

Leadership Programs, Discourses, and Participants' True Sense of Self

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Abstract

As the challenges communities and organizations face become increasingly complex and interconnected, leadership has continued to evolve to meet these new needs. This applied research study investigated the norms and assumptions about leadership held by participants in an adult leadership development program. This study also highlights participants' perceptions of the program's impact on their own norms and assumptions about leadership. Based on the Western Indicator of Leadership Discourses, participants reported a near-even preference for eco-leader and therapist discourses. A preference for eco-leadership was highly correlated with introversion, while a messiah leadership was highly correlated with extroversion. Participants also placed a high value on relationships with followers, promoting collaborative environments, promoting committed followers, and not relying on positional leaders for answers.

Introduction

Today's challenges are increasingly complex, requiring a greater reliance on interdependent work. To meet these challenges, the way we approach leadership is also changing. Leadership is increasingly viewed not as the effect of an individual, but, rather, a collective process (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). "While traditional historical teaching points to the 'great man' theory of leadership, it is the marginalized, grass-roots, social movements that often lead and innovate change ..." (Western, 2010, p. 43). These changes are apparent in applied contexts and surface in writings, such as *Leadership in Agriculture: Case Studies for a New Generation*. In that book, Jordan, Buchanan, Clarke, and Jordan (2013) report, "in this rapidly changing environment *effective leadership* is vitally important agriculture's continued success" (p. 4). Moreover, they report, "leadership is intrinsically communal in nature and is also a relationship among participants and collaborators" (Jordan, Buchanan, Clarke, & Jordan, 2013, p. 13).

The *National Leadership Education Research Agenda* identifies a priority for "programmatic assessment and evaluation," noting the need for leadership educators to "be more adept at understanding how to empower the development of those we serve" (Andenoro et al., 2013, p. 9). In the context of agriculture, the leadership programs often work at a state level to develop leaders for the challenges of our modern era. This is accomplished largely through facilitating new connections and partnerships to find collaborative solutions. While the aspirations of agricultural leadership programs are admirable, we need to know more about the programs' ability to promote community partnerships associated with modern leadership challenges and discourses (Kaufman, Rateau, Carter, & Strickland, 2012).

Literature Review

Based on a meta-analysis of leadership from historical, socio-political, and economic perspectives, Western (2008) has identified four discourses of leadership during the past century:

(a) controller, (b) therapist, (c) messiah, and (d) eco-leader (Figure 1). While each was a reaction to the limitation of the prior discourse, they all have their own strengths and weaknesses, and all continue to exist concurrently in varying degrees (Western, 2008).

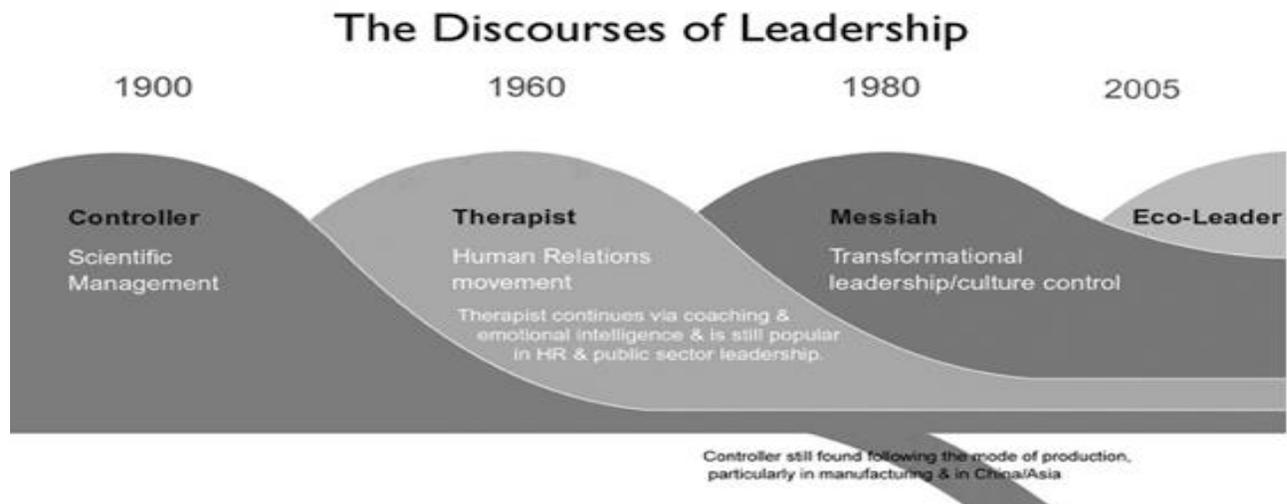


Figure 1. Approximate timeline of leadership discourses. *From Leadership: A Critical Text* (p. 82), by S. Western, 2007, Thousand Oaks: SAGE. Copyright 2007 by SAGE Publications.

The controller discourse dominated the early part of the 20th century, when our understanding of leadership was heavily influenced by the industrial revolution. The first scientific studies of leadership were conducted during the early decades of the 20th century, and the resulting industrial paradigm of leadership emphasized the “preeminence of leaders and the machine-like qualities of organizations” (Wielkiewicz & Stelzner, 2005, p. 236). Typified by Frederick Taylor’s scientific management approach and Max Weber’s Iron Cage metaphor, the controller discourse was the appropriate fit for an era of scientific rationalism and industrial revolution (Western, 2008). In this discourse, followers were relegated to worker status and reduced to “cog[s] in a machine, mirroring standardization and mechanization within the mass production of the factory” of the time (Western, 2008, p. 162). The archetypical controller leader values efficiency and productivity among his or her workers. They expect workers to respect positional authority and power, and to know their place in the hierarchy of the organization. The industrial revolution led to higher salaries and the creation of the consumer-driven economy we still enjoy (Western, 2010). However, faced with the atrocities of authoritarian regimes before and during World War II, society began to question the notion that scientific management would always yield societal progress, and scientific management slipped into decline in many contexts.

Following World War II, the therapist discourse emerged among calls for a more democratic society and a bet on the “principle that ‘happy workers are more productive workers’” (Western, 2010, p. 39). This approach made leadership more people-focused; it reflected the “wider social trends of atomization, self-concern, and the post-war individualistic expectations of being fulfilled, successful and happy” (Western, 2008, p. 163). With this in mind, the therapist leader seeks to maximize production by increasing the motivation of workers through promoting personal growth. While there is an emphasis to encourage workers to create their identity and find fulfillment through work, the underlying purpose is still to maximize productivity and shape

individuals to fit desired norms (Western, 2010). The therapist discourse continues in many people-oriented sectors, such as non-profits and public administration. However, this approach fell from favor in the corporate world, as it could not be scaled up to provide economic benefits in an era of globalization and the global corporation (Western, 2008).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the messiah discourse emerged “with the aim to create strong, dynamic organizational cultures under the vision and charisma of a transformational leader” (Western, 2010, p. 40). This new “covenantal leadership” style drew on the lessons of the more collectivist culture of Japan, which focused on eliciting loyalty and commitment from employees, as well as tying personal success to that of the organization. During this era, the organizational leader became a social character of influence, leading through his or her own symbolism and status (Western, 2008). Business schools, corporations, civic organizations, and churches embraced this transformational (messiah) leader who could offer vision and passionate leadership to create inspired, loyal, and committed followers. However, this discourse relied heavily on “normative control,” which is “self- and peer-control through surveillance and internalization, emotionalism and cultural norms” (Western, 2008, p. 164). This often led to highly conformist, cult-like followings, such as in the case of Enron. The archetypical messiah leader uses charisma and passion to inspire devotion and loyalty from their followers. While the messiah leadership discourse remains strong, the evangelical leaders it has created are sometimes revealed to be a facade, as they have often failed to produce the desired results. Additionally, as the world becomes increasingly complex, interconnected, and interdependent, we can no longer look to heroic individual leaders as the sole source of vision and direction (Western, 2013).

In the beginning of the 21st century we find ourselves facing numerous complex and interconnected challenges: climate change, finite fossil fuel resources, global financial crises, and terrorism — truly adaptive and wicked problems. Western (2010) posits that centralization and control are not, nor ever were, possible. The nature of leadership under the eco-leader discourse is that it redistributes leadership and power from a centralized, hierarchical structure throughout the organization in an attempt to leverage the energy and creativity of the entire system (Western, 2010). In this discourse, the role of leadership is to bring together people, ideas, and organizational structures so that organizations can develop strategies to address adaptive challenges (Allen, Stelzner, & Wielkiewicz, 1999). Leaders within this paradigm must understand that productive leadership ecosystems can be cultivated, but they cannot be created and controlled. The archetypical eco-leader thinks like an “organizational architect, connecting people and creating networks using processes and technology” (Western, 2013, p. 275). They create spaces for others to lead, recognizing that leadership is a collaborative, collective process. They have a “profound belief in ethics, collaboration, diversity and distributing leadership” (Western, 2013, p. 275). Implicit in this new approach to leadership is a greater reliance on everyday individuals to have the skills and willingness to participate in the process of leadership. Collective decision-making, collaboration, and grassroots organizing require specialized skills similar to those described by Silvia and McGuire (2010): (a) understanding social and political contexts; (b) creating work groups to tackle tasks; and, (c) communicating vision to attract followers. All are appropriate and useful in the highly decentralized agricultural community.

The [Agricultural Leadership Development Program] (ALDP) program is an example of an approach to prepare the agricultural community for the challenges of our modern world and to

facilitate new partnerships within the community. The mission of the [ALDP] program is to develop leaders “who can effectively engage all segments of the [State] agricultural community to create collaborative solutions and promote agriculture inside and outside the industry.” More specifically, the program is designed to “develop new partnerships and foster deeper collaboration across [State]’s organizations, groups, and sectors.” The long-term vision is that the [ALDP] program “will provide a sustainable future for [State]’s agricultural community by maximizing potential for successful growth through a system of networking, collaborative decision-making, and development of strong leaders” (ALDP Website). Individuals applying to [ALDP] do so, at least in part, because of an interest in leadership and the development and application of leadership skills. Throughout two years of intentionally designed experiential learning opportunities, program participants are placed in study seminar situations intended to enlighten and challenge their understanding of leadership — what it looks like outwardly, what it feels like inwardly, and what the implications of applied leadership are in various contexts.

Research Objectives

This study had the following research objectives:

- 1) Characterize [ALDP] program participants’ leadership discourse preferences, as measured by the Western Indicator of Leadership Discourses (WILD) questionnaire;
- 2) Investigate relationships between WILD questionnaire and other personality assessments administered through the [ALDP] program; and
- 3) Describe [ALDP] program participants’ perceived impact of leadership development activities on their norms and assumptions about leadership (i.e., leadership discourses).

Methods

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used to conduct this study. In this design, we first conducted a quantitative strand of research and then followed up on specific findings with a second, qualitative strand (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The qualitative strand offers the opportunity to focus on specific results, investigate in greater depth, and explain initial findings. Leadership studies, in particular, benefit from a mixed methods approach because of the complexity of the phenomenon; Stentz, Plano Clark, and Matkin (2012) argue that multiple methodological approaches are, in fact, necessary to understand the complex processes involved in leadership.

Quantitative data were collected by means of several personality assessments. We collected the dependent variable (discourse preference) using the Western Indicator of Leadership Discourses (WILD) questionnaire, which reveals an individual’s underlying assumptions regarding how leadership should be enacted. This 20-item instrument consists of brief statements concerning leadership and then asks respondents to rank responses from number one, the answer you most agree with, to number four, the answer you least agree with. An individual’s score is apportioned among the four leadership discourses (e.g., Controller = 4%, Therapist = 12%, Messiah = 50%, and Eco-Leader = 34%) such that a dominant or preferred discourse is revealed — though it is possible to be equal in all four discourses. The independent variables were measured through a variety of personal assessments, such as the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), Kirton’s Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI), and

the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i).

Simple descriptive statistics were used to summarize and present results. Additionally, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the strength and direction of correlational relationships between assessment scores. Based on these results, participants were selected for the second, qualitative strand because of a strong preference for either controller or eco-leader discourse (i.e. extreme cases) (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2013).

Qualitative data were collected by means of semi-structured, open-ended interviews guided by a researcher-developed protocol. *A priori* propositions guided the researchers to interpret quantitative results in light of supporting literature, which led to specific interview questions. The protocol focused the conversation on encouraging participants to share in their own words their attitudes and beliefs on leadership in the context of the agriculture community. It was comprised of several primary questions:

- (a) Please describe a moment, situation, or experience that has shaped your perspective on leadership.
- (b) How has participation in [ALDP] influenced the way you lead or practice leadership in your personal or professional life?
- (c) How would you describe the way in which an organization should be led?
- (d) When you provide leadership to a group or project, where do you focus your attention and efforts?
- (e) What is the role of followers in leadership?
- (f) Thinking about a leader that you admire, how do they approach decision making in the groups they work with?

Each of these six questions had several follow-up questions that allowed the researcher to probe for better understanding and detail. During interview sessions, the researcher acted as facilitator.

Following the interviews ($n = 9$), the researchers completed whole-text analysis of verbatim transcripts, employing the constant comparative analytic procedures developed by Corbin and Strauss (2008). We used Atlas.ti to code the data and excerpt text using a systematic approach (Ary et al., 2013). We grouped codes into preliminary categories and used the categories to identify broad themes in the data, as they related to the research questions. The results of this qualitative analysis are reported in the form of themes, which are each supported by participant quotes.

Findings

Quantitative Data

Based on the Western Indicator of Leadership Discourses questionnaire (WILD), [ALDP] participants ($n=23$) had a near-even preference for the eco-leader (29.5%) and therapist (29.1%) discourses. Participants next preferred discourse was messiah (24.1%). Least preferred was the controller discourse (17.3%). We observed several significant relationships between leadership discourse preference and other personality assessments (Table 1). Notably, preference for the eco-leader discourse was highly positively correlated with the MBTI score for introversion, as well as the TKI rank for collaborating. A preference for an eco-leader discourse was negatively

correlated with the TKI rank for competing. Additionally, a preference for the messiah discourse was positively correlated with the MBTI score for extroversion.

Table 1

Correlations, means, and standard deviations of variables hypothesized as related to leadership discourse.

Measure	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Eco-Leader	29.52	4.67												
2 Messiah	24.13	5.04	-.302											
3 Therapist	29.13	5.32	-.005	-.253										
4 Controller	17.26	6.86	-.450*	-.326	-.591*									
5 MBTI Extroversion	.61	.499	-.604*	.518*	.073	-.021								
6 MBTI Introversion	.39	.499	.604**	-.518*	-.073	.021	-1							
7 MBTI Thinking	.04	.209	-.210	.427*	-.252	.023	.171	-.171						
8 MBTI Judging	.43	.507	.010	.528*	-.282	-.168	.344	-.344	.243					
9 TKI Competing	2.90	1.29	-.710	.242	-.077	.388	.268	-.268	<i>b</i>	-.082				
10 TKI Collaborating	1.90	1.52	.712*	.104	-.097	-.349	-.198	.198	<i>b</i>	.069	-.742*			
11 TKI Accommodating	1.30	1.06	.034	-.096	-.317	.273	-.162	.162	<i>b</i>	.299	.514	-.513		
12 KAI Score	100.59	20.00	-.063	-.633	.011	.213	-.384	.384	.261	.566**	-.190	.094	-.317	
13 EQ-i Total	101.55	12.17	.163	.066	-.296	.063	-.220	.220	.210	-.119	-.353	.362	-.247	.062

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *b* cannot be computed because at least one of the variables is constant.

Qualitative Data

We identified five themes regarding the impact of the [ALDP] program on participants' norms and assumptions about leadership:

- Positional leaders do not have all the answers.
- Effective leaders value relationships.
- Effective leaders promote committed followers.
- Effective leadership promotes collaborative environments.
- [ALDP] participants value practical, everyday leadership skills gained.

Positional Leaders Do Not Have All the Answers. Most participants reported that before participating in [ALDP] they had a highly leader-centric understanding of leadership. They described leadership as the actions of an individual, often in an official position of authority, who issued directives for followers to carry out. As one participant put it: "In the past, I expected the leader to be the person who came in and made all the decisions and told you what to do..." Another described leadership as a "very much a top-down kind of deal." However, after participating in [ALDP], participants reported a change in their perceptions. They began to see leadership as a collaborative process involving both leaders and followers, and most reported that they no longer saw positional leaders as being capable of, or responsible for, having all the answers. They favored drawing on the collective intelligence of the group to solve problems. One participant said, "I don't assume that I ... have all the answers or the best ideas and...I think there's a lot to learn from others... You risk a lot if you think you can do it all." Another stated flatly, "Organizations that aren't so effective ... lead by positions of authority." Participants also reported the affect of this new understanding was a shift in the role of the leader in the group from directive to facilitative. As one participant put it, "Instead of feeling like I have to be in charge and tell everybody what to do...[I] realize that you know the leader is just guiding the group."

Effective Leaders Value Relationships. As participants in [ALDP] began to see leadership less in terms of positional authority, they identified the relationships between leaders and followers as being increasingly important in facilitating leadership and group success. They also reported becoming more concerned with followers' motivations and psychological well-being, and they saw their role as a leader as central to ensuring the positive experience of the follower. One participant said, "Call it what you want, but an organization is nothing but people. It's a group of people with a common purpose, and whatever the organization is, [it] should be run...in a manner that all those people in that organization matter..." Another added, "The true value of [ALDP] was that understanding of myself and how to relate that to others."

Effective Leaders Promote Committed Followers. Participants frequently spoke of capitalizing on the relationships they forged to promote committed followers who brought their whole selves to the task. The primary means of fostering committed followers was encouraging them to provide input on decisions and ensuring a process in which people felt they had a "say-so." As one participant put it, "I am very conscious now of involving those people that work for me in the process...I don't involve them ... only to make them feel good...but I do it because I recognize it as a needful thing." One aspect of this felt need for input reported by many

participants was the widely reported byproduct of fostering buy-in and motivation among followers:

So I think...it has to be an input from all; simply because if you have input, you feel like you are part of the group, whereas ...if you are told that this is the goal, it's a lot harder to buy into...

For many participants, follower input was not only encouraged but expected. Several equated committed followers to followers who actively participated in the process and challenged the processes when necessary for the good of the group or mission. One participant said, “[A follower’s] role is to support the leader, but not to be a ‘yes man’ for the leader, you know, to support the leader with ideas, thoughts, and opinions.” Another added, “I expect them to ... think for themselves. So if a directive doesn’t make sense, you know, I want them to articulate why it doesn’t make sense.”

Effective Leadership Promotes Collaborative Environments. Nearly all participants reported a greater preference for promoting collaboration in their groups and teams to help solve problems. They saw collaboration as central to creating better organizational outcomes through deliberation and leveraging the collective intelligence of the group. One described her new approach in this way:

We’re all hands-on, doing different things, and one of the most valuable things that can happen is the person who’s doing something...if they stopped and say, “You know what, if we did it this way, it would be a lot faster;” or they’ll, you know, “a lot less expensive,” or it would be, you know, “we would have a better outcome.”

Participants also noted that fostering collaborative environments, again, required a shift in thinking about leadership, from a directive to facilitative role. Many saw part of their new role as encouraging others to take leadership roles: “Anyone can be a leader to one degree or another.” One participant’s description of his role was typical of the group: “I am a leader and other people are leaders, but they don’t know it. And part of my role as a leader is to enlighten other people and enable them.”

[ALDP] Participants Value Practical, Everyday Leadership Skills Gained. Lastly, while this study focused on [ALDP]’s success in challenging the leadership norms and assumptions of its participants, emergent in this research was a clear appreciation for the everyday skills gained, such as better social skills and a deeper understanding of self. One participant said, “We’ve had a lot of opportunities to self-evaluate in [ALDP]. And that was, without a doubt, most influenced process for me on the education side...” Others expressed that [ALDP] had helped them become more confident and better able to articulate their ideas. More importantly, they cite this communication ability as a facilitator of their success in their newfound more collaborative, relationship-focused leadership approach described in the previous four themes. One commented:

I think what...what [ALDP] has done for me... is that they made me more vocal in just ...in certain meetings where I wouldn’t speak at a certain time because I said well, it’s

not important, nobody wants to hear that. Then when you get the confidence to speak up in a very high power meeting, uh, you see that you can make a difference and I think that's part ...part of the relationship.

Another echoed the same sentiment, but added that he attributed much of that growth to his peers in the program: "Peer learning, and watching others become more confident, more skilled, more articulate, ... learning from them, and we shared experience."

[ALDP] participants also saw their increased knowledge of self as not only valuable when communicating a position, but also in terms of increasing character. [ALDP] participants viewed characteristics, such as authenticity, integrity, and honesty, as essential to garnering followers. One commented, "Folk that are being led or needing leadership or whatever are going to look at the leader, see his actions and how he acts and walks...and they will obviously see that and emulate it." Another added that to be an effective leader, one must "have a true sense of self. And that sense of self must be beyond...must be beyond simply skills and abilities but also attitudes and beliefs." For [ALDP] participants, questioning those attitudes and beliefs was a critical aspect of the program.

Discussion

This applied research study examined [ALDP] participants' preference of leadership discourses, as well as the relationships between their leadership discourse preferences and other personality assessments. The study also examined [ALDP] program participants' perceptions of the impact of the leadership program on their preferred leadership discourse.

Research Objective 1: Characterize [ALDP] program participants' leadership discourses preferences, as measured by the Western Indicator of Leadership Discourses

Results show that participants had a near-even preference for the eco-leader (29.5%) and therapist (29.1%) leadership discourses. This indicates both a distributed leadership approach and a focus on followers and relationships. The preference for the eco-leader discourse indicates that participants may conceive of agricultural organizations as "a web of connections, networks that operate like ecosystems" (Western, 2013, p. 245). This has implications for leadership; adherents to the eco-leader discourse believe "organizations cannot be led top-down, for an ecosystem requires nurturing, not controlling" (Western, 2013, p. 245). In this vein, the eco-leader discourse contends that leadership is a collaborative process, rather than the influence of one individual on a group of followers. The preference of a therapist discourse suggests that participants might subscribe to the belief "to run an organization successfully, it's the people you have to focus on, and it's the psychological and emotional that are important, not just managing people as function objects or 'human resources'" (Western, 2013, p. 188).

Participants favored the messiah discourse (24.1%) a close third. This preference indicates participants' may place importance on fostering committed followers. The messiah leader is considered largely synonymous with the transformational leader (Bass, 1985), and is characterized by the ability gain the loyalty and commitment of employees by articulating a compelling common vision and establishing a strong sense of community among employees. The

messiah discourse, too, focuses on individual followers. Rather than viewing a company primarily as a brick-and-mortar structure, such as a factory or an office, that happens to need human resources to operate, messiah leaders instead view organizations socially, “as cultures, and as constructed systems of meaning” (Western, 2013, p. 220).

Lastly, the least preferred leadership discourse was the controller discourse (17.3%). The low preference for the controller discourse indicates participants may largely eschew a view of leadership that emphasizes hierarchical organizational structure, top-down directives, command-and-control style leadership, and the reward of loyalty and obedience (Western, 2013).

These findings are significant because they characterize leaders in the agriculture community and show a significant preference for the still-emergent eco-leader discourse. The eco-leader discourse may be a logical fit for leaders in the agriculture community because its focus on distributed and collaborative leadership approaches may be applicable in the largely decentralized, egalitarian agricultural community.

Research Objective 2: Investigate relationships between WILD questionnaire and other personality assessments administered through the [ALDP] program

We found several relationships between preference for leadership discourse and elements of personality assessments, notably the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Management Instrument (TKI).

A preference for the eco-leader discourse was highly positively correlated with the MBTI score for introversion (Table 2). While there is no literature that explicitly links eco-leaders with introversion, the eco-leader discourse does view leadership as a more collective, collaborate process, which may be preferential to introverts avoiding the spotlight that is so prized by other discourses (Western, 2013).

A preference for the eco-leader discourse was also highly positively correlated with the TKI conflict mode of “collaborating” and negatively correlated with “competing.” The opposite of competing, those with a preference for collaboration learn from team members’ insights, often resolving some issue that would have otherwise resulted in competing for resources (Thomas, 1974). This finding supports Western’s (2013) description of the eco-leader discourse.

A preference for the messiah discourse was highly positively correlated with the MBTI score for extroversion. Messiah leaders are transformational leaders who offer “vision and passionate leadership” to create inspired, loyal, and committed followers (Western, 2008, p. 40). That those who prefer a messiah leadership discourse also tend to be extroverted is consistent with the literature on messiah leaders. Western (2013) writes flatly, “Messiah leaders are usually extroverts” (p. 240). However, until now there has been little empirical data offered to support this assertion.

Research Objective 3 - Describe [ALDP] program participants’ perceived impact of leadership development activities on their norms and assumptions about leadership (i.e., leadership discourses)

[ALDP] program participants identified five broad themes when describing the effects of their participation in the program on their leadership: (a) Positional leaders do not have all the answers; (b) Effective leaders value relationships; (c) Effective leadership promotes collaborative environments; (d) Effective leaders promote committed followers; and (e) [ALDP] participants value practical, everyday leadership skills gained. Embedded in the first four of these five themes is evidence of two important shifts in participants' norms and assumptions about leadership: (1) participants believe leadership is more about relationships than position or title, and (2) participants feel a collaborative approach to leadership processes leads to greater commitment and better organizational outcomes. Each of these shifts is supported by the quantitative data presented in Table 1, which leads us to some important considerations. First, participants reported a shift from a position-based leadership approach to a relationship-based leadership. Several participants reported entering the program with a perception of leadership as being based on positional authority: "very much a top-down kind of deal." However, participants reported a shift toward more collaborative processes that draw on the collective capacity of the group rather than relying on a single, positional leader. This may help explain why participants eschew the controller discourse, which is typified by a command-and-control style of leadership, in favor of the eco-leader and therapist discourses, which focus on distributed leadership structure and a people-first approach.

Second, participants reported viewing relationships with followers with increased importance. Moreover, they increasingly see themselves as central to the followers' motivations and psychological well-being in a group. Participants frequently talk of the importance of input and buy-in; consistent with the therapist discourse. The therapist leader is one "who listens, cares and encourages, and is usually a leader who is liked and admired...this leader takes care of the team, creating a subtle therapeutic dependency, becoming the unconscious 'good father/mother'..." (Western, 2013, p. 213). Oftentimes, though, attention to follower motivation and psychological well-being is for the purpose of achieving the end goals of the leader and organization. Third, participants reported an increased importance placed on fostering collaborative environments. In addition to any increased motivation or well-being of followers, the participants reported a belief that collaboration leads to better decisions and outcomes. This is consistent with the basic premises of the eco-leader discourse.

Fourth, participants reported the necessity of fostering committed followership to ensure increased motivation. The primary means of fostering committed followers was soliciting input and providing an open process for decision making. This is a hallmark of both the therapist and eco-leader discourse; however, each has its own ethos surrounding motivating followers. The therapist leader motivates followers by providing for their psychological well-being and need for fulfillment through meaningful work, but for the purpose of increasing organizational productivity (Western, 2013). The eco-leader, however, solicits input and sets in place collaborative decision-making processes to ensure better decisions; concern for the psychological well-being of follower is also present, but more genuine. With participants reporting a near-even preference for the eco-leader and therapist discourses, it was unclear from which discourse their concern for follower participation comes.

Interestingly, it was the fifth thematic finding related to the value of practical, everyday

leadership skills that alluded to implications for norms and assumptions about leadership regardless of discourse. Indeed, there are aspects of leadership that transcend discourse, yet are nested in skill, experience, and ability to act as a leader. Within this idea of valuing everyday practicality, are findings that the ALDP helped develop interpersonal skills and helped participants gain a better understanding of self and others. Truly, this insight has implications for developing perspective around discourse ethos and allows for contextual flexibility in leadership style.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The preference for the eco-leader discourse indicates that participants may conceive of agricultural organizations as “a web of connections, networks that operate like ecosystems” (Western, 2013, p. 245). This has implications for leadership, because the eco-leader discourse suggests “organizations cannot be led top-down, for an ecosystem requires nurturing, not controlling” (Western, p. 245). In this vein, the eco-leader discourse contends that leadership is a collaborative process, rather than the influence of one individual on a group of followers; and such a perspective is supported by the qualitative themes. Perhaps it is the “behind-the-scenes” approach that makes the eco-leader approach more attractive to introverts.

A preference for the therapist discourse seems to align with value ALDP participants place on relationships. As one shared, “I really think the key is understanding the people that you’re working with.” According to Western (2013), the archetypical therapist leader “listens, cares and encourages, and is usually a leader who is liked and admired, because they understand, praise and support, and stand by their people” (p. 212). Certainly, such a leader is valuable when establishing partnerships and collaborations. As one participant put it, “I am a leader and other people are leaders and they don’t know it. And part of my role as a leader is to help enlighten other people and enable them.”

While the controller discourse may have some value for ALDP participants, they clearly acknowledge the limitations of a positional leader. One participant expressed the sentiment well by sharing, “I don’t assume that I don’t have all the answers or the best ideas and I ... I think there’s a lot to learn others.”

Western’s (2013) four leadership discourses provide a useful framework for assessing leadership development program participants’ views on leadership, and for discussing leadership trends in the agricultural sector. Additionally, Western’s (2013) discourses offer a means for leadership development programs to assess their own inherent discourse preference, and more purposefully develop and evaluate leadership development programs and their effects on participants. Additionally, we recommend that administrators of leadership programs administer the WILD questionnaire to participants at the outset and conclusion of the leadership program. This will allow for better measurement of any shifts in participants’ norms and assumptions regarding leadership. Finally, while this study examined the leadership discourse preferences of 23 participants in one agricultural leadership program, further research should be conducted on a larger sample to more fully explore the leadership discourse preferences of today’s agricultural leaders. A larger sample would also allow for the use of predictive statistics, specifically regression analysis, to potentially use MBTI and TKI scores to predict leadership discourse

preference.

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