in mind that employees make organizations successful. Organizational goals may not be met if employees do not understand and believe in those goals.

Intellectual stimulation was defined as leaders who encourage employees to use innovative and creative methods of problem solving (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Leaders who used pressure to get employees to comply with the "way things have always been done" are viewed as ineffective (Jordan & Mertesdorf, 1994; Tjosvold, et.al., 1992). This study found that employees reported higher levels of collegiality, collaboration, and efficacy when the director allowed them to determine their own methods of task accomplishment. Therefore, park and recreation leaders should empower employees by creating organizational visions that incorporate employees' ideas, values, and input.

Results from this study indicated employees felt directors only participated in the charismatic leadership behavior of inspirational motivation. Avolio and Bass (2004) reported that leaders displaying charismatic leadership behavior create a compelling vision of the future and express confidence that organizational goals would be achieved. Employees might go beyond self-interest and consider what is good for the parks and recreation department if directors displayed more charisma. Collaboration

and collegiality might also be increased among employees were directors to show more charismatic leadership. Leaders should utilize charismatic styles of leadership in order to get employees to "buy in" to organizational goals. Instilling organizational pride has been shown to have a positive effect on employee job satisfaction (Ellickson, 2002).

All three culture measures were also statistically significant regarding the transactional leadership variables of contingent reward and active management-by-exception. Tjosvold, et al. (1992) reported that employees were more satisfied with leadership when power was shared. Jordan and Mertesdorf (1994) deferred with the finding of Tjosvold in that park and recreation employees were less satisfied with power-sharing leaders because they desired strong leadership. This may show that employees of smaller, human service oriented agencies may have different leadership expectations than those of larger, commercial organizations. The current research supports Jordan and Mertesdorf's (1994) findings in that employees of parks and recreation departments reported desiring directors who set standards for compliance and measures for ineffective performance.

Findings indicated that collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy were statistically significant related to passive-avoidant leadership. Passive-avoidant leadership does not respond to situations and problems systematically. Instead, these leaders avoid specifying agreements, clarifying organization expectations, and providing clear goals and standards to be achieved by employees. Park and recreation leaders should avoid the use of passive-avoidant leadership because employees could be collaborating in a manner that works against the goals of the director and the organization. The research here found that employees were collaborating, and being collegial, however it did not investigate whether this collaboration was to the benefit of the organization. Directors should strive to keep communication lines

open, encourage open discussion and debate on all levels, and recognize individual employees for successfully completing tasks.

As park and recreation agencies struggle to improve service quality in tough economic times, park and recreation leaders should pay close attention to the leadership being provided and the culture that exists in their organizations. Several research studies have shown leaders who employ more transformational styles of leadership improve employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance (Bass, et al., 2003; Savery, 1994; Yousef, 2000). The research in the current study shows that transformational leadership can also improve employee collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy. Park and recreation leaders should examine the leadership styles being used in departments and determine if they are meeting the needs of employees and the public.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study examined only three culture behaviors that were borrowed from the educational field where they had shown important indicators of effectiveness. Future research should examine the cultures of park and recreation departments to determine what culture behaviors make departments more effective and how they may affect the employees of the department.

This study examined the relationship of supervisors' leadership style and three culture behaviors. The leaders focused on here was the parks directors. Future research could examine other park and recreation leaders of the various sub-groups that exist in most parks and recreation departments (maintenance, programming, athletics, etc.).

This research found that recreation employees were just as likely to participate in culture building activities regardless of the leadership styles displayed by the parks director. This was a surprising finding and was different from what other researchers reported finding in other work settings. Future research should exam-

ine what makes the recreational setting different from other organizational settings and how might this affect the park and recreation administrator.

Another limitation that was of concern was that only two departments were included in the research for this study. Future studies should expand the research and include more departments. Assumptions were made in this study about the leadership and culture of Kentucky parks and recreation departments based upon the data collected from only two departments.

Future research could examine park and recreation departments (or other leisure service providers) in other areas of the United States. This study focused only on Kentucky park and recreation departments that had 20 or more employees. The majority of parks and recreation departments have fewer than 20 employees working for them. However, there are large numbers of volunteers or unpaid laborers who could provide much insight about the culture and leadership of these organizations.

Implications and Conclusion

Relationships between leadership styles and organizational culture should be a primary consideration for park and recreation professionals. Healthy organizations display and encourage honest communication among employees, show an abundance of humor and trust, and provide tangible support to employees (Wagner, 2006). Parks and recreation directors desiring to improve the effectiveness of their employees should pay attention to the culture existing in their departments and the leadership style they are using. It is the responsibility of the leaders of parks and recreation departments to identify, shape, and maintain a strong, positive workplace culture that promotes the advancement of the organizations and its employees. Transformational leaders can positively influence culture building activities by pulling members together and highlighting the importance of harmony among employees.

Organizations expend tremendous amounts of money each year to ensure that employees fit in. New employees must learn the culture of the organization in a positive way (Schein, 1990). Park directors should develop methods that indoctrinate new employees into the culture of the organization so that exclusionary tactics and other destructive behaviors can be eliminated or controlled. Ultimately, the parks and recreation director must focus on and practice positive leadership styles if they are to enhance the culture of the organization and productivity of employees.

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