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Leadership in Kansas Agriculture: Examining Organization CEOs' Styles and Skills

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Introduction

Agriculture is Kansas' largest industry, employer, and economic driver. Sixty-six agriculture, food, and food-processing sectors together deliver nearly \$65 billion in total economic contribution, about 43 percent of the total economy. The industry employs more than 234,000 people, nearly 13 percent of the state's workforce. More than 21 million acres of cropland and 16 million acres of pastureland comprise 88.9 percent of the state (*Hearing From the Heartland-a*, 2017).

Given that importance, it is significant to note that farm prices are down more than 40 percent since 2013, and U.S. farm income is expected to fall another 8.7 percent in 2017 (*Hearing From the Heartland-b*, 2017). Obviously, farming and ranching are high-risk, highly cyclical endeavors.

Additionally, the U.S. population and government officials are more urban than ever, reducing the agriculture community's political influence. Agriculturists increasingly depend upon their industry organizations to represent them and the rest of rural America before policymakers, regulators, jurists, and consumers in the general public. Those organizations' futures depend on how well they respond to fluid situations and changing dynamics. How their chief executive officers (CEOs) direct the members, leaders, and staff will determine whether the organizations will be able to manage change effectively and efficiently.

Varied studies have supported that firm performance follows leadership changes. "Good leaders enhance firm performance, and bad leaders degrade it" (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008, p. 104). While some contend that attributing organizational outcomes to individual leaders is a "romantic oversimplification" (2008, p. 103), others point out that research consistently has found a relationship between who is in charge and organizational performance. The many alternative theories seem to converge on long-term adaptability and survival.

Demographic traits – for example, age, tenure, functional area background, and educational background – are important aspects of leadership that influence organizational success (Hambrick & Mason, 1984, as cited in Moore & Rudd, 2006). Leaders must understand processes and not just rely on their content expertise to lead people through change in an orderly manner (Jones & Rudd, 2008). Leaders' styles, functions, competencies, and strategies will decide the effects they have on their organizations (Powell, 2007).

In association management, there is a body of knowledge that differs from the for-profit world. While private-sector companies focus on profit, associations have multiple "bottom lines", such as publishing journals, planning meetings, offering certifications, and advocating before governmental bodies (Cook, 2011). The motivations for this project were, within the context of association management's unique challenges and increasing importance to agriculture, the relationships between demographic traits and leadership and between leadership styles and skills.

Style is an aspect of leadership that is well-documented in the literature. If the leadership styles of Kansas agricultural organizations' CEOs are shown to be predictors of effectiveness in those positions, exploring them could guide the evaluation of future candidates for those positions and the training of newly hired CEOs. The organizations may benefit from recruiting leaders with specific styles, but they first must evaluate how the various styles correlate to skills and demographics within the agriculture community.

Additionally, identifying specific competencies could help design leadership-development programs that “prepare individuals to be successful in future leadership positions” and “ensure a large pool of competent leaders ... from which the next generation of leaders can be chosen” (Moore, 2003, p. 8). Finally, being able to explain the relationships between demographics and both leadership styles and skills could help in the recruitment of future CEOs and the training of newly hired CEOs.

This project sought to describe the CEOs at Kansas agricultural organizations in terms of their demographics, the levels of importance they placed on various leadership skills in their roles, and their leadership styles as they perceived them. Kansas agriculture can benefit from it through the preparation, recruitment, and retention of future organization executives. In particular, the project can guide the evaluation of future CEO candidates and the training of newly hired CEOs.

Specifically, answers were sought to the following questions.

1. What leadership styles do Kansas agricultural organization CEOs exhibit?
2. What leadership skills do they deem most important?
3. Does leadership style correlate with skills emphasis?
4. Do demographics (organization experience, CEO tenure, education level, age, gender, and organizational category) correlate with leadership style?
5. Does staff size correlate with either leadership style or skills emphasis?
6. Does skills emphasis correlate with leadership outcomes (as measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire)?

Literature Review

Leaders help their organizations create and execute a vision and prepare people for greater levels of responsibility (Powell, 2007). Competent leaders must focus on contribution, build on strength, set priorities, and systematize decision-making (Drucker, 1967, as cited in Powell, 2007). Above all, leaders must understand the skills needed to execute the organization’s mission, appreciate the needs and interests of organizational members, and approach goals objectively. “Leadership, governance, passion, guidance, and strategic direction are inextricably linked to organizational prosperity” (2007, p. 2).

Effective leadership serves as a solution to the “problem” of combining people’s efforts to promote “success and survival” (Kaiser et al., 2008), which requires coordinating and guiding a group to achieve its goals by getting individuals to contribute willingly to the greater good. Leaders exert influence through decisions about strategic goals, organizational structure, staffing, and policies. Leadership is more about the relationships between leaders and followers than the authority someone has within an organization (Moore, 2003).

Leadership Styles

The recurring theme of either providing structure or nurturing subordinates carries over into many examinations of leadership style, which is the characteristic manner in which an individual leads others. The concept is somewhat vague because each individual’s style is so personal (Moore, 2003). Task-oriented leadership is more managerial and content-focused, while human-oriented leadership is more relationship-focused (De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010).

Certain leadership styles produce certain effects: Structured leaders increase performance, and considerate leaders enhance their subordinates’ job satisfaction and inspire greater commitment (Kaiser et al., 2008). Employee satisfaction is highest when

supervisors exhibit both task- and relationship-oriented leadership; both styles are positively correlated to subordinates' job and communication satisfaction (Madlock, 2008).

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership refers to "the exchange of rewards for effort" (Kaiser et al., 2008, p. 104). Transactional leaders explain their followers' roles and responsibilities then negotiate rewards for good performance and punishments for poor performance. Working within the existing organizational culture, transactional leaders thereby achieve the desired outcomes (Moore & Rudd, 2006).

Transactional leadership often is for "lower levels of performance or nonsignificant change", and it often is ineffective because the leader lacks the reputation or resources to deliver rewards (Avolio & Bass, 2004, p. 22). Constructively, transactional leadership specifies the compensation and rewards that come with successful completion of tasks. Correctively, it focuses on actively setting standards. Passively, it waits for mistakes to occur before taking action. Actively, there is close monitoring for mistakes to occur. The constructive measure is labeled *contingent reward*, and the corrective one is labeled *management by exception* (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Contingent reward. Transactional leaders who employ contingent rewards (CR) clarify expectations, arrange mutually satisfactory agreements, negotiate resources, exchange assistance for effort, and provide commendations for successful performance (Jones & Rudd, 2008).

Active management by exception. When transactional leaders intervene to make some correction, they exercise management by exception, which generally involves corrective criticism and negative reinforcement (Moore & Rudd, 2006). "Active" management-by-exception (MBEA) leaders monitor their followers' performances, take corrective actions when deviations from the set standards occur, and enforce rules to avoid mistakes (Jones & Rudd, 2008).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is an extension of transactional leadership, and leaders are most effective when exhibiting both styles (Moore & Rudd, 2006). Transformational leadership augments rather than replaces transactional leadership in achieving goals (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Transformational leaders combine vision, appealing group goals, high standards, intellectual stimulation, role modeling, and relationships. They also model collective commitment, emphasize group members' similarities, and reinforce shared values and common interests. Doing so helps followers see themselves as members of a larger group instead of as individuals, and the leaders' success depends on their followers' trust (Kaiser et al., 2008).

Transformational leaders also move their followers beyond leader idolization to an energetic commitment to the organization and its goals (Graham, 1987, as cited in Powell, 2007), making their followers more aware of task outcomes and motivating them to exceed expectations. Most important to maintaining progress, transformational leaders teach members how individual efforts actively contribute to organizational achievement.

For an organizational culture to become more transformational, the top managers

must articulate and effect required changes. Transformational leaders imagine responsible organizational change wherein employees are viewed as assets whose more effective use increases long-term organizational well-being. For them, success means both outcomes and how well associates develop into effective transformational leaders themselves in the *cascading effect of leadership* (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Idealized influence. Followers admire and respect transformational leaders who serve as strong role models, have high moral and ethical values, and provide a sense of vision and mission (Jones & Rudd, 2008; Moore & Rudd, 2006). Those leaders exert a lot of power and influence (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Idealized influence is both an effect and a behavior; therefore, it encompasses two scales of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ): *idealized influence (attributes)* (IIA) and *idealized influence (behaviors)* (IIB) (Bass & Avolio, 2000, as cited in Moore & Rudd, 2006).

Inspirational motivation. Transformational leaders clearly communicate high expectations to their followers, increasing team spirit and enthusiasm (Northouse, 2004, as cited in Jones & Rudd, 2008). That inspirational motivation (IM) is one way to encourage followers to imagine success (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998, as cited in Jones & Rudd, 2008). Inspirational leaders articulate shared goals and a mutual understanding of what is right and important (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Intellectual stimulation. An intellectually stimulating leader heightens others' awareness of problems and of their own thoughts, imaginations, beliefs, and values (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Transformational leaders demonstrate intellectual stimulation (IS) when they encourage their followers to be creative and innovative, try new approaches, and challenge existing beliefs and values at all levels (Moore & Rudd, 2006).

Individualized consideration. Transformational leaders display individualized consideration (IC) when they provide supportive climates, listen to followers, and coach or mentor them (Moore & Rudd, 2006). They develop followers through delegation (Northouse, 2004, as cited in Jones & Rudd, 2008). Individualized consideration includes understanding and sharing in others' concerns and developmental needs and participating in acculturation activities (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Passive-Avoidant Leadership

Other management-by-exception leaders do not respond to situations and problems systematically. That style has negative effects on followers, associates, and desired outcomes – similar to a total lack of leadership. Therefore, Avolio and Bass (2004) placed both styles, labeled *passive management by exception* and *laissez faire* (“let do”), together within the passive-avoidant style.

Passive management by exception. Passive management-by-exception (MBEP) leaders do not intervene until problems become serious (Jones & Rudd, 2008). They avoid specifying agreements, clarifying expectations, and providing goals and standards for their followers to achieve (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Laissez faire. Some leaders assume their followers are intrinsically motivated and will accomplish their tasks and goals if left to their own devices (Jones & Rudd, 2008). Leaders exhibit that laissez faire (LF) behavior when they relinquish responsibility, procrastinate, withhold feedback, or make little to no effort to engage their followers (Moore & Rudd, 2006).

Complementary Styles

Some scholars have related the differences between transactional and transformational leadership to the differences between management and leadership (Moore, 2003). From that perspective, transactional leaders manage while transformational leaders lead. In other words, management is concerned with consistency and efficiency through contractual agreements (transactions), while leadership is concerned with adapting to change through empowering others (transformations).

Transactional leadership is based on the exchange of something valuable, and transformational leadership is raising the levels of motivation and morality for both the leader and follower. The two are not viewed as mutually exclusive (Bass, 1990, as cited in Jones & Rudd, 2008). In fact, research has associated higher ratings for both with more effective business-unit performance (Howell & Avolio, 1993, as cited in Avolio & Bass, 2004). Together, they build trust, respect, and a desire to work together toward common goals. An individual generally exhibits both, albeit in varying degrees over time (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

The most effective, successful leaders combine transactional and transformational leadership (Jones & Rudd, 2008), while most people have transformational leadership in mind when describing the ideal leader (Bass, 1990, as cited in Jones & Rudd, 2008). Transformational leadership builds on transactional leadership to produce greater levels of effort and performance, but the reverse is not true (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Good transactional leaders without transformational qualities, therefore, are likely to be mediocre leaders at best.

Leadership Skills

In addition to working with their subordinates, leaders must be able to address unique or vague organizational problems with solutions that will work in the organization's complex environment, requiring them to predict downstream consequences, assess risks and workability, coordinate with various constituencies, and formulate long-term solutions for multiple subsystems. Leaders must exhibit autonomy, risk taking, and ongoing environmental assessment (Mumford, Marks, Connelly, Zaccaro, & Reiter-Palmon, 2000).

The quality of leaders' responses or solutions to problems may depend on whether they have the necessary knowledge and skills. Experience provides skill development and performance, particularly in terms of problem solving and systems skills (Mumford et al., 2000).

There are three primary activities performed by leaders that require skills and abilities: project management, personnel supervision, and strategic planning (Friedman, Fleishman, & Fletcher, 1992, as cited in Connelly, Gilbert, Zaccaro, Threlfall, Marks, & Mumford, 2000). Leaders' performance requires complex cognitive abilities, creative-thinking skills, and social judgment skills.

Focusing on leadership skills emphasizes that leaders can improve, and it shifts the focus from the person in a leadership position to the job itself. Leadership skills could be understood in four general categories (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007). First and central to many of a leader's activities, cognitive skills are related to (a) collecting, processing, and disseminating information; (b) learning and adapting; and (c) logically analyzing various approaches to the work. Second, interpersonal skills facilitate

coordination, negotiation, and persuasion by being aware of, understanding, relating to, interacting with, and influencing others. Third, business skills are those related to the specific functional areas – such as material resources, operations, personnel, and finances – that are the organizational context. Fourth, strategic skills are conceptual and utilize a systems perspective in understanding complexity, dealing with ambiguity, and influencing the organization through environmental scanning, planning, and problem solving.

There are several leadership-skills classification systems, and all of them involve accomplishing work, seeing both the big and detailed pictures, and dealing with others (Moore, 2003). Although some leadership competencies are universal, it also is important to examine an organization's specific needs. While the words *skill* and *competency* often refer to tasks, they also can mean the level at which someone performs them. Competency is viewed either as the knowledge and ability to meet minimum standards or as the characteristics to be highly successful (Robbins, Bradley, & Spicer, 2001, as cited in Moore, 2003).

Methods

To identify the agricultural organizations serving Kansas, three sources were reviewed: (a) the organizations that belonged to the Kansas Agriculture Alliance during the 2014 Kansas legislative session, (b) the 2014 membership directory of the Kansas Society of Association Executives, and (c) the organizations that were represented in the Kansas Department of Agriculture's agricultural communicators and educators working group as of January 1, 2013. From them, 39 groups were identified, representing various constituencies within Kansas agriculture.

Further internet research and e-mail correspondence to confirm the organizations' current staff leaders and contact information resulted in a list of 26 paid CEOs, two of whom led multiple organizations, which served as the population for this project. There were 23 responses from the population, for a response rate of 88.5%.

This project used a three-part instrument, which was pilot-tested with seven agricultural organization employees from outside the population frame before administering it to the CEOs in the project.

To gather information about the participants' leadership styles, the first section was the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5x-Short, which was developed, tested, and copyrighted by Avolio and Bass and published by Mind Garden. The instrument's transactional, transformational, and passive-avoidant constructs have built on earlier leadership paradigms. Such paradigms included autocratic versus democratic, directive versus participative, and task- versus relationship-oriented, which have dominated selection, training, development, and research for more than 50 years. The MLQ is the most widely used measure of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2001, as cited in Moore, 2003). It includes scales for five empirically derived factors of that style: idealized influence (both behaviors and attributes), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

The participating CEOs completed the MLQ Leader Form, which is a self-rating of how frequently they engage in certain types of leadership behavior that research has shown to be strongly linked with both individual and organizational success. Forty-five items identify the key behaviors and measure each of nine leadership scales on a spectrum. Nine other items measure outcomes – extra effort, effectiveness, and

satisfaction with leadership – that are results of leadership behavior. To reiterate, this project belongs to the class of studies in which the leaders themselves completed the survey, as opposed to those in which followers answered questions about their leaders. It follows that the results, therefore, were subject to self-related biases.

To assess how important current CEOs believe specific leadership skills are, the second section was an assessment based on Moore's (2003) "leadership competencies in Extension" instrument, which identified 80 leadership competencies within six major skill areas and assessed how important Extension leaders believed the competencies were to their overall success and their self-perceived proficiency levels in each. Based on the notion that an instrument of such length would be detrimental to the response rate, the technical skills area and the proficiency-level questions were eliminated from this project. Further, the remaining five areas (human skills, conceptual skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence skills, and industry-knowledge skills) were limited to 10 competencies each.

The third section was a writer-developed instrument used to collect data about the participants' demographic characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, age, education level, and work history. It also collected data about the organizations' scopes and staff sizes.

Data were collected during September and October 2014. Five contacts were made over six weeks. As completed instruments were received, random identification numbers were used to eliminate those participants from future contacts.

The collected data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and its PHStat add-in. Descriptive, correlation, and inferential statistics were used. Specifically, single-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) at a 5% level of significance (α) was used to investigate relationships.

Results

Of the 23 current CEOs who participated in the project, 34.8% ($n = 8$) were female and 65.2% ($n = 15$) were male. In terms of ethnicity, 100% ($n = 23$) were white.

The participants reported their ages in years, after rounding down, by selecting one of the five offered ranges. None ($n = 0$) were 29 or younger, 17.4% ($n = 4$) were 30 to 39, 21.7% ($n = 5$) were 40 to 49, 43.5% ($n = 10$) were 50 to 59, and 17.4% ($n = 4$) were 60 or older. In terms of the participants' highest levels of education, 13.0% ($n = 3$) had high-school diplomas, 4.3% ($n = 1$) had an associate degree, 43.5% ($n = 10$) had bachelor's degrees, 21.7% ($n = 5$) had master's degrees, and 17.4% ($n = 4$) had doctorates.

They reported years of employment with agricultural organizations (associations, commissions, councils, societies, and the like), after rounding down, by selecting one of the six offered ranges. Only one, or 4.3%, reported less than one year; 4.3% ($n = 1$), one to four; 13.0% ($n = 3$), five to nine; 21.7% ($n = 5$), 10 to 14; 17.4% ($n = 4$), 15 to 19; and 39.1% ($n = 9$), 20 or more. They reported tenure in their current CEO positions in the same way, with 26.1% ($n = 6$) having less than one year; 21.7% ($n = 5$), one to four; 21.7% ($n = 5$), five to nine; 13.0% ($n = 3$), 10 to 14; 4.3% ($n = 1$), 15 to 19; and 13.0% ($n = 3$), 20 or more.

Three organizations, or 13.0%, were focused on agribusiness; 26.1% ($n = 6$), animal agriculture; 30.4% ($n = 7$), plant agriculture; 13.0% ($n = 3$), general agriculture; 13.0% ($n = 3$), agricultural education; and 4.3% ($n = 1$), something other. Six of them, or

26.1%, had only one paid employee, 43.5% ($n = 10$) had two to five, 13.0% ($n = 3$) had six to 10, and 17.4% ($n = 4$) had 11 or more. Table 1 shows staff sizes by organizational category.

Table 1. Staff Sizes by Organizational Category ($N = 23$)

Organizational Category	Staff Size								Total	
	1		2–5		6–10		11 or more			
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Agribusiness	2	8.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	4.3	3	13.0
Animal Agriculture	1	4.3	4	17.4	0	0.0	1	4.3	6	26.1
Plant Agriculture	2	8.7	3	13.0	2	8.7	0	0.0	7	30.4
General Agriculture	1	4.3	1	4.3	0	0.0	1	4.3	3	13.0
Agricultural Education	0	0.0	2	8.7	1	4.3	0	0.0	3	13.0
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	4.3	1	4.3
Total	6	26.1	10	43.5	3	13.0	4	17.4	23	100.0

The preceding demographic overview of the project's participants provides context for answering the research questions. Before continuing, however, it should be noted that people generally present themselves in a positive light, so the social desirability of certain constructs (styles, skills, and outcomes) is subject to the aforementioned bias in self-reporting.

What Leadership Styles Do Kansas Agricultural Organization CEOs Exhibit?

The project participants' leadership styles were determined as outlined in the MLQ Form 5x-Short's scoring key. Mean scores of the nine leadership scales and three leadership styles are in Table 2.

Table 2. MLQ Form 5x-Short Leadership Scale and Style Scores ($N = 23$)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Idealized Influence (Attributed)	2.95	0.62	0.75	3.67
Idealized Influence (Behavior)	3.13	0.63	1.25	4.00
Inspirational Motivation	3.40	0.50	2.00	4.00
Intellectual Stimulation	3.15	0.44	2.00	3.75
Individualized Consideration	3.26	0.55	2.00	4.00
Transformational Leadership Style	3.18	0.38	2.30	3.83
Contingent Reward	2.96	0.51	2.00	4.00
Management by Exception (Active)	1.58	0.83	0.25	3.00
Transactional Leadership Style	2.27	0.49	1.50	3.13
Management by Exception (Passive)	1.07	0.41	0.25	2.25
Laissez Faire	0.71	0.57	0.00	2.00
Passive-Avoidant Leadership Style	0.89	0.45	0.13	2.13

Means for each of the scale and style scores can range from zero to four. Of the nine scale scores, the highest mean score was for inspirational motivation ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.50$), a transformational leadership scale. The lowest mean score was for laissez faire ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 0.57$), a passive-avoidant leadership scale.

What Leadership Skills Do They Deem Most Important?

Individuals' average scores for human skills ranged from 2.80 to 5, the highest possible score. For conceptual skills, they ranged from 3.20 to 5. Communications skills ranged from 3.40 to 5. For emotional intelligence skills, they ranged from 3.80 to 5. Industry-knowledge skills ranged from 2.60 to 5. As Table 3 shows, the highest mean was for emotional intelligence skills ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.40$), and the lowest was for industry-knowledge skills ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.66$).

Table 3. Mean Scores for Perceived Importance of Leadership Skills

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Human Skills	4.34	0.58	2.80	5.00
Conceptual Skills	4.31	0.44	3.20	5.00
Communication Skills	4.35	0.48	3.40	5.00
Emotional Intelligence Skills	4.48	0.40	3.80	5.00
Industry-Knowledge Skills	4.21	0.66	2.60	5.00

Overall, the mean score for perceived importance of the 50 leadership competencies was $M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.81$.

Does Leadership Style Influence Skills Emphasis?

Table 4 presents the correlations between each of the three leadership styles and the five leadership skills.

Table 4. Correlations Between Leadership Styles and Skills Emphases

	Human Skills	Conceptual Skills	Communication Skills	Emotional Intelligence Skills	Industry-Knowledge Skills
Transformational Style	.40	.39	.24	.45	.60
Transactional Style	-.09	.05	.19	-.23	.12
Passive-Avoidant Style	-.22	-.24	.06	-.32	-.01

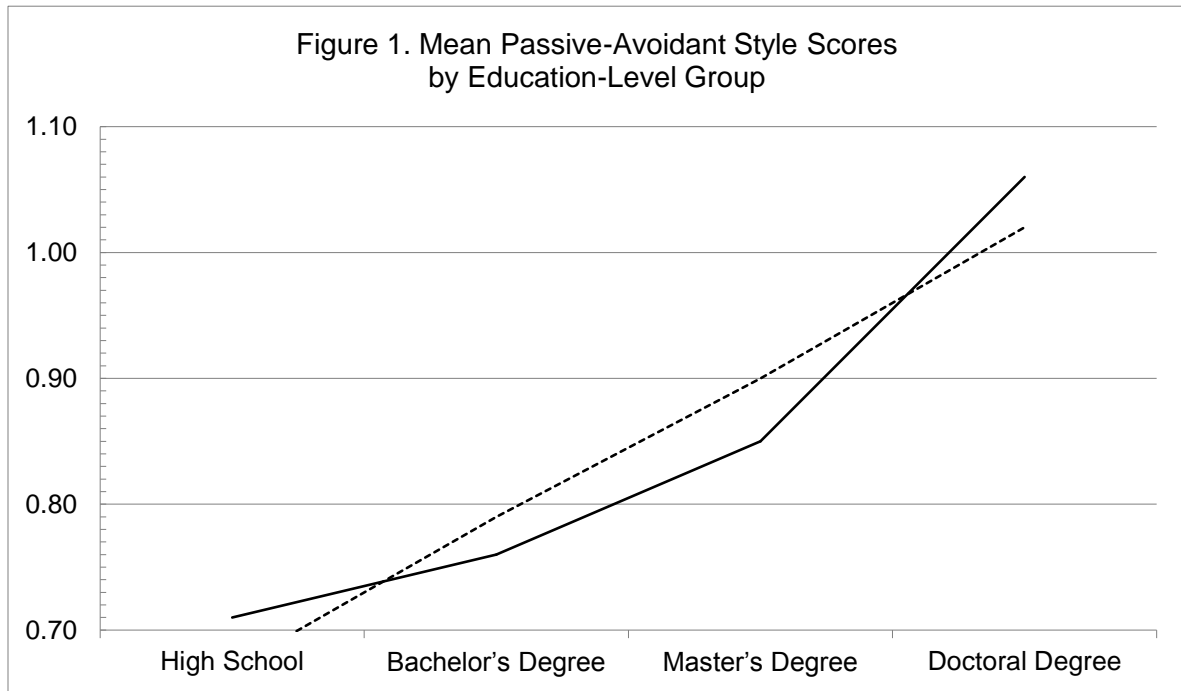
The strongest association ($r = .60$) was between the transformational style and industry-knowledge skills. At the other extreme, the weakest association ($r = -.01$) was between the passive-avoidant style and industry-knowledge skills.

Do Demographics Influence Leadership Style?

The relationships between (a) organization experience and leadership style, (b) CEO tenure and leadership style, (c) age and leadership style, and (d) gender and leadership style were explored using ANOVA. At a 5% level of significance, there were no statistically significant differences in any of those group means.

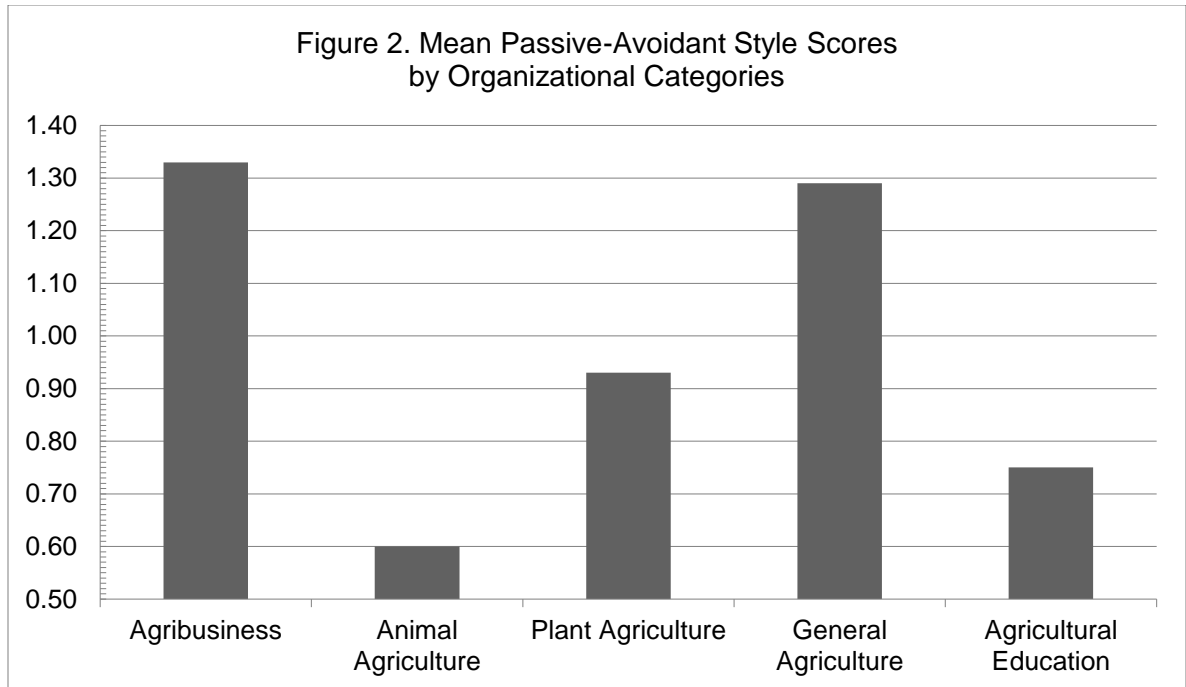
The relationships between education level and leadership style also were explored using ANOVA. Analyzing the variation in leadership-style scores among and within the five education-level groups yielded a critical value ($F_{.05}$) of 2.93 and test

statistics (F) of 0.56 for transformational ($p = .70$), 0.94 for transactional ($p = .47$), and 3.29 for passive-avoidant ($p = .03$). Therefore, there were statistically significant differences in group means only for the passive-avoidant style, which are presented in Figure 1.



Because only one participant reported an associate degree as the highest education level attained, it was excluded from further analysis. When considering the remaining groups, the passive-avoidant score increased with the education level.

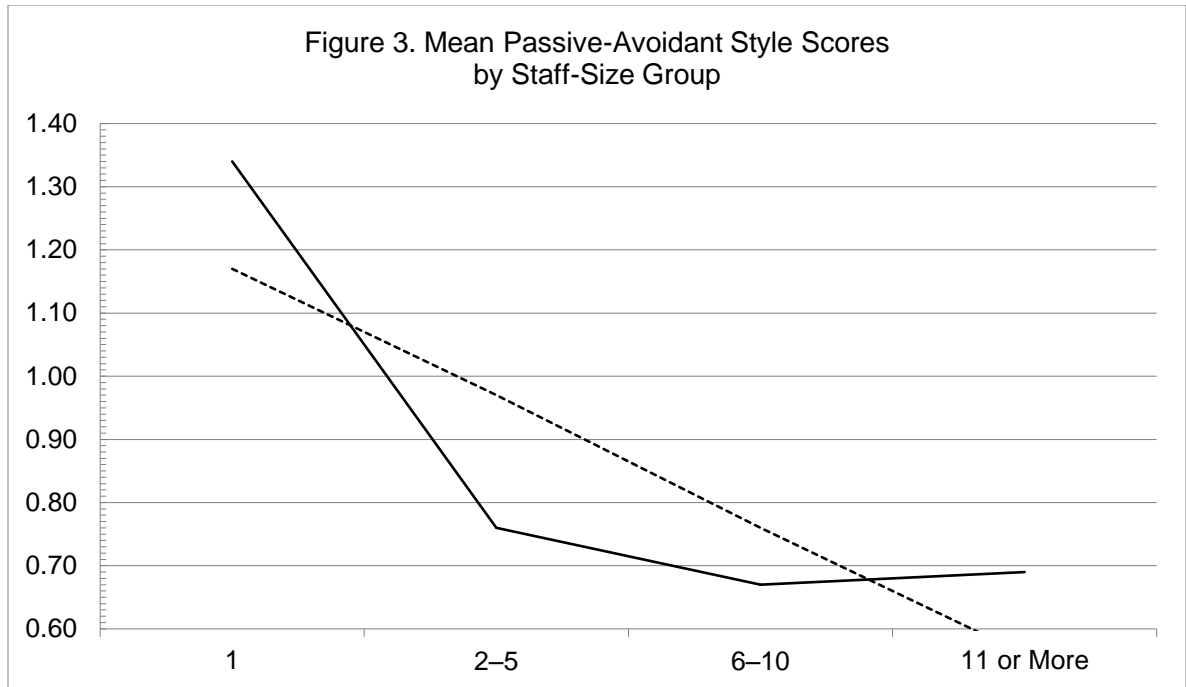
Analyzing the variation in leadership-style scores among and within the six organizational categories yielded a critical value ($F_{.05}$) of 2.81 and test statistics (F) of 0.49 for transformational ($p = .78$), 1.38 for transactional ($p = .28$), and 3.26 for passive-avoidant ($p = .03$). Therefore, there were statistically significant differences in group means only for the passive-avoidant style, which are presented in Figure 2.



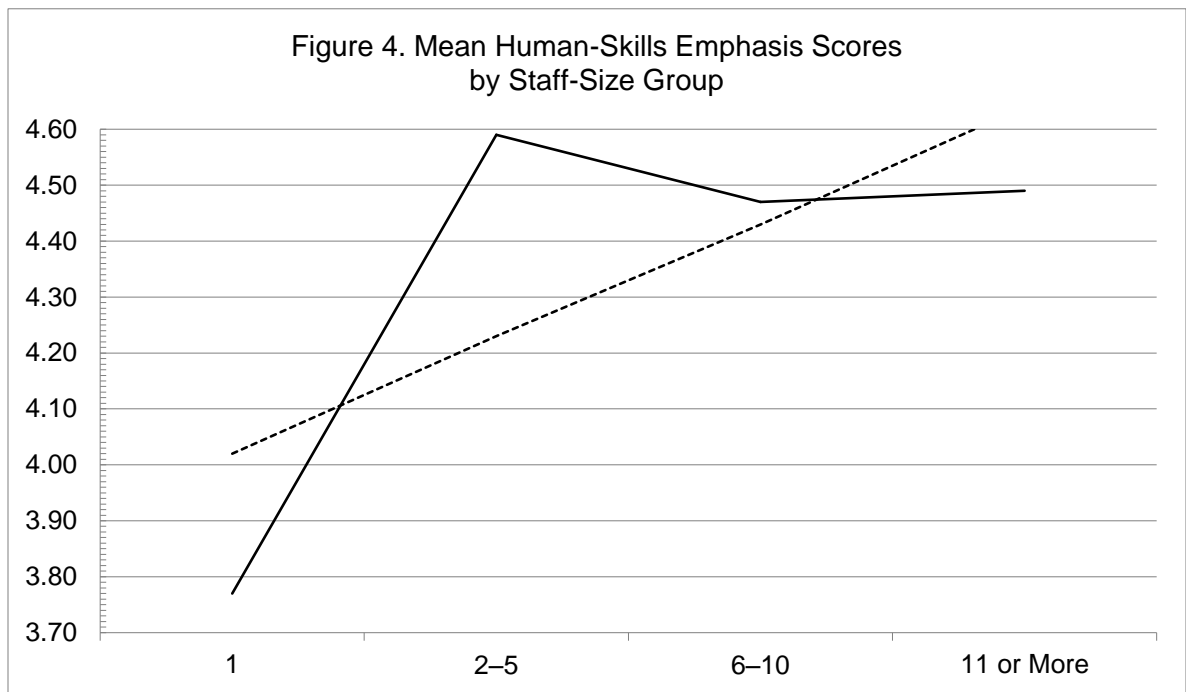
Because only one participant was from an “other” organization, it was excluded from further analysis. When examining the remaining groups, the passive-avoidant score was highest for the agribusiness-focused organizations and general agriculture organizations. It was lowest for the animal-agriculture organizations.

Does Staff Size Influence Either Leadership Style or Skills Emphasis?

The relationships between staff size and leadership style were explored using ANOVA ($\alpha = .05$). Analyzing the variation in leadership-style scores among and within the four staff-size groups yielded a critical value ($F_{.05}$) of 3.13 and test statistics (F) of 1.98 for transformational ($p = .15$), 2.53 for transactional ($p = .09$), and 3.69 for passive-avoidant ($p = .03$). Therefore, there were statistically significant differences in group means only for the passive-avoidant style, which are presented in Figure 3.



Analyzing the variation in skills-emphasis means among and within the four staff-size groups yielded a critical value ($F_{.05}$) of 3.13 and test statistics (F) of 3.66 for human skills ($p = .03$), 0.84 for conceptual skills ($p = .49$), 1.47 for communication skills ($p = .25$), 2.99 for emotional intelligence skills ($p = .06$), and 0.35 for industry-knowledge skills ($p = .79$). Therefore, there were statistically significant differences in group means only for the human-skills emphasis, which are presented in Figure 4.



When examining the staff-size groups, the passive-avoidant score was highest for the one-person shops, and the human-skills emphasis scored lowest among those lone staffers.

Does Skills Emphasis Influence Leadership Outcomes?

The correlations between each of the five leadership-skills emphases and the MLQ's three leadership outcomes are in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlations Between Leadership-Skills Emphases and Outcomes

	Extra Effort	Effectiveness	Satisfaction	Overall
Human Skills	0.09	0.04	0.12	0.09
Conceptual Skills	0.18	0.28	0.33	0.27
Communication Skills	0.10	-0.02	0.11	0.07
Emotional Intelligence Skills	0.18	0.09	0.14	0.15
Industry-Knowledge Skills	0.41	0.25	0.35	0.37

The strongest association ($r = .41$) was between an emphasis on industry-knowledge skills and the extra-effort outcome. At the other extreme, the weakest association ($r = -.02$) was between the emphasis on communication skills and effectiveness. Across all of the outcomes, including the overall scores, the strongest associations were with the emphases on industry-knowledge and conceptual skills.

Conclusions

With a sample of 23 respondents, there are limitations on what can be concluded reliably or validly. Ultimately constrained by the size of the whole population, this project's quantitative aspect is a weakness. Readers must be careful to stay within the limits of the population and collected data to glean insights into Kansas agricultural organizations only. Further, even though it captured only the perspectives of the CEOs themselves, the project provided a sense of what they think about their own jobs, which offers a certain value.

That said, this project's sample appears to be rather "middle of the road" on each of the MLQ's nine leadership scales. If a predominant style were assigned to the participating CEOs, it would be transformational because their highest deciles were on three of those five scales. Anecdotally, leadership in agriculture often has been described as *recruiting the right people then getting out of their way*. That would seem to indicate either of the management-by-exception scales or laissez faire. The participants were slightly more than the norm on all three.

Emotional intelligence skills rated most important for this project's participants at a 4.48 average, with the perceived importance of personal and professional integrity, time management, and respect for others all earning average scores above 4.70. It was the only skills area to place multiple specific skills that highly. Only one human skill (interaction with the board of directors), one communication skill (active listening), and one industry-knowledge skill (explaining basic programs) garnered such importance from the participants. The emphasis on integrity was borne out by professional integrity's averaging 4.86 and personal integrity's averaging 4.96.

While none of the industry-knowledge skills averaged below 3.90, the area's overall score managed only 4.21. The skills that did fall below that threshold were

identifying others' strengths and weaknesses (a human skill), thinking linearly (conceptual), and reading and comprehending a wide range of publications (communications). To summarize, the higher leadership-skill scores were associated with a CEO's basic interactions with others and being a good role model, while the lower ones were associated with subject-matter expertise.

Avolio and Bass (2004) found emotional intelligence (EI) was associated with both transformational and transactional leadership but not passive-avoidant leadership. This project found one of the stronger associations between EI skills and the transformational style ($r = .45$). At the same time, it indicated EI skills had a stronger association to the passive-avoidant style ($r = -.32$) than to the transactional style ($r = -.23$), although neither was particularly strong and both associations were negative.

The association between industry-knowledge skills and the transformational style was the highest ($r = .60$). Meanwhile, industry-knowledge skills – again, the participants' least emphasized category – also had the weakest association, which was to the passive-avoidant style. Both the high and low associations had rather inconsequential coefficients of determination. In total, leadership styles and skills did not adequately predict each other in any useful way in this project.

The participants who attained higher levels of education indicated stronger tendencies toward passive-avoidant leadership. Upon closer inspection of the management-by-exception (passive) and laissez faire scores for each educational group, only those for the master's and doctoral degrees were found in the sixth decile for MBEP. As already established, all were more LF than the norm, with all but the doctoral group in the sixth decile. Its average landed in the eighth. Either those with more passive-avoidant styles are more motivated to attain higher education levels, or that style of leadership is a byproduct of the training received in the pursuit of those academic degrees.

When considering the organizational categories in this project, there were statistically significant differences in group means only for the passive-avoidant style, which was highest for the agribusiness-focused organizations (1.33) and general agriculture organizations (1.29). It was lowest for the animal-agriculture organizations (0.60).

Upon closer inspection of the management-by-exception (passive) and laissez faire scores for each organizational category, all average scores were in at least the sixth deciles for both scales, excluding animal agriculture's MBEP score (fifth decile) and agricultural education's LF score (fourth decile). The agribusiness averages landed in the eighth decile for MBEP and 10th decile for LF, and general agriculture's averages were in the ninth deciles for both. Animal agriculture's averages were in the fifth decile for MBEP and sixth decile for LF.

Perhaps those two organizational categories' high scores in the passive-avoidant style are related to their broader stakeholder groups. Unlike the more specialized organizations within animal and plant agriculture, for example, agribusiness and general agriculture groups might require more subject-matter experts on their staffs, and the CEOs actually do lead best by getting out of their way. A qualitative dimension to the project would have helped answer that question.

When considering staff size and both leadership style and skills emphasis, there were statistically significant differences in the group means for the passive-avoidant

style and the human-skills emphasis. The passive-avoidant score was highest for the one-person shops, and the human-skills emphasis scored lowest among those lone staffers. The “solo acts” do not have teammates to transform or with whom to transact. Neither do they require creating a work environment that fosters relationships and teamwork. It is important to note, however, that even among the one-person staffs, the mean score for the perceived importance of “interact with members of your agricultural organization’s board of directors” was $M = 4.83$, $SD = 0.41$.

In the correlations between the five leadership-skills emphases and three leadership outcomes, industry-knowledge and conceptual skills consistently had the strongest associations with all three outcomes. Their mean scores were the lowest in the project, however, reinforcing the apparent disconnect between the MLQ and the evaluated leadership skills.

Implications for Further Study

Any study has limitations. This project – part of a professional MBA program – focused on quantitative data and could deal with only so many aspects, given the time and resources available. Therefore, based upon its results and interpretations, significantly more research is suggested.

- Because nearly two-thirds of the participants were males and all were white, a larger population, perhaps by adding seconds-in-command, should be included to achieve more diversity.
- Because both the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and the leadership-skills instrument relied on nonvalidated self-reporting, feedback should be sought from some of the organizations’ elected leaders and the CEOs’ subordinates. Using such secondary sources would be especially important when investigating outcomes of leadership.
- To help identify training needs, the current CEOs’ self-perceived proficiencies in each of the 50 leadership skills should be determined.
- The transformational and transactional leadership styles’ associations to emotional intelligence and industry-knowledge skills should be examined further.
- Qualitative engagement with participants would allow for more robust analysis of certain findings, especially given the project’s small sample. In particular, interviews with agribusiness, general agriculture, and staff-of-one CEOs could explore why those organizations scored so highly in the passive-avoidant style.
- An instrument should be administered before and after participation in a formal leadership-training program to assess its influence on self-perceived proficiencies.
- The relationships between other organizational variables, particularly those that would indicate success (for example, membership trends or media impressions), and the instruments’ scores for leadership styles, outcomes, and skills should be investigated.
- A similar project should investigate the demographics, skills emphases, and leadership styles of volunteer CEOs.

Discussion

In evaluating CEO candidates, if an agricultural organization desires a particular

leadership style, skill set, or both, it should design its process to gauge them separately. Once an agricultural organization hires a new CEO, a formal leadership-training program should emphasize the transformational style over the transactional and, more so, passive-avoidant while still maintaining an appropriate balance between transformational and transactional as previous research and the literature support. The passive-avoidant style was the one that kept having statistical significance in this project, and while the “get out of their way” slogan distances a CEO from characterizations of micromanagement, its outcomes were not conclusively positive. It appeared that agribusiness, general agriculture, and single-staffer organizations were most likely to have passive-avoidant CEOs, and training might be most valuable for them.

As to how organizations might apply its conclusions, search committees seeking to replace key personnel can look to this project to determine what leadership styles and skills they want to emphasize. Also, they possibly could use the same instruments as benchmarks or interview questions to determine if candidates align with what is viewed as good or considered necessary across agricultural organizations.



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