

## **PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SELECTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IOWA**

Richard I. Carter, Professor  
David R. Spotsanski, Graduate Assistant  
Iowa State University

The need for leadership is becoming a crisis in the business sector of America, according to John P. Kotter (1985), Chairman of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management at the Harvard Business School. Kotter claims that a student can go through graduate school and learn nothing about leading people, yet still receive excellent performance appraisals. As our society continues to grow and change, so will the leadership training requirements of students and adults. Existing leadership needs must be identified to better prepare leaders for the demands of the future.

Youth organizations such as 4-H, Future Farmers of America, and the Boy Scouts of America have long made leadership training an essential part of their program. Hampson et al. (1976) reported that leadership and personal development competencies gained in the FFA activities were perceived as important and helpful traits for success in agriculture.

Harvill (1983) studied the effects of a systematic training program on subjects' ability to communicate and discriminate among four leadership skills. Training improved the leaders' ability to communicate and discriminate among four leadership skills. Training improved the leaders' ability, while the control group stayed the same from pre-test to post-test. McCollum (1979) tested a leadership training course for students in West High School in Alaska. McCollum found that individuals who received leadership training showed an increase in self-esteem and self-concept, leadership behavior, and intergroup effectiveness. The researcher concluded that leadership training should be offered to students so they can develop self-concept and leadership skills necessary to be responsible adults.

Rathbun (1974) looked at vocational clubs to study their relationship with a student's leadership, citizenship, character, willingness to serve, self-confidence, and a cooperative spirit. Active students were perceived by adults to have higher levels of ability in leadership, citizenship, character, responsibility, confidence, and cooperation than less active students. The length of time and amount of participation were the strongest predictors of these qualities.

Leadership training of future agricultural leaders can be provided through instruction, involvement in the FFA, and experience gained in agricultural organizations. The quality of agricultural programs can only improve with the quality of the leadership provided.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

Formal classes in leadership development have been provided on a limited basis in high schools. Leadership and personal development training of students is generally provided through student involvement as an officer, committee chair, or as an active group member in an organization. Are these opportunities effective means for promoting leadership development in students or should we move to more formal methods of leadership training?

This study was concerned with two primary objectives:

1. To assess leadership and personal development levels of high school students in selected schools.
2. To determine differences between selected student experiences and their leadership and personal development levels.

### **Procedures**

A descriptive case study was used in the research design. The population of this study consisted of all high school students (grades 9-12) in three secondary schools in Iowa. The three schools were selected based on size, location, and the existence of a vocational agriculture program. A total of 3437 students, over a three year period, contributed to the data collection.

The instrument used in this study is the result of extensive testing in other research studies. The instrument was developed to measure student perceptions of their personal development and

leadership skills. The survey consisted of a series of statements which were used to identify the student's perception for each of 10 measurement scales. The ten measurement scales used include: group drive, cohesiveness, productivity, achievement, attitude toward group work, degree of attainment of leadership, self-confidence, cooperation, citizenship, and personal development. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability was calculated for each scale. All scales had a reliability coefficient of .70 or above (Table 1).

Table 1  
Reliability Coefficients for Each of the Ten Scales Used in the Instrument

Scale	Reliability alpha*
Drive	.70
Cohesiveness	.85
Productivity	.77
Achievement	.91
Attitude toward group work	.81
Leadership	.73
Self-confidence	.77
Cooperation	.78
Citizenship	.74
Personal Development	.90

\*missing cases excluded

The instrument was divided into four major sections. The first section contained 27 questions which were used to identify student perceptions on group achievement, productivity, drive, and cohesiveness. The second section consisted of 24 questions which were used to indicate the student's attitude toward group work. Part three consisted of 23 questions related to individual leadership, cooperation, self-confidence, and citizenship. The final action of the instrument gathered demographic information related to the student's year in school, involvement as a committee chair, involvement as an organization officer, and the formal leadership training received.

Description of the Ten Scales: The students responded to nine statements for each scale (drive, cohesiveness, and productivity) in section one of the instrument. Drive was computed by having the students indicate their perceptions of the motivation and commitment within their group. To determine a scale score for cohesiveness, students indicated their perceptions of the level of attraction between their group and members. The scale score for group productivity was determined by asking students to respond to statements related to the degree of goal achievement attained by their group. All responses from the previous scales were used to determine a scale score for the level of group achievement.

Section two of the instrument was designed to determine the attitude of the students toward group work. Students were asked to respond to statements related to the feelings and opinions they have about delegating, leading, and working in a group.

In section three, students were asked to respond to statements related to the scales: leadership, self-confidence, cooperation, and citizenship. Responses from all the scales in this section were used to determine a scale score for the Personal Development Inventory (PDI). To determine a scale score for leadership, the students responded to six questions assessing the student's level of leadership ability. The scale score for self-confidence was determined by asking students to respond to six statements assessing the student's level of confidence. Six statements were used to determine a scale score for cooperation by asking students to assess their degree of participation in a cooperative effort. To determine a scale score for citizenship, the students responded by seven statements which assessed their degree of character, citizenship, and patriotism.

Data Collection and Analysis: Instruments were delivered to the schools in the fall of each year and were administered to the students by home-room teachers. Directions for administering the instrument were provided to the teachers. The students were asked to use the following Likert scales for:

<u>Sections 1 and 3</u>	<u>Section 2</u>
1 = Strongly Disagree	1 = Never
2 = Disagree	2 = Hardly Ever
3 = Slightly Disagree	3 = Seldom
4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree	4 = Occasionally
5 = Slightly Agree	5 = Usually
6 = Agree	6 = Almost Always
7 = Strongly Agree	7 = Always

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences X (SPSSX) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics, t-tests and Oneway Anova's were utilized in this study.

### Results

Grand means for each of the ten leadership and personal development scales are reported in Table 2. Students indicated a mean score of 4.79 for group drive, 4.88 for group productivity and a mean score of 4.94 for group achievement. The leadership and personal development scales which received the highest mean scores included: cooperation (5.77), citizenship (5.50), and self-confidence (5.50). Students perceived some measurement scales higher than others and it appears that some of the measurement scales are not perceived as evident in some organizations.

Table 2  
Grand Means and Standard Deviations for each of the Ten Scales

Scales	N	Mean	SD
Drive	3419	4.79	.79
Cohesiveness	3414	5.15	.96
Productivity	3413	4.88	.83
Achievement	3416	4.94	.77
Attitude	3420	5.00	.56
Leadership	3347	5.19	.87
Self-Confidence	3344	5.50	.85
Cooperation	3346	5.77	.80
Citizenship	3349	5.50	.83
Personal Development	3350	5.48	.71

Significant differences were indicated by a t-test which compared perceptions of students who served as an officer in a school or community organization and those students who did not serve (Table 3). Thirty-six percent of the students surveyed indicated they had served as an officer in an organization. Students who have served as an officer rated all of the 10 leadership and personal development scales significantly higher at the .01 alpha level than those students who have not served as an officer. Students who have not served as an officer perceived group drive, productivity, achievement, attitude toward group work and leadership attainment as below 5 on the Likert scale which indicates less than slight agreement on these scales as characteristic of their group. Those students which have served as an officer indicated group drive as the only scale which did not obtain at least slight agreement on the Likert scale.

Significant differences in perceptions of all 10 leadership and personal development scales were indicated by those students who have served as a committee chair in a student or community organization and those who have not. Only twenty-five percent of those students surveyed indicated they had served as a committee chairperson. Mean scores reported in Table 4 indicated students who have served as a committee chair rated each of the 10 measurement scales higher. Students who have not experienced serving as a chairperson indicated a score of less than 5 on the Likert scale on 4 of the 10 scales in this study. These scales included group drive, productivity, achievement, and attitude toward group work. Students who have served as a committee chairperson indicated a Likert score less than 5 on the scale of group drive.

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of Officer and Nonofficer Perceptions for each of the Ten Scales**

Scales		N	Mean	SD	t-value
Drive	Y	1227	4.9407	0.762	8.33**
	N	2159	4.7077	0.794	
Cohesiveness	Y	1223	5.3966	0.864	11.54**
	N	2158	5.0219	0.980	
Productivity	Y	1224	5.0761	0.802	10.06**
	N	2156	4.7809	0.829	
Achievement	Y	1225	5.1371	0.714	11.40**
	N	2158	4.8364	0.776	
Attitude	Y	1228	5.1807	0.502	14.86**
	N	2164	4.9030	0.559	
Leadership	Y	1198	5.5679	0.760	20.27**
	N	2131	4.9860	0.854	
Self-Confidence	Y	1198	5.7028	0.753	10.53**
	N	2129	5.3993	0.873	
Cooperation	Y	1197	5.9776	0.693	11.61**
	N	2132	5.6642	0.836	
Citizenship	Y	1197	5.7325	0.748	12.34**
	N	2134	5.3828	0.847	
Personal Development	Y	1198	5.7336	0.634	16.05**
	N	2134	5.3484	0.717	

Note. Y = Yes, N = No, \*\*Significant at .01 level.

**Table 4**  
**Comparison of Chairperson and Nonchairperson Perceptions of the Ten Scales**

Scales		N	Mean	SD	t-value
Drive	Y	888	4.9226	0.777	5.78**
	N	2496	4.7451	0.789	
Cohesiveness	Y	887	5.3636	0.870	7.99**
	N	2494	5.0831	0.974	
Productivity	Y	887	5.0462	0.793	6.67**
	N	2493	4.8311	0.836	
Achievement	Y	888	5.1099	0.718	7.81**
	N	2495	4.8861	0.775	
Attitude	Y	888	5.1911	0.511	12.43**
	N	2504	4.9373	0.554	
Leadership	Y	867	5.5891	0.810	16.15**
	N	2462	5.0562	0.844	
Self-Confidence	Y	866	5.6832	0.804	7.13**
	N	2461	5.4472	0.848	
Cooperation	Y	866	5.9736	0.720	9.00**
	N	2463	5.7084	0.815	
Citizenship	Y	866	5.7356	0.770	9.91**
	N	2465	5.4275	0.836	
Personal Development	Y	867	5.7345	0.678	12.18**
	N	2465	5.3994	0.704	

Note. Y = Yes, N = No, \*\*Significant at .01 level.

Students who received formal leadership training rated nine of the ten scales significantly higher than those students who have not received formal leadership training. Mean scores reported in

Table 5 indicates all scales were rated higher by the group which had received leadership training. Twenty-six percent of those surveyed indicated they did receive some leadership training. Both groups indicated similar perceptions of the level of cooperation in their group; no significant differences were found. The group of students who have not received formal leadership training rated four of the ten scales less than 5 on the Likert scale. These scales include group drive, productivity, achievement, and attitude toward group work. Students which have received formal leadership training rated the scale group drive and productivity as least characteristic in their group.

**Table 5**  
**Comparison of Students having Leadership Training with those Students who have not Received Leadership Training**

Scales		N	Mean	SD	t-value
Drive	Y	880	4.8653	0.756	3.32**
	N	2495	4.7652	0.802	
Cohesiveness	Y	880	5.2729	0.961	4.24**
	N	2490	5.1137	0.956	
Productivity	Y	880	4.9654	0.828	3.28**
	N	2489	4.8584	0.834	
Achievement	Y	880	5.0346	0.757	4.08**
	N	2492	4.9118	0.772	
Attitude	Y	880	5.0515	0.567	2.94**
	N	2501	4.9878	0.549	
Leadership	Y	861	5.4139	0.852	8.70**
	N	2458	5.1184	0.860	
Self-Confidence	Y	860	5.5854	0.859	3.13**
	N	2458	5.4807	0.839	
Cooperation	Y	861	5.8051	0.853	1.18
	N	2458	5.7660	0.785	
Citizenship	Y	861	5.5863	0.838	3.17**
	N	2460	5.4821	0.827	
Personal Development	Y	861	5.5867	0.742	4.66**
	N	2461	5.4518	0.701	

Note. Y = Yes, N = No, \*\*Significant at .01 level.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The measurement scales of cooperation, citizenship, self-confidence and personal development were rated the highest and may appear to be characteristic of the leadership and personal development which exists in student organizations. The measurement scales of group drive, group productivity, and group achievement were rated the lowest of the ten scales and may suggest a need by students for additional training in these areas.

Students who have served as a committee chair, officer, or have received formal leadership training, consistently rated each of the ten measurement scales higher than students without these leadership experiences. More students should have the opportunity to serve as committee chairs and to assume leadership positions.

Instructional materials should be developed and utilized to enhance leadership skills in all students, especially those students who have not had the opportunity to develop these skills. Leadership skill training in vocational agriculture programs can serve leadership needs of high school students regardless of their career objective. Leadership training can also assist all students in developing interpersonal skills which may be required for employment.

Organizations should utilize committees more often to provide opportunities for students to serve in leadership roles. Leadership training should be provided in the areas of group drive, productivity, and group achievement to improve awareness and benefits of these areas when working in groups.

References are on page 40